

BOSNA I HERCEGOVINA

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The Bosnia and Herzegovina UK Network was set up in 1996 with the aim of providing practical and psychological support on behalf of Bosnian refugees in the UK. Artists from The Public have been working with members of the network, both formally and informally. The Network is based in Birmingham in the West Midlands. Their long term aim is to develop Bosnia House, a new business centre to promote trade links and cultural ties between the UK and the Balkan region.

<http://www.uknetwork.freemove.co.uk/>



The City of Birmingham in the West Midlands is home to about a thousand Bosnians who left the country in three ways. The first came in 1992-93 under a programme called Governmental 1000. This brought survivors of concentration camps to the United Kingdom. A second group were evacuees who had been injured and seriously wounded during the war and came to receive medical treatment. Finally there were a small number of refugees who escaped and whose homes had been destroyed during the conflict.

The Bosnians had temporary leave to remain and were not able to travel, but over time most have gained permanent status in Britain. Like people from other countries, Bosnians in Birmingham have two identities: their traditional culture inherited from their homeland and their status in Britain where they have secured jobs, made friends and created new lives for themselves. Today there are several Bosnian associations across the country, with communities in Birmingham, Derby, Manchester, Coventry and London - participating in cultural and educational events and activities.



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The Group I arrived with consisted of 16 patients. We came in from a Nato base in Italy. Every patient had to have someone escort them especially if you're a kid, bearing in mind I was a kid at the time - the older one - but a kid. Then in February 1994, there was another group of evacuees from Sarajevo. When the massacre of the market happened, they took all the patients to Germany and the American base. Because physically there was not space. because of the number of injuries, from there the Government made a decision to which countries we went to.

Ten patients came to the UK to the Children's Hospital in Birmingham - it was closed at the time but they re-opened it for these ten and they were there for some period of time because of the nature of their injury. I myself was in the Heartlands hospital.

After everything where do you start? I don't know if it heals - you learn to live it, it's part of your past and we can't change that. What has happened has happened.

I think it is very important to remember what happened and pass that on to our generation so they know what happened. For example, our son should be aware of what has happened, but that should not stop him or next generations, having a normal life, and living the life where they interact with people from different backgrounds and religion.

I think tolerance is very important, mixing with others and appreciating other cultures. What has happened is very unfortunate and tragic, we shouldn't forget.

Forgiveness is a very difficult issue I guess you learn to live with it.

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My very first experience... I arrived at Birmingham Airport, and I was taken by ambulance to the hospital and taken all the tests, and the following day had the operation. I was awake all the time apart from the operation but the people were very nice.

My first meeting with the British public was 20th December, and you can imagine - just before Christmas - everybody was shopping. I went with an interpreter at the hospital to ask if it was OK to go out. I felt a little bit better and they took me into the city centre by taxi. Basically we came to the back of Mcdonalds, on a side street and then into the High Street. It was overcrowded - that was a shock for me that I will never forget and that will always stick in my mind.

Coming from Bosnia, you're just looking where the sniper is, or where the bomb is gonna shell. You can't see all the people during the day, only in the night you see people carrying the water. And when you're here and you see all the normality on the street... it just shocks you. For me it was not a normal environment, for I was so long in that other environment.

That was something... the first sight. I thought: here was not normal, something is not right! I still remember every scene cut in my brain, never been erased.

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excerpts from interviews with members of the Bosnian community by Beverley Harvey

















According to international data, the territory of B...
more than 100,000 have been injured and over 1...
1 in 4 still fe...
ould not b...
to return to...
their hom...

"We all left B...
together, but..."



Images from:

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Promocija BH Kulture U Velikoj Britaniji, Highgate, Birmingham

‘A Terrible Beauty’, a project with Nicola Atkinson.Davidson,
curated by Brendan Jackson and Beverley Harvey.

Information at www.nadfly.com

Photographs: Brendan Jackson/Nicola Atkinson.Davidson

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