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Interview with Senida Husic (FA 1137)

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Interviewee: Senida Husic

Interviewer/Recordist: Kate Horigan

Date: November 11, 2015

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Others Present: n/a

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Transcribing Conventions:

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

Use of parentheses () indicates a conversational aside.

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

Use of ellipses ... indicates a discontinued thought.

Use of quotations “ ” indicates reported speech.

Use of *italics* indicates emphasis.

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

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

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

[00:00:00]

KH: This is Kate Horigan. I'm interviewing Senida Husic, um on November 11th, 2015, at the Fine Arts Center at Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green, Kentucky. Um, hi Senida, thanks for talking to me again.

SH: Hi, how are you?

KH: Good.

SH: Good.

KH: Um so I wanted to kind of pick up where we left off-

SH: Mhmm.

KH: -last time. Um, we were talking about some of the things that you remember from your family coming to the United States from Bosnia-

SH: Mhmm, mhmm.

KH: -and how your father really wanted to provide a better life, and how it was really difficult for you to just imagine even where you were going and what life would be like. Um, is there anything else you remember just about that time? About coming to the United States, or about when you first arrived?

SH: Um, well yeah, we definitely uh, my father is very big into education and then my family is just the type of family I guess they were raised to um work very hard and like, you know, make something of yourself. Um and things after the war in Bosnia and just the, the way that the Dayton Peace Agreements were made and how the structure of the new government was just flawed, I mean everybody knew that it was. Um I don't think my parents, especially my father, didn't have much um, I guess uh trust in, in the new foundation that was laid out for the future of Bosnia, and so, you know, he wanted to do everything he can to provide his, you know, four girls and a, and a, and a son a better uh future and more opportunities. Um, because at the time when I, I think we were applying, I was in the fifth grade maybe, even just started sixth grade, uh the sister that's um right after me age-wise is uh three years younger, so she was in the third grade, and then my other sister was in the second, and then my brother was just about to start first grade, you know? And he knew that getting your kids through school in Bosnia at that time was very difficult. Um, the only people that found that somewhat manageable were people who were not so much affected by the war, as in, you know, they were still in their home towns, they had their, their jobs or somewhat of a job. Uh, you know like I said, we were from eastern Bosnia, completely displaced, my father um worked in the mines um in, in eastern Bosnia, and in the area that we were and around Tuzla there wasn't many of that and it was just really hard to find a job. Um, so they worked like field work, summertime, and just, you know, odd jobs just to kind of provide for the family. So, you know, we didn't fit in that category. And then the other category was um children with, who have lost their father, um because they were getting um different aid actually, from a lot of different, you know, um donors, a lot of different companies and things like that, and, and countries. Um, so we of course were not a part of that, so it was really- we were disadvantaged when it comes to that. And, you know, my father saw that going to school was gonna be very difficult, the distance, providing for school supplies, and, you know, I remember my father didn't have money to give me to buy a sandwich at school. So that was a very difficult thing and, you know, the one time that he did, I'll never forget that day, I was so happy, and, and you know, it, it's just one of those things that he wanted more for us. So when he did apply, that was what he had in mind. And when we came here, that was one thing that my parents continually reiterated and made sure they talked to us about. Uh, you know, "You have an opportunity for something more. Yes you lost a huge part of your childhood but, you know, now you have different opportunities. You have more um chances to succeed, and actually be better than I am." Like my father wanted all of us to graduate college um because, you know, anytime we had, like you

know if uh one of us wasn't meeting our parents' expectations or like we didn't do chores or anything like that, you know, that card would always be played. Like, "you're here to go to college. Like we came here for you, for your school." Like they made sure we were aware that was one of the main deciding reasons or factors that made them come to the States, and, and take that huge leap, that journey. I mean I, like I said, if I was placed in that situation now, I don't know if I could just pick up and move to France, for example, with my family, even though France is very similar to us. But, you know, move to Japan, like how?

KH: Mhmm.

SH: It's just, it's just a lot to, to consider, so yeah, I mean that was one thing that was difficult, um just kind of getting over that idea um when we first came here, and then just coping with the society. [00:04:59] I think um your uh general American, or like, you know, the population, the general population, their core values and our core values, especially being a displaced family and a family that has survived the genocide, um you know, lived through this wretched war, things were different for us and different priorities, we prioritized life differently, we had different values and things like that. So, you know when we were kids going to school, our parents didn't buy us the best backpacks, they didn't buy us name brand clothes, they didn't- that wasn't important. And that was another thing that was very tough for us, um me and my siblings to really be able to cope with, because you have all of your friends and they're wearing name brands and your family is shopping at Goodwill. Like we shopped at Goodwill, and that was one thing that at, at times we were very embarrassed. Or not a- not even Goodwill, sometimes a lot of our clothes came from the refugee office or, you know, the Salvation Army flea. Um, at first we kind of went to Salvation Army a little bit but not very much, most of our aid came from the refugee office. So that, that was difficult because, you know, you're already looked, you know, kind of, you're already shunned on and, or you're in a different light because you are foreign, you don't speak the language, and now you don't look like everybody else. It was just, that was one thing that was very, very difficult for us to, to kind of get over. Plus, um, [coughs] we studied, I felt like at the time and I don't know what the situation is now, but when I was in school, like I took more school more seriously than most students in my class, um because that was the reason we came here, like that, that was our number one priority, this- that was our duty, um and I think people, like, you know, students and, and classmates noticed that and then you- I know personally I got teased a lot as being like the teacher's pet or something along those lines because I was really eager to learn and just soak in everything where most other kids, or not necessarily, you know they could be a grade A student, and you know top of the class, but they just had a different, different approach to school. And they were, you know, going in for different reasons I guess. Um, and part of that also is I think um a lot of teachers uh sympathized with us, uh I know with me in particular because, you know, here I am one of five kids, you know in a family of such young kids, and having to have

gone through all of this before you're even a teenage is just a lot. And then having all this drive to study and to be a good student, I think they appreciated that, and I'm- I don't know, maybe, at that time I didn't notice is, but now looking back maybe they had a different approach to us and maybe they view us a little, or me, a little differently, and, you know, maybe that to other students wasn't, you know, that was noticeable I guess and then maybe they perceived that as a different um, I guess different reasoning behind that, if that makes sense.

KH: Mhmm.

SH: So there was, you know, to say the least, there was quite a bit of teasing but, hey, it's okay.
[both laugh] It was way long in the past.

KH: Yeah.

SH: Yep.

KH: Well what was, [SH coughs] what was some other parts of life in Bowling Green that you remember? And so that's kind of describing your relationship with other students and teachers-

SH: Right, mhmm.

KH: -I mean how about um like neighbors? Or other-

SH: Yeah.

KH: -other Bosnian um refugees? Or-

SH: Well um, when it comes to neighbors, um I don't think we had any issues, per se. Um, I, I think we were somewhat welcomed, although um just taking in relation the um relationships of neighbors in Bosnia versus relationships of neighbors here is totally different. Um, you know, in the States, your neighbors, like if you don't hear from your neighbor ever, that's a good thing. Or, you know, it's an acceptable thing, let's not say it's a good thing, it's an acceptable thing. You know, they're not noisy, they are not bothering you, that's what you want. Uh, in Bosnia, you know, they don't want to have a noisy neighbor or a bothersome neighbor, but they want more of like care and, and visitation, and interaction, positive interaction. And I think, so we had to kind of get used to that very quick, [slight laugh] and I think it just that language barrier helped us get used to that um quiet, uh, uh, you know, at, at a faster rate than it normally would. Um, but as, you know, Bosnians and being white, caucasian, I don't think we got, or I didn't experience discrimination as I know a lot of my other friends who um might have been like from uh Central America. For example, I had a lot of um classmates who were from Ecuador, or fro- who were from Nicaragua, or, and they already look different and then you can kind of pinpoint them out a lot easier. [00:10:06] Um, I had students who were like from Asia, and you know, like that's one of those features that you know, "oh they're an outsider." Some people might've had, you know, discriminatory um instances and that, um, but my family we didn't. When it comes to with uh our relations with Bosnian-Americans or new Bosnian refugees, we kind of aggregated and I think there was a sense of community, and, and, and support that we built initially, uh, unintentionally, but I

think everybody needed that. Um, so that was very nice, like that's actually one of the things that I truly miss about our Bosnian-American community here in Bowling Green, um because, you know, I've lived here so I know what it was like. We would take trips to like Barren River Lake, I remember um the entire neighborhood would just go on a Saturday or a Sunday. You know, load up our vans, bring food, cook, you know, grill, and just enjoy the outside, and just enjoy life, and, and breathe and relax because all of our parents uh worked at factory jobs, you know? And a lot of them actually had to travel quite a good distance to get, you know, those extra twenty cents to a dollar that let's say Portland, Tennessee paid, or, you know, work at a, a lot harder job or a lot more labor-demanding job, just for that little extra dollar um on their, on their salary or their wage. So, you know, they, they were tired, and, and they worked very hard, a lot of them worked third shift because of, you know, that extra money. Like it was very important for them to be able to provide for their family and a lot of these families had larger membered family. Like, for example, ours is seven, so my parents worked third shift in Portland, Tennessee. And, you know, they drive together and that was, they had to, it's not because, you know, they wanted to, but they had to because they needed that every little penny to make ends meet to pay the bills and things like that. I mean imagine when you're- you come somewhere you have literally nothing, and as far as the aid that you would be getting, very minimal, um and uh sometimes I kind of get into a little rant when it comes to welfare, because I really feel like welfare, people who receive it don't need it, the people that need it don't receive it. Uh, and people, and I'm not saying like everyone, but there are more instances than not, people who are abusing welfare and that's why they get it. And I think maybe the welfare system has noticed that and that's why it's made things so much harder to receive welfare, to where your normal person or your average family who is really struggling would not qualify, but people who know how to work the system will qualify. Um, because I know like if, if you imagine a family of seven, where there's two parents, you know, working, my mom was probably making seven dollars an hour, and my father seven-fifty, can you imagine a family of seven living on that salary? Or on that, on that compensation.

KH: No.

SH: And imagine having to drive forty minutes each day to get to work. Um, and we didn't get any aid whatsoever, the only aid that we would get is at school, our lunches would be covered. Uh, I think the very first few months when we moved here we had food stamps because my, only my father worked, but that wasn't enough to, you know, because then we started going to school, we needed this, we needed that, like you've got to buy school supplies. The school sometimes offers things, but not enough. Um, you know, then you've got to buy a car, then you bought a car that's older and it's breaking down all the time, so you're paying a lot more in repairs. So then you've got to, okay you've got to buy a better car, a newer car, not necessarily better but just a newer where it's not going to break up, break down on you. So a lot of the things like there is this demand, you, you

were slowly, I felt like we were slowly getting sucked into the normal routine of a life in the States. Where, you know, there's so many things that you want to say no to, but you can't. Like, you know, in Bowling Green you can't say no to a car, and then when you say yes to a car, then you kind of can't say no to a newer car, because if you get an older one you've got to pay for repairs all the time, that adds up, and it's just, you know, it's a lot.

KH: Yeah.

SH: So, yeah, and I, you know, we didn't- my parent had to do a lot of, a lot of that, they had to, they had to work a lot, and when we had those opportunities to get together with our friends um, you know, and if you had any family members even better, you know? We'd, we'd hang out together, we'd do little gatherings, um and that was very nice, and I think we all kind of looked out for each other. [00:15:03] But I, after, as years were passing till today, I feel like that is lost, because we, everybody, each family and just individuals maybe, we've become so independent and so individualistic that, you know, we're just, like we've got our own goals, and like we're just so focused on this one root to success, and whatever we decide that success is. But when it comes to um, you know, we haven't, and, and my family is guilty of that, like we haven't gone to Barren River in such a long time. Not, not even just our family but, you know, not to even mention like, you know, a couple families getting together and doing that. Our family is not able to because it goes back to that system, like you know? As soon as you're fourteen, fifteen and you can work, you know you've got to work because well you want to buy that cell phone, or you want to buy those tennis shoes that are name brand, but your parents can't really give you the money so you've got to work. Or, you know, if you want to go to college, well you've got to work. So then everybody is working, like my, my family right now, we like celebrate the weekend day, not just the weekend, just the day in the weekend [slight laugh] where we're all together at least for half of that day.

KH: Yeah.

SH: It, it's amazing because everybody ha- is working in different fields, and different fields require different working hours, and just having to correlate that and being able to create that one spot is just very difficult. So it, it's kind of sad when you think of it that way, because you've gone from such a strong sense of community and support, and I don't know, I guess *love*, you know? To yeah, there may still be love but there's no support, there's no sense of community and, and doing things together. So, it, it has changed.

KH: Yeah. And do you think that's um, and you think that's in the community as a whole, not just your family?

SH: Yeah, community as a whole. Um, there are still some uh parts of the community that are really, and when where that is happening it's mostly people who are family. And what has happened, and we talked about this in a couple of meetings back, a lot of people are moving to Bowling Green, for a lot of different reasons, but one of them is because, you know, they have family members living here. Um, relative cost of living is uh a lot less here than it is maybe somewhere northeast, or something along those lines, which there's

a lot of people living in the northeast, there's a lot of people in St. Louis, a lot of Bosnian people I mean. Um, so the relative cost of living is a lot lower here, and you know, the climate is somewhat decent, you know? It's not like it is in Bosnia, like it would be, for example in Michigan. Um, but um, so a lot of people are moving here for those reasons, and, you know, when there is like four or five families that are related, then they tend to do things together. My family, we don't have any family in the States except for one family in Connecticut, but that's so far way. And funny thing is like they, we used to communicate a lot more and actually see each other a lot more back then, now everybody is like on the road to success, and they've got things going on and their schedules are so um constricting, and their free time is so limited, and this and that, and it's just, it's difficult. And sometimes like you see now, like talking about it I'm like "wow." It, it's, it's amazing me how much it has changed, but I guess I'm so caught up in *my* routine that I don't even notice that that is happening. So, it's amazing what [slight laugh] what world will do to you, what life, I guess. [laughs]

KH: Yeah. Well when you do get together with your family, um like on those, on that one we-

SH: Mhmm.

KH: -weekend day-

SH: Yeah.

KH: -um what kinds of things do you guys do?

SH: We um, my mom likes to go to the Amish village a lot, um just because like that kind of gives her, she gets to breathe the air she says, and, you know, experience the nature, and, and it just kind of I guess brings back the good memories, so we like to do that. Um, we tend to go out to eat a lot, and I don't like that as much but it's also like a, a bonding time, we're eating and we don't have to cook so we can spend more time talking to each other. Um, and then every now and then we do cook, and when, when we have holidays it's really hard, and this is something that I really hope that Bowling Green or Kentucky uh will do, hopefully very, very soon, is there, there's two really big holidays in our Bosnian Muslim uh culture, and if we could get like at least one day [slight laugh] off for those days, that would be amazing. Uh because then like we, we have so many things planned around that and that would be really, really nice to be able to actually go through all those traditions and, and all those customs, and really be able to spend that time with the family.

[00:20:26]

KH: Yeah. Um, what are the holidays?

SH: It's uh called Bajram, uh but um in English it's called Eid.

KH: Okay.

SH: And the one is after the holy month of Ramadan, where we're fasting and it's like a celebration to the end of fasting. And then the other one is three months after that one, and this one is where people actually go to pilgrimage, to Mecca, and, you know, they

visit the city in which our prophet was born, the city that he had to immigrate to because he was persecuted. And, you know, they kind of make that pilgrimage, yeah.

KH: Um, so, I, I just was also wondering, I mean in your, in your family, [SH coughs] in your home now, um you've mentioned a couple objects, like things that-

SH: Mhmm.

KH: -that you guys have that are important. Like you mentioned your mom's needlework-

SH: Mhmm.`

KH: -and the coffee grinders.

SH: Yes.

KH: I'm just wondering if there are other, other kinds of um things in your home that are really important to like your identity, your memory, your family?

SH: Mhmm. Um, there are, and I don't know if I mentioned this before, but we don't have any photographs of our life's past, so, you know, we don't have that, a lot of other families do. Um, we have a set of glasses that my mom, like wine glasses even though we don't drink wine, but you know, they're glass, they are used as decoration right now, uh that my mom was able to get on one of her trips back to our home in uh [00:22:02 unsure], and uh we, we get things that kind of remind us of Bosnia and Bosnian culture, like we have a set, like this little um, it's actually a functional set for coffee drinking, but we use it more as just like an antique piece that we don't necessarily use everyday but it's like to drink coffee and it's the very traditional like um style. It's small little cups, um they're called fildžan. And then um we do have a lot of prayer rugs that it is kind of near and dear because of the religion and we use them on a daily basis, but also it's kind of, you know, a, a, a thing from back home. Um, and a lot of those we've actually gotten in Bosnia during our many trips back to Bosnia and visiting family. And then there's a lot of like small little things, um like little cups, like my mom has this um our, our kind of main, go-to serving set for dinner is from Bosnia, and it's, it's very simple, very kind of plain Jane and I feel like probably I would say seventy percent of Bosnian families in Bowling Green have it, but it's such a, it was such a big popular thing in Bosnia and it just kind of, you know, gets you the feeling of Bosnia, so.

KH: And that these are all things- I mean [SH coughs] nothing was- there's no- noth- no things that you brought with you, these are all things that you've accumulated since?

SH: Accumulated, mhmm. On uh, when we came um we probably just had a couple of changes of clothes. Um, I honestly don't even think we had like two hundred marks with us, because the house that we were living in, we tried to sell a lot of stuff just to get money for the road and, and just to have as much as we could, um but I don't, I don't think it was even that much. Um, I'm trying to see what else we, we, we brought. But as far as like antique-y things like that, like that's the only thing that we got are those cups. And I honestly, I can't remember if it was our initial trip here or our, I guess, like coming to the States, or if it was one of our trips visiting back home and then grabbing that, I'm not

really sure. But no, we like, I could safely say we didn't have anything, that we just came with like a couple bags and that's it.

KH: Hmm.

SH: Yeah.

KH: Well how about um, [SH coughs] so thinking about objects, like how about stories? I mean what kinds of- are there stories that your family tells about Bosnia, or that your friends tell about Bosnia now? Like things that come up a lot, or?

SH: Mmm, before it did, and a lot of I, I guess the time that we do speak about Bosnia I would say majority of the time is talking about the, the hardships. [00:24:56] Um, and then the other majority of times that we're speaking about Bosnian, or living in Bosnia, life in Bosnia, um is when you meet someone and you're trying to figure out where they lived and you, if you know someone from that area. That's like a, that's like a phenomena in the Bosnian culture is let's say you tell me you're from Ilidža and, you know, that's a place near uh Sarajevo, and now I'm thinking, "Oh, I've been there! Is your house on that road? Do you know so and so?" Like that's a phenomena that I feel like is only related to Bosnians. I, I haven't witnessed any other culture, any other ethnicity, and other group of people putting so much emphasis into knowing the surroundings or the environment of the person that they're speaking to. Um, and, and I, I don't know, and to some people like it speaks volume if you're from a certain part of the country, if you're from a certain part of a town, like it, it just like, I don't know, I guess it shapes you in a way, and I think it's- and I understand, like once you get older, you kind of understand because let's say for example, you know, you are from Kentucky, but people living in Louisville are different than people let's say in Bowling Green, but further so different than people living in the, around the Amish villages or surrounding the Amish villages. And you're like, when you get older and you're kind of more observant of people and, and their upbringing and their values and norms and things like that, you get to understand that. And environment has a, a huge affect on people, and, and what it shapes, how they shapes their uh, you know, their culture, their customs, their priorities, their, just their whole outlook on life, so. This is more of the older generations of Bosnians really placing a lot of emphasis on that, I don't think the younger generations are doing as much because I, I feel like now it's not as, like there's not a huge correlation because we've all been displaced and moving into a lot of different areas, so our, our personalities, our upbringing have been shaped by a lot of different- by those areas that we've visited, so for each person it's different. Um, and, and to just kind of exemplify that, there are people, um Bosnians, who first uh when to Germany, like after the war there were refugees accepted by Germany, and then they came to the States. So there is, you can notice some differences in their experiences, and, and you know, maybe their priorities and things like that, than a person who went straight from Bosnia to the States, if that makes sense.

KH: Mhmm, yeah.

SH: So yeah.

KH: Um, you mentioned the other day, you, you were saying there was some- [SH coughs]
sometimes you hear people's stories that give you goosebumps, like stories about other
people's experiences.

SH: Mhmm.

KH: I mean, are those kinds of stories ones that people share often?

SH: Mhmm.

KH: Yeah.

SH: It's just I think um, and I don't know if they're doing it for a s- I don't know if it's just, you
know, somebody asks about something and it brings up that, um, or if people feel like it's
a therapeutic way of expressing everything that they have lived through and survived, and
just kind of maybe consciously but maybe even sometimes subconsciously, you know,
wanting to let it out so that it's in the, in a therapeutic sense. But yes, um, you know
when, especially older ladies because, you know like I said, a lot of the men were killed,
so now you have a huge number or ratio of women to men, in Bosnia. Um, and, you
know, like for example, my neighbors they will come and they'll talk about something
and then [snapping sound] that will trigger a story about how she survived this, and you
know, and a lot of that stuff, I mean it is, it is brutal, and I feel like that's when people
mostly talk about life back in Bosnia, because it, you know, you remember good stuff but
it's very hard to forget back stuff, you know? And sometimes the bad overpowers the
good um in your memory, so people tend to remember a lot of, you know, pain, and I
don't know if it's a certain way that it's encoded in our brain but painful experiences tend
to always um stay with you for a lot longer, and, you know, come to mind a lot faster
than, you know, your positive experiences, especially if, you know, for a good length of
your life the negative experiences or the painful experiences outnumber the positive or
the happy, so.

[00:30:01]

KH: Are there any- is there any one story, either painful or positive, that really has stuck with
you?

SH: Um, this um I would say in June, or actually July when we did the Walk to Remember
Srebrenica Genocide, and um when I um kind of orchestrated, or I helped orchestrate the
um presentation at the Mass Media auditorium and one of the ladies, and I'm really
hoping that she's gonna be there tonight, told us about her story, and I just, I, I, I'm like
"is it possible?" Um, this lady, and I don't remember the quite correct sequence of events,
but she was first wounded or, or no, she lost her son, he was killed, the she was, and this
happened in like a matter of a year, so months, we're talking months, then she was
wounded, and I don't know where exactly, I think yeah her arm was cut off, um and she
was laying in a hospital for hours without any like um anesthetics or anything, and, and
then just like then they had to operate her. I mean she, she screamed, "kill me," like "I
don't want to live through this," like "kill me, I can't bare this." Then her husband gets
killed, in front of her eyes, and then she gets wounded again, where like her guts are

outside. This lady survives it all, like she was there telling us this, and I'm like, "how?" So it, you know, she loses a son, loses a husband, is wounded twice, and, and having to like get medical attention the first time, having to wait hours, the second time I think, I think she mentioned thankfully she had like, they, they had anesthetics and things like that to help her kind of cope with that. And then, on top of all of that, you know, she's an older lady, she had to make that journey from the S- from Bosnia to the States, to a place where she doesn't- like imagine the strength of this lady, like I will never forget her story. Like, you know, I don't quite remember because I was- like that's the one that gave me goosebumps and I was like, I was at the podium crying because I just couldn't hold it in, I'm like, "how is this possible that a human being can endure so much? And she's still like functioning, she's not like in a mental hospital or, or just dead in general." Um, so yeah, her story always amazes me, and it, it's probably going to be one that I will probably never forget.

KH: That's amazing.

SH: Yeah.

KH: What's her name?

SH: Oh um, that's something that I can ask um Adisa uh tonight, but-

KH: We'll find out-

SH: -they told me but I yeah, and she actually might be there tonight. I think they wanted to invite her. [coughs]

KH: Wow, a survivor.

SH: Mhmm.

KH: Um, well um I know you mentioned that you, you've returned several times, and your family has returned, and your father is currently there, he's been there-

SH: Mhmm, mhmm, yes.

KH: -since May in, to Bosnia.

SH: Yes he has.

KH: Um, I mean what's it like to go back?

SH: It's a surreal experience.

KH: Yeah.

SH: Um, it really is, because the very first time I went back nothing was like I remembered it, nothing was like I thought it would be. Um, the people were different, and it was very Americanized, um, that I, I couldn't believe. Um, like I guess maybe it was because I was so young, and like I just remember going to my school and I just thought that school was like so huge, and the playground was so big, and it, it just like, it looked different. And then when I got there it almost looked like an abandoned house. I mean it was like smaller and everything, and I'm like, "is this really?" If that makes sense. So it was, it was just very different. And then just the people, I, I think uh after the war the West had a lot of influence um in, in, in Bosnia, and I have nothing against the West but uh it makes me sad that I feel like, really personally deep down I feel like we are losing our culture and

our sense of being, the Bosnian people are because, you know, now in the Bosnian language a lot of the words that we use for technology, or even for just like your day-to-day, are an American words that, that's Bosnian-ized. [00:35:00] And, and then, and we have such a huge vocabulary and the Bosnian language is- does such great works in literature and uh poetry, and I mean it's just, like it's a, an amazing language, um and I feel like for us to not utilize those words and to jum- just really jump to popular, globalized words I think is kind of doing it a disadvantage. And, you know, just the way people are dressing, sometimes, you know, I feel like our core values as and, and just speaking specifically as a Bosnian Muslim, you know? Some of the Bosnian Muslims, the way that they're dressing does not correlate to our values, definitely not to our religion but just to our values. And, you know, that was kind of hard for me to see because I felt like somethings were far worse than they were in the States, if that makes sense. Um, and, and I just, one thing that was really hard for me to just grasp and was how younger generations were talking to the older generations, and the lack of respect. I just, I could not believe that, and, and that's one thing, you know, in my opinion, is a Western thing. Um, because if you go to any of the other countries that don't have as much Western influence there is such huge respect for your elders, I mean just amazing immense respect, and that's what we had in Bosnia. And, you know, my mom used to tell me that if neighbor's older son that was older than my mom, you know, would say that like my mom couldn't be disrespectful to him, she had to, even though it's the neighbor's older son, if, if he was older than her a couple years like she had to behave towards him in a respectful manner, you know, respectful language and all of that. And now the way younger kids are talking to their grandmas, like breaking my heart.

KH: Mhmm.

SH: It really is. So that was one of the things that was very, very tough for me to see-

KH: Yeah.

SH: -when I went back the first time.

KH: Um, well is there anything else that you feel like it's important for people to know? Either about your experiences or about Bosnia, Bosniaks.

SH: Um, even though things, well about Bosnia, even though things have kind of changed, it's still a beautiful country and people are still nice. Um, but I just- it used to be a lot nicer, like as the, the, the sense of community, and I, and I really feel like maybe it's not just I think specific to Bosnia, I think it's every- like across the board, the entire world. I feel like we're just becoming more success-oriented materialistic people that are just like slaves to the machine, for a lack of better term, um and we've just really forgotten to live and to appreciate one another, and, and that kind of thing. So relatively speaking, Bosnia is still an amazing country, um even though it's governed by just a slew of craziness that we won't even get into, I mean it just makes zero sense whatsoever, the people are resilient, have been resilient, and I really feel like they will be resilient, they will continue to be resilient, and they will continue to still show a sense of community and a sense of

empathy for others and sympathy, and, and doing everything they can to help one another and others. Um, case and point is refugee crisis from um the Middle East, I mean Bosnians are not rich people and lot of them they can't provide for themselves, but still the co- the, the citizens of Bosnians were able to like gather donations and food to prepare for the incoming refugees, where countries, you know, more West European countries that are a lot, you know, well-equipped to deal with that, shut their doors, or they built walls, or they have, you know, barbed wire across their border. So, you know that's one thing that I feel like is very beautiful about the country, and it's a great um natural resource country and just natural beauty, um and I really hope that they kind of maintain that. And I mean one thing that you can really look at is the capital, it is just beautiful and there's so much to do, but it's not your New York look-alike, it's not your Chicago look-alike, it's different, but there is just so much life in it. [00:39:52] And as far as um my story, my experience, I think if I had to choose one sentence to kind of describe my life that has been and that will come, is you can do and you can endure a lot more than you could even imagine. Um, and you really can. I mean I never, ever, in a million years expected when I was in sixth grade that I would be living in the States, [coughs] working for an amazing company right now, managing their accounting and finances, and opening my own boutique, to have my own store, and not just to have my own store but to build that boutique in a way that I feel fit. Having the freedom to say, "You know what? I want three percent of my profit to go to local charities and nonprofits," and just being able to do that and, and still having the drive and having people support me in that, I just never in a million years. I, I never imagined that I would have my own room and my own bed, none the less something along these lines. Um, never imagined that I'd be traveling to so many different places, spending half a year in, in the Middle East, going to a couple different, actually several different countries in the Middle East and just experiencing life. That my sister would be working for the UN, or have worked for the UN, it, it's just- that my brother is going to have a PhD in engineering, like I never, ever in a million years ever imagined that my family could come so far and, and be able to accomplish so much. So you never know, some dreams you can't even dream, and then looking- like you really can't. Some dreams you can't even dream, you can't even imagine them, so imagine how much a person can do if they can't even imagine the greatness that they're capable of.

KH: I love that, and I love that your parents, to some extent, did imagine that because they-

SH: Yeah. And yeah, I mean if they- did I get- if they didn't even imagine it, they had a gut feeling.

KH: Yeah.

SH: And I mean the higher power, it's like, "You need to go this way, this is for you. You don't know it now, but this is it." So, it's been a, it's a been a great experience. It's been tough but I, I honestly- the good and the bad, the bad was horrific and it did such damage to us and to other people around, but it also at the same time did so much good, if that makes

any sense. Um, you know, and if I could take the, the bad away I would, just because it affected so many other people negatively, but I- it was- I, I, I guess it was something that really shaped us and that really gave us strength, and endurance, and the motivation and drive to really, to be resilient, because, you know, in all these years and us getting here we have been taken advantage, we have been mistreated, we've been neglected, we've been uh tortured, I mean it is just so much and not, and that's even after the war. People, you know, you couldn't imagine some of the things that me and my family had to survive through and, and, and to live with and to come to terms with, but it's just, it, it's part of life because, you know, there are- all of that prepares you for the next step in your life. Whether it is to teach you a lesson, to give you more morale, to give you more strength, to give you more faith, you know? To, to teach you that, you know, this is, this could happen so next time when something along those lines comes up, you know how to deal with it to take where you won't be as hurt, where you won't be as damaged as you were the first time. So yeah, yep.

KH: Um, thank you. Is there anything else that you'd like to add before we conclude?

SH: No, I think that's it.

KH: Okay.

SH: That's all I've got.

KH: Okay. [both laugh] Well thank you very much.

SH: Thank you. And I think we-

[00:44:18 End Recording]