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REMEMBER SARAJEVO
Roger Richards



REMEMBER SARAJEVO

R o g e r R i c h a r d s

REMEMBER SARAJEVO

Photographs by Roger Richards

Introduction By Peter Maass
December 2003

Index

pages

Introduction

by Peter Maass

5

For Whom The Bell Tolls

by Roger Richards

8

Lost Innocents

by Roger Richards

15

Photographs

by Roger Richards

21

The Art of War

by Roger Richards

71

Introduction

by Peter Maass

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Do we need to remember Sarajevo? The war in Bosnia ended in 1995, and much has happened since then, not only in Bosnia, but in the rest of the world. We have lived through the events of 9/11, we have engaged in war in Afghanistan, and we are fighting another war in Iraq. We are being told that America's survival is at stake, and though we may doubt the severity of the threat, or the wisdom of the government's response to it, there are people who wish fatal harm to America.

Sarajevo, and the agony it suffered in the 1990s, would seem to carry little importance today. It is just a scarred Balkan city filled with aid workers, peacekeepers and a population that sadly remembers its history even as others forget it. Bosnia is not in material breach of anything today. Sarajevo is fading away, filed in the recesses of our historical memory between the tragedies of Somalia and Rwanda, which briefly grabbed our attention before they faded away, too.

Yet Sarajevo was besieged not just by men with weapons but by evil. It was a multicultural city set upon by nationalists who engaged in ethnic cleansing on a scale not seen in Europe since World War II. In the past year or two, the phrase "ethnic cleansing" has retreated from the lexicon of national discourse, replaced

by the new catchphrases of our fears, such as Al Qaeda and weapons of mass destruction and Osama bin Laden. Even so, the evil of ethnic cleansing must be recalled, alongside the shameful fact that America and its allies tolerated mass murder because it did not seem to threaten us. When, finally, it did menace our interests—the NATO alliance was beginning to unravel over the morass of Bosnia—a U.S. led bombing campaign began, and the Serb nationalists who started the war were forced to end it, but awarded nearly half the country as a sweetener.

Sarajevo teaches us that we must be prepared to act even if a force of evil does not directly threaten our homeland. It is possible for genocide to occur almost anywhere on Earth and for life to continue in New York and Washington without a ruffle of concern or dislocation. Sarajevo is proof that our indifference can kill. It doesn't kill us, but those upon whom we allow evil to have its way. Even if it doesn't imperil our territory or the price of gasoline, we are diminished by its triumph, and a world in which such triumphs occur is not a safe world.

Roger Richards was among the many journalists who worked in Bosnia during the war, and he continued to work there after the country was carved up under the Dayton peace treaty. His evocative photographs take us back to that time,

as do the accompanying remembrances from Sarajevans who provide a pitch-perfect narrative to his stark and damning pictures. This combination of pictures and words is powerful. "Remember Sarajevo" makes us do just that, and for that reason, it merits a wide audience.

"These photographs were made with the intent of making the world look at an evil that was taking place before their eyes, and to force it to face unpleasant truths," Richards says. "We journalists kept doing our jobs, to the point where we became resented by the citizens of Sarajevo as voyeurs. But the fact that we kept on making these images of horror eventually led to a time when the world could avert its eyes no longer. I consider myself to be a caretaker of historical documents and with it comes the responsibility to remind my fellow humans of what can happen when evil is allowed to flourish without challenge from the good."

Evil recedes rather than dies. It is persistent. We must not avert our gaze when it begins to draw the blood of innocent people stricken by the machetes and bullets of genocide. The photos and text in this book explain, elegantly and painfully, why that is so. ●

Sarajevo. Remember.
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Peter Maass was born in 1960 and raised in Los Angeles. He spent most of 1992 and 1993 covering the war in Bosnia for *The Washington Post*. In 1994, he took a sabbatical and wrote "Love Thy Neighbor: A Story of War," which was published by Alfred A. Knopf in 1996. The book, which chronicled his experiences covering the Bosnian conflict, won *The Los Angeles Times Book Prize* (for nonfiction) and the *Overseas Press Club Book Prize*, and was a finalist for several other literary awards.

In 1997, after working for a year in Washington as a staff writer for the *Post*, he left the paper and moved to New York City, where he is a contributing writer at *The New York Times Magazine*. He has also written for *The New Yorker*, *The New Republic*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Outside* and *Slate*, among others.

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For Whom The Bell Tolls

Today Bosnia. Tomorrow The World

Essay by Roger Richards

Originally published in *The Miami Herald* on December 13, 1992

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The shells began raining down as the sun was rising. I was in the middle of one of those early morning dreams between sleep and wakefulness when the first round came in, a sound like a train locking up its brakes while going at top speed. I was on the floor when it exploded in a shower of concrete and glass only a few yards away. My companions in the room at Bosnia TV-Radio, a Spanish television crew, had not heard the round coming in, but were instantly awake after the explosion.

"More incoming," I yelled at them, for already there was the sound of other shells on the way with their payload of death and destruction. We grabbed our flak jackets and raced for the nearest "safe area," so called because only a direct hit from a high explosive shell would prove deadly. Two more shells hit the same floor of the building as we dashed for safety. The Serbian artillery gunners really meant business this morning.

The hallway of the third floor was already crowded with sleepy Bosnian and foreign media people, most still in their nightclothes and rubbing

sleep from their eyes. You could easily tell the locals and old-hand foreign journalists from the new foreign journalists. The newcomers had a weird look in their eyes, a barely suppressed panic that threatened to burst out with every explosion. The veterans just looked sleepy and annoyed that their sleep had been interrupted. Most had long since accepted the main rule of working in Sarajevo, that death could come at any second, any place.

The Serbian "chetnik" artillery barrage continued for the next 20 minutes, raking the TV station from top to bottom, left to right, floor by floor. Then suddenly it was quiet. Nobody moved for at least another 10 minutes, fearing a resumption of the shelling. It never came. It was over, at least for that September morning. Marshal Tito's TV station, built especially for the 1984 Winter Olympics, had survived again, albeit with a few more holes and destroyed rooms. But nobody had been killed this cold morning, only a few bruises and a couple of people cut by flying glass. The clock in the hall said 06:23 hours. Wake-up call, Sarajevo style.



Sarajevo Water Line 1992

Sarajevans line up for water during the Bosnian Serb siege of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, December 1992. With water supplies and electricity controlled by the Serbs, Sarajevo's citizens were forced to join queues to fill their containers, and were frequent targets of Serb gunners in the hills around the city. Almost 2,000 children, and over 10,000 people in total were killed in Sarajevo during the 3-1/2 year siege.

Sarajevo. Since April this year, the name of this once beautiful city has become a word used to describe total anarchy and bloodletting on a scale yet to be fully determined.

With thousands dead, there is simply no place left to bury the victims of shelling and sniping. One terrible irony is a measure of the desperation: The Olympic Stadium of eight years ago has been pressed into service as a cemetery.

Before the violence began, most people had only heard of Sarajevo in connection with the Olympics, or because they remembered from their history lessons that it was here a Serbian nationalist named Gavrilo Princip fired the shots that killed the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian empire, and in the process beginning a chain reaction that ignited World War I.

There are those who would argue that now the seeds of another major European war is incubating in the unstaunched bloodshed among the ruins of Yugoslavia. Held in check for four decades under the repressive rule of a communist government, the ethnic tensions between the Serbs, Croats and Muslims who share this small country flared a new as the old regime crumbled. Slovenia was the first to secede from the uneasy union, followed by Croatia.

Violence escalated into war as ethnic Serbs in Croatia, aided by the federal Yugoslav army, seized a sizable chunk of the country and declared their own country.

Wrapped in the middle of the warring republics, Bosnia Herzegovina—with its mix of Muslims, Serbs and Croats—was next to be plunged into the darkness of ethnic violence. Bosnia has become a place which threatens to prove that, at the end of a century of atrocities and brutality, we have learned nothing except how to kill each other more efficiently.

As the corpses pile up, the most powerful nations in the world—although no longer restrained by the threat of Soviet tanks and missiles—have nonetheless been unable or unwilling to end the slaughter.

When I drove into Sarajevo for the first time, I had only one thought: “My God, I have entered hell itself.”

Monstrous pillars of smoke poured from the black husks of buildings that have taken too many artillery shells. The highway was an obstacle course of burned debris—cars, trucks, trams, military vehicles. The pavement was pocked here and there with huge shell craters that sometimes forced me to steer our rented car onto the crumbling sidewalks to get by.

In the distance, Serb artillery shells whistled out of the hills overlooking the city and sped toward their doomed targets. The ground shook with their impact. Crrrump. Crrrump. Crrrump.



Serb War Criminals 1993

Wanted posters with the images of Bosnian Serb leaders Radovan Karadzic (left) and Biljana Plavsic on a downtown building during the Bosnian Serb siege of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, April 1993. Almost 2,000 children, and over 10,000 people in total were killed in Sarajevo during the 3-1/2 year siege.

**Woman with Firewood 1993**

The face of a woman collecting firewood near the siege frontline shows the signs of almost a year of living with death, Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, February 1993.

Since April, the Serbs have expended tons of shells from their well-fortified positions in the mountains that rise up almost 7,000 feet around the city. But they have not been able to capture Sarajevo. The Bosnians have been fighting like cornered rats with nothing but light weapons against the massive arsenal left to the Serbs by the Yugoslav National Army. So the Serbs have settled into a campaign of slow torture. The legion of Serbian snipers intentionally target civilians. Mortar batteries drop shells on old people lined up for bread. Gunners blow up hospitals, schools and mosques.

I visited the morgue at Kosevo Hospital after a day of heavy shelling on the city center. There is no air conditioning or freezers. The smell of decomposing bodies is controlled by the generous use of formaldehyde, an odor that remains in your nostrils for at least a day. Of the 321 bodies there that afternoon, only eight were soldiers. The rest were almost all women, most apparently over the age of 50 and all of them badly mutilated by shrapnel from the exploding shells that killed them. One old woman was so destroyed that the remains were folded into the black mourning dress she had been wearing. Then there were those shot by snipers, including a couple of young boys under 10 years of age. In July, the world was outraged at the pictures of babies killed

by snipers. It is practically a daily occurrence here, where during lulls in pedestrian traffic, snipers use dogs for target practice.

My first encounter with snipers came while I was driving with another journalist down Sarajevo's main street, a seven-kilometer stretch of road christened "Sniper Alley". Something tore through the open window of the car and whizzed past, inches in front of my face. In another place, I might have thought a bee had been swept in by the wind. But in Sarajevo, we knew exactly what it was. Within milliseconds, two more bullets had zinged over the van.

My second near miss was in the offices of the Djecija Ambasada, or Children's Embassy, an organization that arranges the evacuation of children from Sarajevo. I was about to interview the director when the windows around us shattered, followed by the sound of five gunshots from the direction of Serb positions in the hills about 300 meters away.

The bombardment is seemingly endless. The shells from the big guns you can often hear screaming toward you. But the mortars you never know about until they hit and a million shell fragments spray like deadly rain. It only takes one piece the size of a BB pellet in the wrong place to take you out. I was just



Grave digger at Lion Cemetery, 1992

stepping outside when I saw a flash 30 meters down the street and heard something whistle past my head before I could react. When I turned, I could see something the size of a large coin embedded in a concrete wall, still glowing red hot.

In the midst of this terrible siege the people of Sarajevo try to go on with their lives as much as possible. On mornings when the shelling is not very heavy, the streets are often crowded. Commuters board overcrowded buses and go to jobs, if they still have one. Everyone walks rapidly and breaks into a run when passing areas where snipers are known to be active. Food is scarce, and there is fear that with winter coming, the United Nations will not be able to bring in as much relief aid. Sarajevo airport is often closed due to heavy fog during winter and the land corridor from the Adriatic port of Split is likely to be impassable with the first heavy snow.

In the chaos of Sarajevo there are constant reminders of something even worse happening in Bosnian villages overrun by Serb nationalist forces. Dazed refugees stagger into miserable camps barely able to speak of the horrors that drove them there. One afternoon I drove to a camp on the edge of disputed territory where 1,100 people were crowded into a barracks built during the Austro-Hungarian empire. One woman said she had escaped from a town where the Serbs made the Croat men drink

gasoline. They all died horribly, she said. A man lifted his shirt to show me the livid scars of torture. In another place I met a woman in her 30's with two young children. She said her husband had been led away by armed men without explanation, and she had not heard or seen anything of him since.

Between assignments in the combat zone I stay in the Croatian capital city of Zagreb, where people laugh and the cafes are full. I find myself sitting with food on my plate and a beer in my hand thinking about people who can't get out, and I find myself feeling a painful guilt and eagerness to return to Sarajevo.

Of course, once I'm there I pray that I'll get back out.

I know from my own fears, my own desire to flee, how easy it would be to file away what's happening here as some inexplicable crisis in a place too distant to worry about.

But the urge to escape is countered by a nauseating sense that what happens here will determine a future that belongs to all of us. I feel compelled to stay, to make one more photograph, and one more after that.●

Sarajevo's Lost Innocents

The Children of Bosnia, Under Fire

Essay by Roger Richards

Originally published in *The Washington Post* on March 21, 1993.

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SARAJEVO, Bosnia

Under the overhang of a downtown storefront, Aldin Jogic, 10, happily teeters on two wheels of his skateboard in a rocking pirouette, surveying the madness. Once a bustling community with groceries and delis and cheerful high-rise apartments, this is now a no man's land, the shop glass shattered into gutter diamonds, the concrete walls pocked and blistered from gun-fire. It is midday, sunny and brisk. Two middle-aged women walk up.

"Is he shooting?" inquires the one in the overcoat.

Aldin nods, squinting manfully into the sun. Of course he is shooting. The Serb sniper who works this corner is always shooting. He has been out there all day, on a hillside about 600 yards away, plinking at people as though they were tin cans in a junkyard.

The women clutch their hand-bags, crouch at the edge of the side-walk, absurdly, like sprinters at the starting block, then dart out into the intersection. When they are halfway across, there is the crack of a rifle and a puff of powdered asphalt. A miss. They make it to the safety of the other side, and slow to a walk.

Two more boys Aldin's age show up and begin roughhousing, performing for my camera. They are jostling perilously close to the open street. Aren't they afraid of getting hit?, I ask.

They shrug. "He is not a very good shot," pronounces the one called Zeba. I'm more afraid of grenades."

An old man and two old women shuffle past and out into the open, their footfalls unhurried. Everyone knows about the sniper; perhaps these old people just don't care anymore. There is too much of that. Feeling like a vulture, I train my camera on their backs, ready to make a picture at the sound of the shot, at the instant one of them stiffens and falls. But the street remains quiet. They make it across.

Why didn't he fire, I wonder aloud. He would not have missed.

"He must be having a coffee," Zeba says.

The year-old civil war that has laid waste to this once-elegant Balkan capital has turned life here into a surrealist drama. Serb snipers align their sights by practicing on the half-starved dogs who roam the streets, then open fire indiscriminately on the people. Last summer the towns-people—mostly Croats and Muslims—at least could take cover behind trees, but now these have all

been Stripped to the stump for fuel, and in the big open areas there is no-where to hide. Even the cemeteries are treeless. Random death has become so commonplace that acts of heroism and acts of recklessness and acts of simple survival often are indistinguishable. In the middle of the chaos are thousands of children. Many have been orphaned by the war; some have been abandoned; some are their family's lifeline, peddling soap or gum or foraging for food or scraps of wood to burn for heat.

The children of Sarajevo were easier to find than I had expected. They do not cower in bunkers. They play in the streets with foolhardy abandon. Many have died at this, struck by artillery and mortar shells— some estimates have put the number of dead children as high as 1,200 in Sarajevo alone since the first shot of this civil war was fired nearly a year ago. Thousands more have been injured. And still, they frolic in the open.

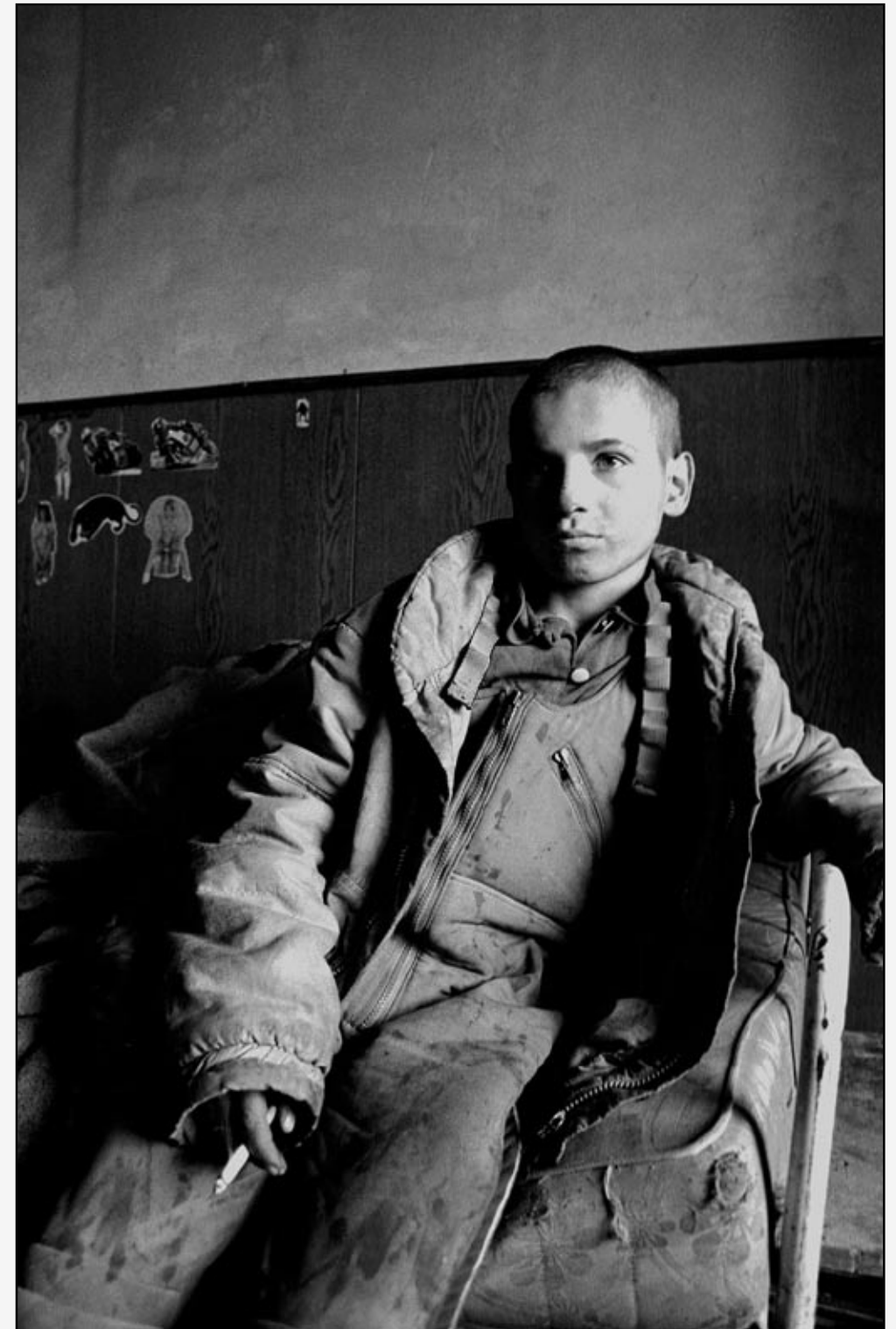
The boys play killing games. You watch this, mystified. They are ferocious, pummeling each other with fists and sticks and toy wooden rifles, the bigger kids sometimes beating the smaller ones bloody or blue. Not once did I see a child cry.

"The children's war games show a greater level of aggression than normal," says Liljana Oruc. She is a psychiatrist at Sarajevo's Kosevo Hospital. She smokes too much, sleeps too little. Her hands shake. She and her colleagues have been studying the effects of the war on the population of this city, particularly the children.

"We are expecting a dreadful situation after the war," she said. "Sarajevo has now become the world's laboratory for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder."

Orphan Smoking, 1993

A 10-year-old orphan smokes a cigarette at the unheated and freezing-cold Children's Orphanage, in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, February 1993.



What happens to a child who teams at the age of 9 or 8 or 6 that sudden, thrashing death or dismemberment can find anyone, anytime?

"All these children," she says sadly, "all these children, we do not know what's going on in their heads."



Wounded Boys, 1993

Two young boys recovering from shrapnel wounds caused by Serb shells, Kosevo hospital, Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, February 1993.

Dodging Bullets

I am on another sidewalk on another day, talking with another group of children, when a man ventures out onto the crosswalk. Crack. A fountain of dirt sprays up from near his feet where the errant bullet struck, and a clod of it lands in the cuff of one boy's jeans. Rizah Smailbegovic, 14, turns around to display it, raising his leg triumphantly. No big deal.

A pair of armored personnel carriers rumble past at a good speed. They are Ukrainian troops, part of the U.N. contingent of peace-keeping forces. It is ironic that there are Ukrainians here. The Serbs have recruited a number of mercenaries from soldiers left unemployed by the dissolution of the Soviet Union. It is not unlikely that some of the men in the armored vehicle are friends of the men shooting down at them from above.

Crack! The sniper is still firing. The soldiers don't even slow for a look.

When the second shot rings out, one girl of about 11 shivers. "I hate them she says of the Serbs. "Me too," says her friend. "Do you like Guns N' Roses?"

Even Hospitals Are Targets

I walk into Kosevo's Hospital ophthalmic clinic, where I am introduced to an 8-year-old boy who almost lost his left eye to a shell splinter. Injured when a mortar landed on his house, he was fortunate enough to have his vision saved by the skill of Vladimir Biljenki, an eye surgeon. No, Biljenki is not available for an interview, I am informed. A few days before, when he opened the door leading to a third floor balcony at the clinic, an anti-aircraft round blew his head

off. He is one of 27 doctors who have been killed at the hospital while on duty. The Serbs on the hills target the hospital around noon every day; that is visiting hour, and so many more people are there.

In the bed of the pediatric ward is Almira Lusic, a 13-year-old girl with a stomach in bandages and a gentle face filled with disbelief. There is no running water in Sarajevo; Almira had been waiting at a water pump for the man before her to finish filling his plastic jugs when, without a warning sound, a mortar shell hit him. That is how mortars strike, out of the blue. She watched him whimper and die, then looked down to see her stomach hanging out of her body. She tried to push it back in.

“It felt like a sponge,” she says dreamily, in a weak voice.

The doctor, Mirjan Lomas, explains that Almira suffered extensive damage to her small intestine, and she lost her spleen and half her stomach. She is emaciated because her body is not absorbing food. He is hoping to medevac her to France, but there are many wounded children and limited evacuation routes. He does not know if she will live.

In the hospital abortion clinic, every chair is filled with patients. Nearby, the nursery is filled with babies, three of them newborns abandoned by mothers who do not have the resources to feed themselves, let alone a child. These women are trusting in luck and in the humanity of health care workers, hoping their children will be evacuated to Italy or Germany. Some are. Some are not. Even evacuation is a crapshoot. Sometimes, the buses are fired on or bombed, and the children die.

One of the abandoned babies, a beautiful little girl, is a double tragedy. She was the result of the rape of a young Muslim girl by a Serb soldier at one of the small villages outside Sarajevo. The girl was held prisoner for seven months, so she could not have an abortion. This is a common terror tactic here. There are countless such babies in Bosnia and Croatia.

An Unheated Orphanage

The orphanage in Sarajevo is called the Children’s Home, though it has more the feel of a cheap motel with busted windows and flooded plumbing, abandoned to derelicts. It has taken eight artillery hits. The director of the home, Amir Zelic, is doing the best with what little he has. Most of the windows in the three-story building have been blown out, and the holes have been stuffed with plastic sheets. There is no running water or heat. Almost all the furniture has been dismantled and burned, even an old piano. The stairwells are junkholes, with stray dogs foraging. The bathrooms are piles of excrement.

At night, the 75 children shiver under threadbare blankets, and their meals are hideous affairs, cold bowls of a watery gruel with floating beans, macaroni, chunks of stale bread, and a queasy mélange of undefinables. The children in this place have the dull, haunted look of prisoners of war. Which in a sense they are.

Little Librarians

“Slika, slika,” comes the cry. “Photo, photo.” Children everywhere see a camera and want to pose. They are no different here, except that these children are posing for me brazenly, in daylight, just a half-block from the central city’s most notorious killing ground. The most deadly street in Sarajevo is right outside the downtown Holiday Inn.

They are beautiful kids, delighting in their conspiracy of fearlessness, grinning, flashing the two-fingered victory sign, jostling to be center-frame. They live nearby. They tell me, in gestures, that they have something to show me, and I follow them into the apartment house in which they live, a modern, half-ruined building that is under almost constant artillery barrage.

Two of them, a pretty dark-haired 12-year-old named Lana and an 11-year-old named Sanja, speak understandable English. They said they had learned the language from their parents, and from television.

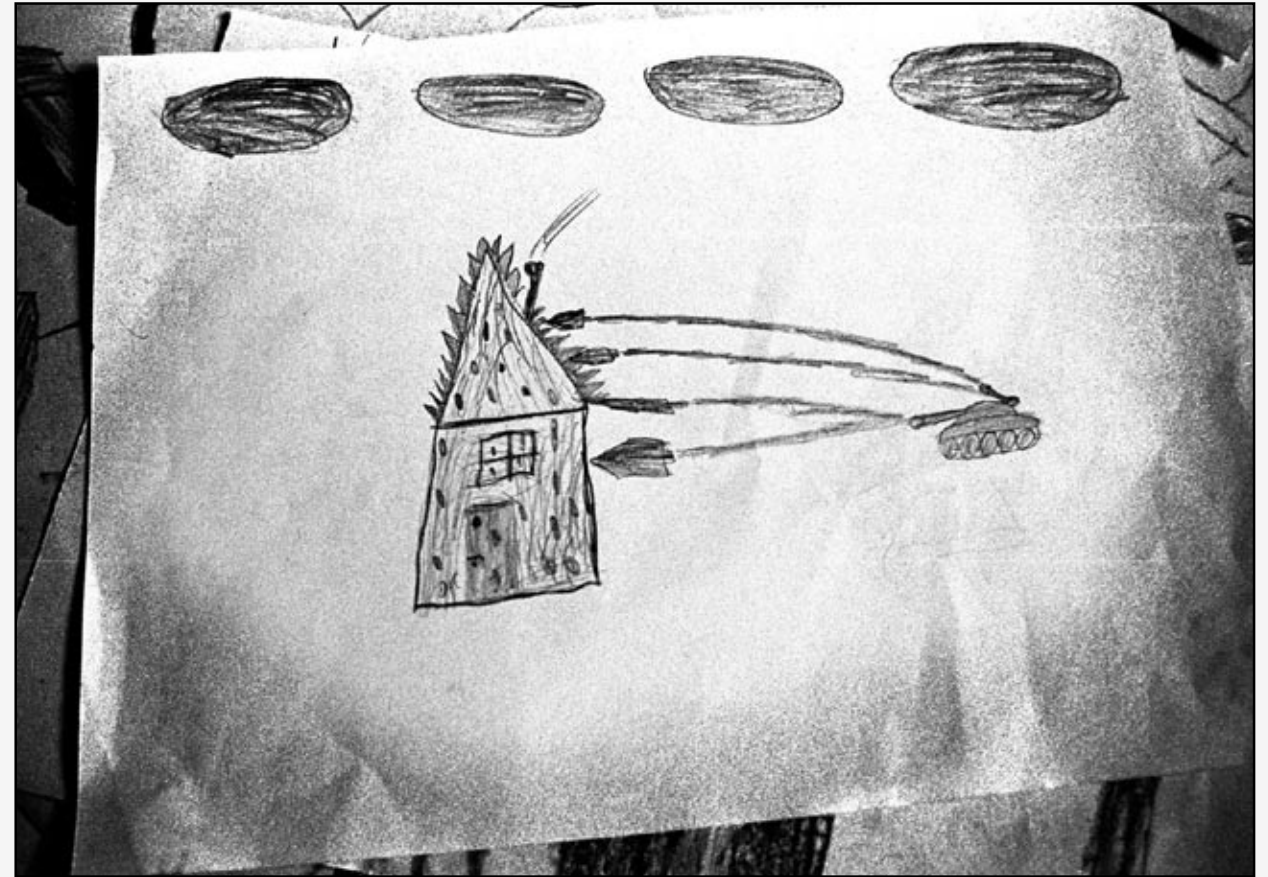
Tugging at my hand, Lana leads me into the dank basement of this building that is a target for Serb sharpshooters and mortar teams. The basement is black, but the children negotiate its passageways expertly, pulling me along. Candle wax is scarce and must be conserved. Finally, when we are at our destination, someone puts a match to a wick, and by its tentative flicker I see four small shelves on the wall, each about two feet long.

“Our library,” says Lana proudly.

Arranged in neat rows, lovingly kept, are children’s books, mostly in Serbo-Croatian, some in English. I recognize “Heidi,” and “little Women,” and “Alice in Wonderland” and a small collection of Doctor Seuss. On the wall above this cache of happy literature is a crude sign, little-kid style, in crayon letters of alternating color.

It says, in Serbo-Croatian, “Children’s War Library.”

And around me stand the librarians, ages 4 to 14, smiling proudly, their smudged faces barely visible in the light of a single tin candle in a bleak bunker beneath a besieged building in a place gone mad. They are the slender hope of Sarajevo. ●



Child's Drawing, 1993

A child's drawing depicts a Serb tank firing at a house, Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, February 1993.

Photographs

Boy with Toy Gun

1992

A sunny August day, not a cloud in the sky. The streets are quiet. No one to be seen but a few desperate souls out scrounging for something to eat, or carrying containers to fill with water from a running pipe, if one can be found. The guns are quiet this day.

The previous night's terror has been followed by a lull in the shelling, as the killers in the hills sleep off the slivovitz and whiskey they drown themselves in, perhaps to deaden their consciences, for surely they know what they are doing to the people of Sarajevo.

On a downtown side street where windows lie in glittering shards on the sidewalk a boy looks out from his basement window. On such a beautiful summer day he should be outside playing. But too many children have been killed already, so his parents keep him inside, and alive.

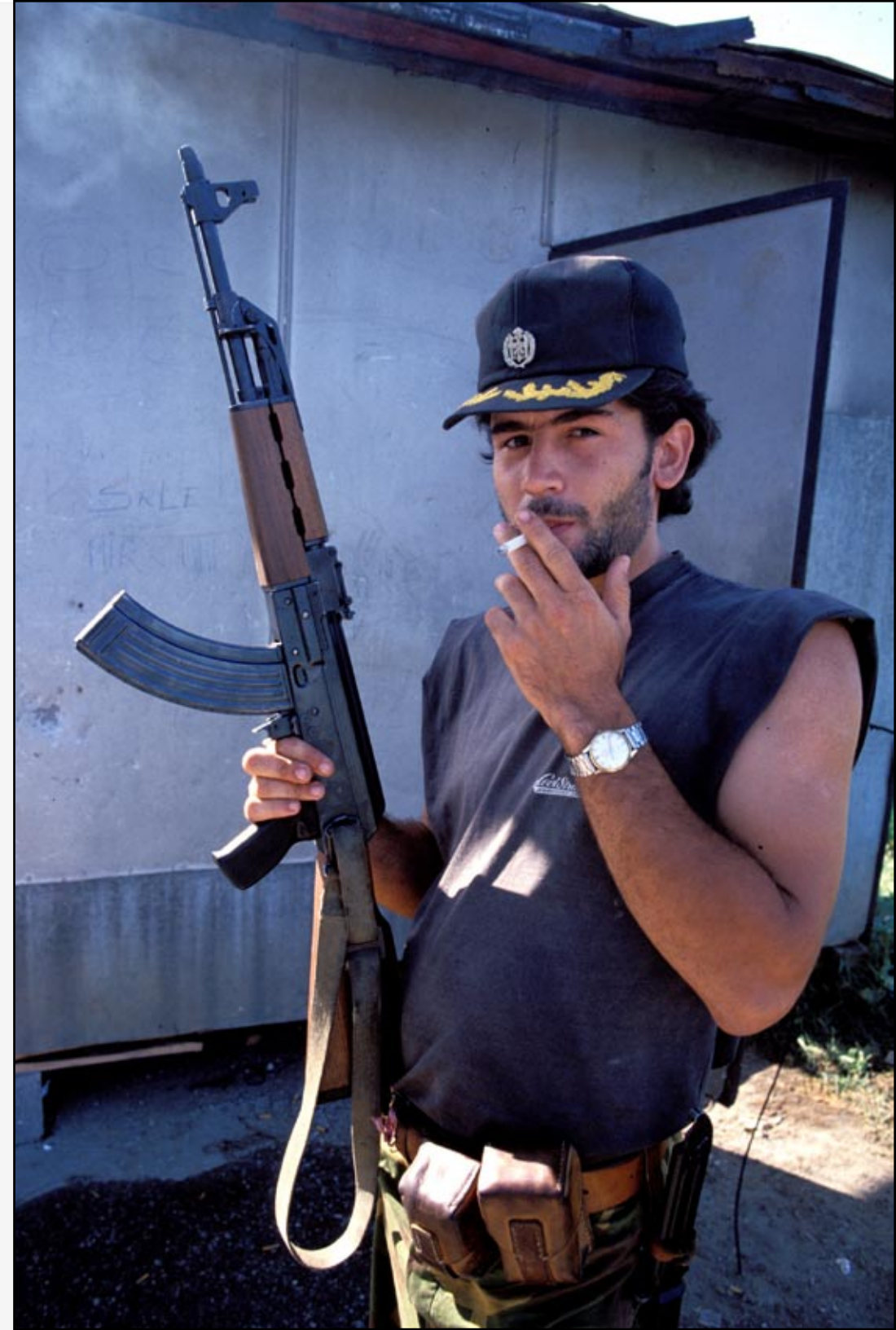
The boy looks out the window of his prison, and points his gun at the stranger, and does what the world has been showing him that big boys do, bang bang bang.



Serb Gunman

1992

The Serb checkpoint is on one of the roads into surrounded Sarajevo. The gunmen, not soldiers but thugs with weapons, do what they feel like doing. There is always uncertainty at these checkpoints, for it is never sure what will happen to you on any given day. Maybe you will be robbed or beaten, or both. Maybe the guy at the post that day will be an educated man, who can be reasoned with. Or maybe it will be a peasant who has lost his village, or a mercenary from Montenegro working for plunder and revenge against the Ottoman Turks foregone for centuries but now come due. Or maybe today it will be a young guy who will check your papers and tell you to go on ahead into Sarajevo, and please take some cigarettes for my Muslim friend who is not responsible for the war but must still pay like all the rest of the balija (a Serb pejorative name for Bosnian Muslims).



Woman Running from Serb Sniper Fire

1993

A RACE UNDER SNIPER FIRE

"I went to work, I worked in the Head Office of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Railroad Company and every day leaving for work and coming back I had to cross an avenue. It wasn't a street, but an avenue, I don't know how many meters wide. A sniper was always shooting at that avenue, killing people, injuring them, and I thought how to cross. I stayed in between the houses. One quick glance to my watch. When the first bullet was shot I counted the seconds to the next bullet.

Some 15 to 20 seconds. And so I was ready when the shot was fired to run across the avenue and I had to do it in 15 seconds. At such times the fear a person feels is incredible. The legs were dead, the muscles don't work and there's no air in the lungs. And when I arrived to the other side then I stayed there awhile to catch my breath and rest a little and the people who were hiding there and watching were happy that somebody managed to cross that fateful avenue near the 2nd Gymnasium."

Mima Tulic Kerken

Citizen of Sarajevo

Excerpt From: Sarajevo survivor testimonies from
OPSADA (The Siege) by FAMA International





Women Shot by Serb Sniper

1992

There are two women in the emergency room at Kosevo hospital, two of the unlucky to get shot by the Serb snipers this September day in Sarajevo. Yet they are also lucky, because the bullet did not take them in the stomach, or head, or in the spine. They will not suffer a slow death from these wounds, but will walk out of this place to face the bullets again another day.



Vedran Smajlovic plays for the Dead, Lion Cemetery

1992



EIGHT PEOPLE ARE KILLED AT A FUNERAL

“The massacre on Budakovici took place 15 June 1993. Twelve people were killed, a lot wounded. It was one of a whole series of massacres that happened at funerals, and in the war there were 10 thousand funerals. A similar massacre took place at the Lav (Lion) graveyard when in two attacks 17 people were killed and once 4 men were killed and over 70 wounded. Two massacres like that took place on the Turbe graveyard on Bistrik. Two men were killed in one and one in the other. This shows that the funerals were deliberately targeted and that the enemy was trying to revenge himself on the town and the people who were burying their loved ones. I’m sorry to say our imams had to take refuge sometimes even had to jump into the grave, or hide behind the dead so that they could finish the prayers and the funeral rites. For that reason we tried to have as few people as possible attending funerals so there would be fewer victims then we went ever farther and held the funerals at night so that fewer people would be in danger.”

Muharem Omeradic’

Head of the Religious and Educational Service of the Islamic Community. Excerpt from: Sarajevo survivor testimonies from OPSADA (The Siege) by FAMA International

Men in a shot-up car, Sarajevo

August 1992

The VW Golf here is like the VW Beetle in Mexico City, seemingly driven by most residents because they happen to have a manufacturing plant locally. In Sarajevo these days they are usually with lots of holes, courtesy of the snipers or from parking when a shell landed nearby.

The Golf has become the main conveyor of the dead and wounded to the morgue or emergency room. These men pull up into the lot at City Hospital, called French hospital by locals. The passenger being delivered is badly hurt. I do not ask from what. The docs take over, and the men in the Golf prepare to leave. One photo for the journalist first.... then they drive back on the street.

The Holiday inn is around the corner, and the snipers who work the area are lining up pedestrians in their sights.



Dr. Edib Jaganjac, City Hospital

August 1992

The doctor is tired. But his desperation for us to understand what is happening at his hospital and to his people overrides his fatigue. The halls are filled with patients. Not because the rooms are occupied but for safety from the Serb snipers and artillery and tank gunners, who aim their weapons at the building and fire at will. Upper floors are useless, the operating theaters destroyed. No water, and electricity only from generators running on diesel supplied by the UN peacekeepers. The hospital is now as wounded as the rest of Sarajevo.





Fikreta Hadovic and Dr. Edib Jaganjac

August 1992

They took her legs but not her spirit. She is the embodiment of survival, of her city, of defiance in the face of pure evil. How can you describe what it is like to be in the presence of such a person.

The thrill of seeing that such people do exist; the sense of responsibility for doing right by this person, even if only on film, to record what force could not smash; and the overwhelming urge to weep.



Vase Miskina massacre site

1992

Flowers and a mortar shell impact in the pavement mark the spot where 27 Sarajevans waiting for bread on Vase Miskina Street, men, women, children and the elderly, were blown to pieces by 2 Serb shells. In May 1992, during the Bosnian Serb siege of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Almost 2,000 children, and over 10,000 people in total were killed in Sarajevo during the 3-1/2 year siege.

HORROR AND SILENCE IN THE CITY

"The news quickly spread through the city since everyone who had a phone or had a phone nearby ran to see whether someone of theirs was hurt. Then the telephone system began to fall apart and only the lucky ones could get through that chaos in the network because quite literally every receiver in the city was lifted up. It took me some two hours to find out that some of my friends had been killed or injured. I won't mention the names because it is always difficult to draw the line at which one should stop with that kind of list. Until then the uncertainty had been unbearable. One always starts with the worst, first thinks of the worst. And then it started the crush in front of the hospital, where everybody waited to see whether they would bring somebody who was theirs. I can say that day I was incapable of being a journalist. That was probably the only day when I couldn't do my job. And I admire my colleagues who were reporters that day and who moved among the dead bodies. But even today, when I pick up the receiver, if there is no signal, the memories of that day of mass murders pass through my head."

Hamza Baksic'

Journalist Excerpt From: Sarajevo survivor testimonies from OPSADA (The Siege) by FAMA International





Almira Lusic, Kosevo Hospital

1993

Almira Lusic is 13. She was hit in the stomach by shrapnel from a Serb shell. Half of her stomach is now missing. Also her spleen is removed. The doctors repaired her large intestine. She has lost weight because her stomach is not functioning properly. The operation to save her life lasted 6 1/2 hours.

Almira's words: "I was collecting water from a pump, there was another girl and a man was pumping water. Suddenly a shell landed 2 or 3 meters in front of me. The man was killed. The other girl was wounded but not that bad. I was thrown by the explosion and I saw the man dying. My 12-year-old brother called my parents and they took me to the hospital. My stomach was completely out. It felt like a sponge. I was fainting. It is so crazy, so foolish. I don't understand why this war started. I wish nobody to experience the same thing that I have."

From Roger Richards' reporter's notebook

Amputee shaving

1993

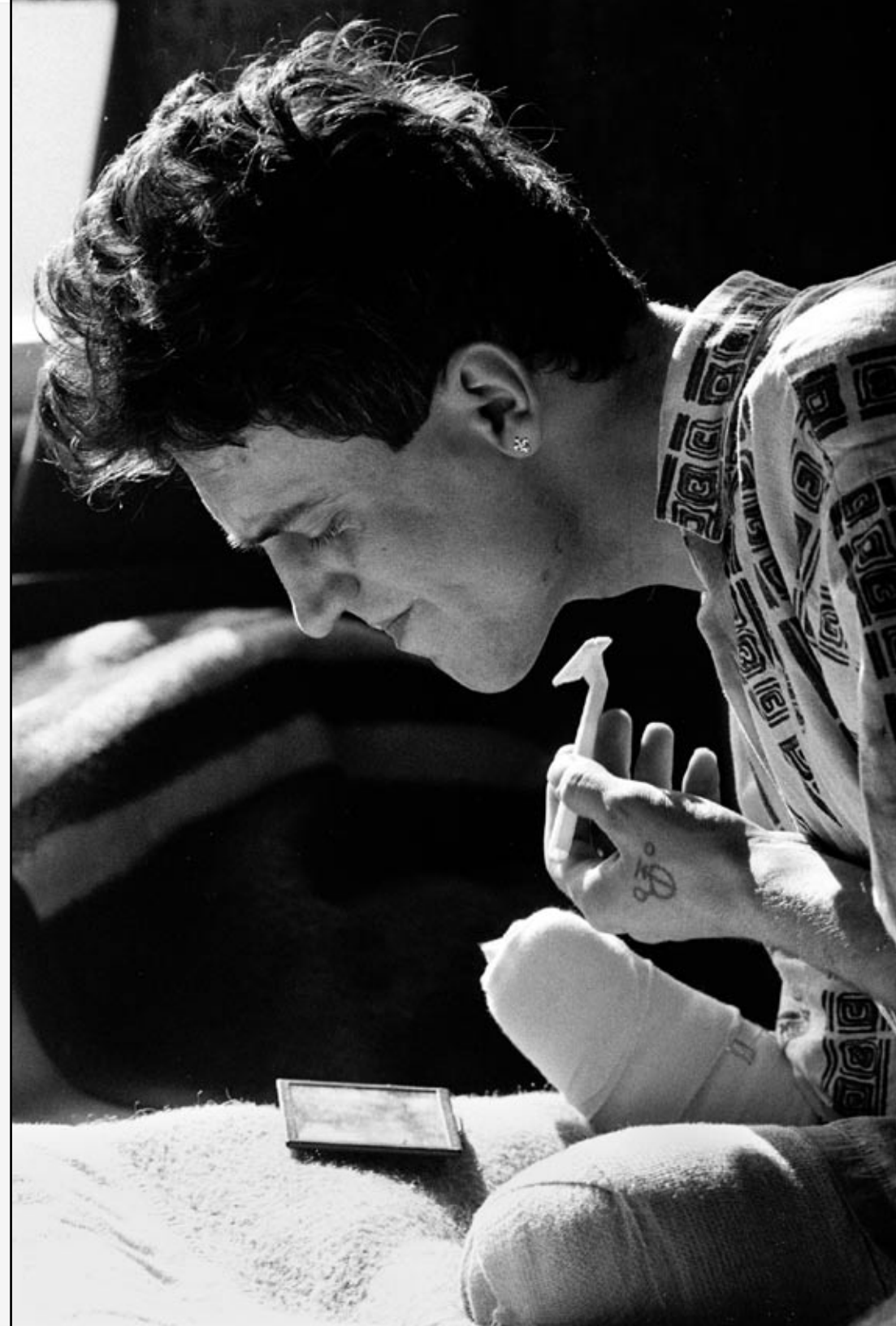
A man who lost his legs and one arm to a Serb shell shaves in Kosevo Hospital, Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, February 1993.

MASSACRE AT A PLAYGROUND IN DOBRINJA

"Listen, I went there, to the game, to see the game, of course. And I got there and I was standing there, all of us, there almost were 150 of us there watching the game. I had been standing there for less than five minutes. It happened at about nine thirty in the morning. Two shells fell out of the sky. The first shell wounded me. My leg was broken. Right about then I started to run away. But I couldn't. The second one fell behind my back. The second one fell about six, five or six meters from the first. So, when I stopped crawling I was conscious. I saw that the whole crowd gotten down on the ground. Panic, a rushing sound, and then the explosion."

Ahmed Fazlic
Citizen

Excerpt From: Sarajevo survivor testimonies from OPSADA (The Siege)
by FAMA International



Chess game

April 1993

Men play a game of chess on the trunk of an abandoned car during the Bosnian Serb siege of Sarajevo, April 1993. Residents of the beleaguered city sought any escape or distraction from the reality of death and mayhem they faced every day.



Running from Serb sniper

April 1993

Like ghosts in their own city, Sarajevo residents dash across an intersection under fire from a Serb sniper during the siege.

SURVIVAL IN AUSCHWITZ - SURVIVAL IN SARAJEVO

"Although sometimes, living in Sarajevo during the war, we did run the streets like chased wild animals, we had some sort of dignity, and we used to keep each other's company. We felt like people. I can say that we were people with spirit, people who wanted to fight for their freedom in spite of impossible conditions.

The people in Auschwitz were walking shadows, which were moving around according to instinct, for they wanted to survive. It is very difficult to say how successful they actually were, because those were terrible conditions, which did not make possible any form of progress. We were only numbers, people with no name. Our future differed from man to man, and it depended upon our own capacities. These were the power of the body and the power of the soul. From the early morning till the late night everything there was intended to destroy, first the spirit, then the body of a man."

Greta Ferusic'

Retired Professor of Architecture/Auschwitz survivor
Excerpt From: Sarajevo survivor testimonies from
OPSADA (The Siege) by FAMA International





The Skateboarder

February 1993

Under the overhang of a downtown storefront, Aldin Jovic, 10, happily teeters on two wheels of his skateboard in a rocking pirouette, surveying the madness. Once a bustling community with groceries and delis and cheerful high-rise apartments, this is now a no man's land, the shop glass shattered into gutter diamonds, the concrete walls pocked and blistered from gunfire. It is midday, sunny and brisk. Two middle-aged women walk up to Aldin and his friend, Zeba.

"Is he shooting?" inquires one of them. They are referring to the Serb sniper who works this area.

"Yes", replies Aldin.

So the two women sprint across the intersection, just to make sure.

There is no shot.

"He must be having a coffee," says Aldin's friend, Zeba.

Deadly intersection

September
1992

The camera looks around a corner into an empty intersection as a Serb sniper works from an unknown nest during the siege of Sarajevo.



Hotel Europa

1993

The slot machines in the casino of the destroyed Hotel Europa in downtown Sarajevo. Upstairs, many of the bombed-out rooms were taken over by refugees from outside the city fleeing Serb ethnic cleansing.

SURVIVING THE MASSACRE

"I had this can of food that I wanted to trade. Maybe I could have gotten one, two kilos of flour. So that I could take it home, and so that my wife could make some celebration. So that I could take them to my daughter so that she would have something to eat, because there wasn't enough to eat. People ate porridge, grass, nettles, various. We were struggling, y'know, we would run under shell fire just to be able to get something to take home. But the man I went to barely have a kilo of flour to offer me. I turned to go in the direction of where the shell was going to fall. I saw a flash of light. I heard the sound and I saw the light. Then I was out. I fell in a coma, because I didn't know that the shell fell so nearby until I was taken to the hospital. When they explained to me where it hit. It was three meters, right next to that self-service store. The fourth table of that textile store called the "22nd of December". I was covered with body parts, and only my head was sticking out. I remember one lady with no head or legs, who was lying to my right and there was also a half of a man who was all bloody. I don't know how long I was conscious then. But then someone came over to me, a television reporter from Japan or China, I think, the person's face looked different from us Europeans."

Sakib Suskic

Citizen Excerpt From: Sarajevo survivor testimonies from OPSADA (The Siege) by FAMA International



Water from the river

1992

Sarajevo residents use anything they can find to collect water from a stream running under "Sniper Alley", 1992. During the siege of the city running water and electricity were scarce, subject to being cut off by the besieging Bosnian Serbs.

ADVICE FOR SURVIVAL

"To fetch the water, you would go to the brewery, at night to avoid the shells. It was impossible to go during the day or in the early morning. It was freezing, and your hands would go numb. When you came home, you could not dry yourself. If someone carried four 5 liter canisters attached to his back with a belt, he would come home with his back wet. I made an iron rod and carried two canisters on each rod, which means that I carried twenty liters of water."

Muhamed Poljo
Pensioner

Excerpt From: Sarajevo survivor testimonies from
OPSADA (The Siege) by FAMA International



Cutting trees for fuel

1992

Sarajevo residents salvage the remains of trees that have been cut down for use as fuel for cooking and heating during the Serb siege of the city, December 1992. During the first winter of the siege most of Sarajevo's parks and tree-lined boulevards were cut down by desperate citizens.



THE DISAPPEARANCE OF SARAJEVO'S PARKS

"You know, that was one decision for which I was much criticized: why did I allow the parks of Sarajevo to disappear? And around the 10th of September I gave a statement in which I said that I thought it was much more important to have that wood, which at that moment was used to make food, and which would be used later for heating during those long Sarajevo winters. I felt that one human life was worth more than all that greenery, than those trees of ours."

Muhamed Kresevljakovic'
Mayor of Sarajevo

Excerpt From: Sarajevo survivor testimonies from OPSADA (The Siege) by FAMA International

Depressed old man

February 1993

I see him from a distance away. It is on one of the back roads that pedestrians and drivers use to avoid the Serb gunmen on 'Sniper Alley'. Everyone else is moving, very quickly, in a fast moving stream. They do not look at each other closely, for they will see what they do not want to see, the grim, strained, hungry and desperate face of their neighbor; and their neighbor looks like them.

Like the old man, who does not look up. He does not move; his face is like stone. But there is no strength, only grief.



A Widow Mourns

September 1992

For the widow of Dzevad Catic, devotion to her dead husband endures and she carries on, praying at his grave side in a cemetery filled with scores of the newly-dead. Even under threat from the Serb snipers and gunners nearby, who delight in shooting as their previous victims are being buried, or when their family comes to mourn, widow Catic defies the human vultures and affirms the spirit of her stricken city.



Death of a 16-year-old girl

February 1993



The two morgue attendants, thin and gaunt from lack of food for ten months like most Sarajevans, wheel a gurney with a cylindrical bundle wrapped tightly in a brown patterned blanket. They unwrap the bundle and lift what had once been a living young woman onto a stretcher to carry her into the morgue. She is a fresh victim, killed by a Serb shell during an early morning barrage. While most of the world dressed for church, the people of Sarajevo listened in fear for the shell that could blow them to bits. The girl's head is held together with tape and bandages soaked with blood and brain matter. Sightless eyes stare from a once pretty face. Her head looks like what would be left if you taped an egg and threw it against a wall as hard as you could. The men on the hill who fired the shell that killed this girl they do not know, will if you ask why say that they do it for the love of God, for the sanctity of His name, and for Civilization.

Shelling victim in Sarajevo morgue

1992

A morgue attendant adjusts a sheet covering the body of a man, one of several victims killed by a Serb artillery shell.



BREAD LINE MASSACRE

"I saw one of our Bosnia and Herzegovina TV crews with Cakan Dzevad Colakovic', Pupa Stijarcic', our friends, who seemed to be going to Svjetlost Park to make a completely different program from what in fact they were about to make in a minute or two. Since my mother hadn't come for 10 minutes I decided to go with them and see what they were up to. I don't think we'd gone more than 5 or 6 paces when it came without whistling, they say you don't hear the whistle of the shell that's for you. That was probably the shell that was for all of us... Then a silence, then chaos. Screaming, cries, hell, horror, panic, death, everything most terrible. Of course the TV crew reacted immediately, Dzevad took the camera and began filming. Just one little jump in time forwards. After that filming Dzevad Colakovic' has never been the same person. Why did that little jump forward happen? While he worked I saw a man becoming completely deformed. Almost physically. He went on; other members of the crew helped to collect those almost disintegrated bodies. We got people that we could still help into any kind of transport to get them somewhere they could be treated. But the terrible feeling is left that any one of us might have been there, or some other place a little before or would be years later. That we simply had no control over our paths and what might cross or tear them apart, like happened to those people in Ferhadija 27 May 1992."

Benjamin Filipovic'

Film Director Excerpt From: Sarajevo survivor testimonies from OPSADA (The Siege) by FAMA International

Jesus with bullet holes

January 1996

A bullet and shell-scarred portrait of Jesus on a Serbian Orthodox Christian church near the frontline in Sarajevo.



Serb victims of the siege

April 1993

A woman mourns among the graves of Serb citizens of Sarajevo killed by shells and snipers during the Serb siege of the city, at Lion Cemetery, Sarajevo.

NO DIESEL! PEOPLE BRING IN BODIES ON HAND TRUCKS

We had nothing left anymore and we asked those who needed to bury somebody to give us their wardrobes. And we got those wardrobes. The people brought the wardrobes; we brought the wardrobes and various wooden planks. And we made makeshift coffins so that we could bury the dead.

In 1994 we paid the black marketers 30 marks for a liter of gas. We had to buy it to transport the deceased from their homes to the mortuary and from the mortuary to the cemetery. It was horrible, horrible. It was impossible to find gas. It was impossible to find the planks for coffins. We coped and even in such conditions I can say the burials were performed in a correct manner. No burial was performed without the presence of a priest and all burials were performed in a civilized manner. This is what we are very proud of. Let me tell you that from the beginning of the war to the end of 1994 we buried 15 thousand people in Sarajevo. That would be a three-kilometer long trench, one and a half meters deep and a meter wide.

You can imagine, all of it was dug manually because the Serbs took away the machine for digging. The German machine which could dig a grave in 8 minutes while we needed 2 people digging all day. Because they were exhausted and weak.

Vlado Raguz

Director of the Funeral Services Company

Excerpt From: Sarajevo survivor testimonies from OPSADA (The Siege) by FAMA International



Dead Bosnian Army soldiers

February 1993



I was at Kosevo hospital one morning, and head for the psychiatric clinic to see this doctor who has impressed me with her dedication to her patients. She refuses to leave the city, even though she has a chance to go, and being a Serb in Sarajevo is not always an easy thing these days. For as the bodies pile up and food grows scarcer, neighbors begin to suspect loyalties. Is it to the city, or to the thugs in the hills firing the big guns?

Near the psych clinic is the morgue, and there is activity although it has been relatively quiet. Winter fog makes it hard to shoot if you are a sniper, and the Serb gunners above are probably huddling to stay warm with their whiskey and slivovitz. Inside the frigid morgue, which in summer is hot as an oven, bodies cover the floor. The smell and taste of formaldehyde clogs my throat and permeates my clothes. They use a lot of the stuff because of no refrigeration. Most of the bodies are in ragtag uniforms, and in advanced decomposition. They have lain in the field for a long time, and only now collected because of a temporary truce to recover the dead.

The dead soldiers are Muslims, Croats and Serbs; but unless you can find some identification, like a wallet with papers, or a bible or a koran, or a crucifix, you cannot tell who is who. Especially because they are so intermingled, with Serbs marrying Croats and Muslims and Montenegrins and Macedonians and Slovenes, all the combinations that was Yugoslavia. I wonder if the killers can't see that in killing their neighbors they are only killing themselves.

The Exiles

1993

Bosnian refugees, many from Sarajevo, cling to each other as their Red Cross bus departs for sanctuary in western Europe, Zagreb, Croatia.

GOING OUT OF SARAJEVO

Sometime in June 1994, as part of the project Witnesses of Existence, I came out of Sarajevo for the first time, went to Biel, a small town near Bern. That was the first time I got out. I went with about five artists and the organizers of the exhibition. To get out of Sarajevo, besieged, shelled and are in a town where normal, peaceful life was going on, where people walked about the streets after nine o'clock, quite ordinarily. It was a bit of a shock, a bit unforgettable. A woman came, a rich Swiss woman in a fur coat. Prosperous looking, well groomed, you could see she was rich. She looked at our exhibition and we laughing and joking and all at once she began to cry. The crying of that woman made me realize the full force of what was happening to us. I'd never thought about it. Looking at her as if she were me, like I might before the war have visited an exhibition showing some terrible catastrophe that had taken place. Looking at the dreadful and moving pictures of it, of course I would cry. But as a witness of it here was me laughing and she, as a visitor felt the full drama and began to cry. It was then that I became aware of what was happening to us in Sarajevo.

Edo Numankadic'

Painter

Excerpt From: Sarajevo survivor testimonies from
OPSADA (The Siege) by FAMA International



Searching for Food and Water

August 1993



Every day they leave their apartments in the Sarajevo survival ritual, carrying plastic jugs or buckets, or anything that can hold water. If they are lucky they will have something to transport their cargo, like a wheel barrow, a trolley, or a baby carriage, for each gallon weighs ten pounds. Because of the weight sometimes entire families go together to fetch water at crowded communal pumps. There they often become victims, like the family of 8 year-old Berin Lacevic. The nearest water source to their home was a distance away so they all went, each person carrying a container. They got to the pipe, filled up and were preparing to set off home when the shells landed.

"I took two buckets and I just felt an explosion, and then a shrapnel hit me in my head and arm and my leg," Berin relates. "My mother fell, my sister as well and then my sister was bleeding.

"Both of Berin's parents were killed, but his sister survived. At the time they thought she was dead, but she was 'only' seriously wounded. I think of Berin as I stand in line for water with my friend Dino Kunic, who will eventually be my father-in-law and the grandfather of my children. It is a cool September evening, and the sun has gone down. Residents in the area have come from their apartment buildings to get water at the only source in the area. The line is long, but everyone is patient. Gossip is traded, and small children run around playing. Each person goes up in turn at the pipe and fills their containers; it is night and the water station is in a good spot, hard for shells to hit because of the angle under the hill where the Serbs fire from. Dino and I fill our containers, and aside from a few curious looks when they hear me speak to Dino in English, the crowd accepts me as just another foreigner living in Sarajevo. The walk back to the apartment is a strenuous one, for our buckets are very heavy. Lucky for us the apartment is only on the second floor. As I struggle with my load I am passed by fit-looking old men, some carrying more weight than I am. To survive under siege in Sarajevo one has to be tough and these people are the strongest I have ever seen.



First Day of School

September 1993

The young faces in the tiny classroom reflect their experiences. After seventeen months of war, Sarajevo's schools are reopening and today is the first day back. Worried about snipers and exploding shells, parents stopped sending their children to school. Classes were suspended when the shells started falling, and never began again. Until today. They have seen too much evil, and need to start being children again. Maybe the normality of school will help, is the thought. And to keep depriving them of an education will also mean the barbarians in the hills above Sarajevo have won something. Psychologist Dr. Liljana Oruc says the war is doing terrible things to their young minds: "They are living in a prison," she says. "All these children, we do not know what is going on their heads."

Orphan Boy Eating

February 1993

An orphan boy eats a meal of cold gruel and bread crumbs at the unheated Sarajevo orphanage during the Bosnian Serb siege.

HUNGER IN SARAJEVO

We went to find the costumes, because we couldn't afford to make new ones. I picked one costume from the wardrobe of that tailor shop and tried it on, and turned sideways toward the mirror, and Kaca said, oh great, it's good, we'll take it. It had only one sleeve. When I turned around to the other side, the dress was so asymmetric, and me so thin so I asked what we were going to do with this Biafra detail. As absurd as it may sound, the war was one of the most beautiful parts of my life. It is horrible to be face to face with death all the time, with tragedies, with injuries. But, there was another side as well, that purity of emotions, which we shared with each other. Everything was clear, everything was simplified, and that made it human. Which was wonderful. When someone was scared, he said that he's scared, when he loved someone, he would show that. If we wanted to help each other, we would act as if we did. As much as we could under the circumstances.

Minka Muftic

Actress

Excerpt From: Sarajevo survivor testimonies from OPSADA (The Siege) by FAMA International



Orphan Gang

February 1993

This first winter of the siege is hard. Sarajevo winters are cold. Surviving without heat and food in these conditions is extremely difficult. The home has been hit several times by shells, but only one child has been wounded. There is no running water. They burned everything for heat, even an old piano. Food is usually a meal of rice, macaroni or beans, always cold by the time it is to be eaten. There are few funds to buy black market supplies to supplement their meager rations, so the children suffer hunger as a constant companion. The older ones travel in packs to scrounge for food. They do what is necessary to survive, including stealing.

For these children life is a Hobbesian existence, a world of brutality and deprivation. The Sarajevo orphanage houses about 75 children, 20 girls and 55 boys, according to director Amir Zelic. Before the war there were 150 children, some were evacuated to Italy once the war started. The babies went to Germany. When the convoy left for Germany, Serb snipers opened fire on their bus and killed two children.



Apartment Foyer

January 1996

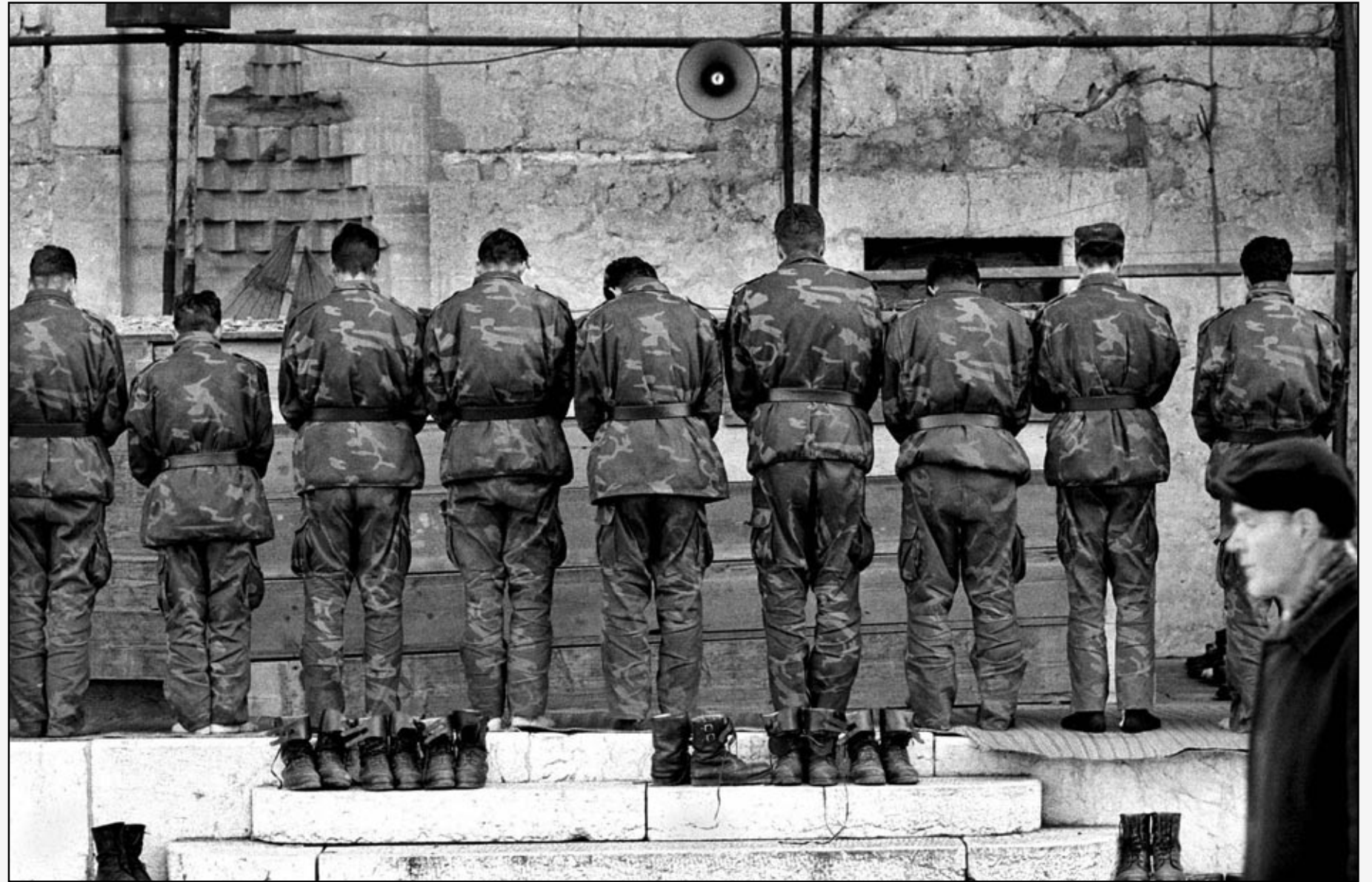
The entrance to this Sarajevo apartment building is like most in the city after almost four years of war. Dark and grimy, windows broken, rusty, unpainted doors with smashed locks. Walking down the stairs from your apartment to face the bleak world outside each day is a test of mental resilience. This foyer is for the apartment building of my wife's grandparents. In the early days of the war, in 1992, my wife-to-be stopped outside on the doorstep for a minute to speak to someone, then was called inside. Seconds after she entered the foyer a mortar shell exploded outside, spraying shards of hot metal in all directions, shattering the window and adding another 'Sarajevo rose' to the sidewalk pavement. If she had not walked inside that day you would not be reading these words.



Bosnian Soldiers Praying

January 1996

A group of Bosnian army soldiers offer prayers on a Friday afternoon at the Begova mosque in Sarajevo. While most of the Bosnian army's fighters were Muslim, many were also Serbs and Croats resisting the division of their country. With a population so ethnically intermixed, families were also split by the fighting, with relatives opposing each other across the front lines.





Gypsy Refugee Begging

January 1996

A gypsy girl refugee begs for money on a street corner in downtown Sarajevo. A large influx of refugees fleeing Bosnian Serb 'ethnic cleansing' of their rural towns and villages has changed Sarajevo's population, as many city residents left for exile in other countries. A few years after the war has ended many who left Sarajevo have started to return but find that the city has been indelibly changed.

Serb Children outside NATO camp

February 1996



I am photographing Italian Bersaglieri troops at their camp in Vogosca, a suburb of Sarajevo, now occupied mostly by Bosnian Serbs. The Muslims and Croats fled for their lives at the beginning of the war. Outside the wire surrounding the camp are children playing in the snow. As the soldiers parade by, uniquely peculiar in their peacock feather-topped hats, the children move closer to watch the strangers now living next to their apartment building. In a couple of weeks these children will flee with their parents when Vogosca reverts back to the control of the Bosnian government. Never mind that they were implored to stay, as no harm to them was guaranteed by the Bosnians. Radovan Karadzic and the Serb leadership told them to flee, as the heathens were coming to kill them. And so they fled into the unknown, mostly with nowhere to go, taking all they could carry, even their dead dug up from the cemeteries riding in coffins lashed to the roofs of cars. Such was the power of fear, and their grip on the peoples minds that the nationalist Serb leaders who helped lead the Serbs to disaster continued to inflict their damage even after the last shots were fired.



Former Frontline of battle

January 1996

The apartment towers across the Miljacka River still spook me. My mind knows that the snipers are gone, but my instinct is still to take cover or flee. Just next door is the Hotel Bristol, once a nice place but now shot to bits. A few meters away is the Brotherhood and Unity Bridge, across which uncountable bullets and shells were exchanged. So many bad things happened here, so many dead. I do not think that I will ever be able to come to this place without feeling my skin crawl. The years might pass but of this I am sure.

Anti-sniper Barrier

February 1996

Elderly women walk past destroyed cars stacked to block the vision of Serb snipers. Under cover of darkness these barriers would be moved to intersections where the Serb snipers nests afforded them a clear shot at pedestrians.



Bosnian National Library

February 1996

The destroyed interior of the Bosnian National Library where hundreds of thousands of priceless books and documents burned when Bosnian Serb gunners fired incendiary shells at the building in 1992, shown here during the final days of the division of the city, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, February 1996.

NATIONAL LIBRARY BURNS

I went out in the courtyard, which was partially paved in concrete, because there is a garage, and everything is kind of gray. Behind it is some greenery, and then on the concrete I saw big black pieces of burned paper. And then it was awful. I realized at one moment that the National Library was on fire? These papers were great big pieces of paper, and on these big burned pieces of paper you could make out some of the writing. There must have been really high temperatures. It was terrible. When I went into the house I told everyone. We all were very attached to the National Library building, because it was located on one of the main thoroughfares, and wherever you went in Sarajevo, you had to pass the National Library. By that beautiful wonderful building which was truly a symbol, a symbol of the city. I did feel sorry about that building, but I also thought we were finished. Yeah, because at that point we were afraid - we did feel sorry about our city - but we were more afraid for our lives. We were thinking, "this is it, this is the end, its coming closer, it'll be here soon."

Zlata Huseincehajic'

Boutique Owner Excerpt From: Sarajevo survivor testimonies from OPSADA (The Siege) by FAMA International





Books for Sale

February 1996

Sarajevans browse among books for sale spread out on a tarp laid over the snow during the final days of the division of the city. Sarajevo was considered the cultural center of the former Yugoslavia, producing many artists, writers and musicians. A cosmopolitan city of tolerance where people of different religions lived and intermarried, it was singled out for destruction by nationalist Serbs for this very reason.

Laundry day, Dobrinja

February 1996

Clothes hanging to dry on a line on an apartment balcony. Something that you normally pay no attention to. It only becomes significant when you stop to think that here in Dobrinja, the former Olympic Village of the 1984 Winter Olympics, stepping out on your balcony was like daring the neighborhood Serb sniper to shoot. But I learned in Sarajevo that human beings will find a way to survive, no matter how difficult life becomes. Even when all semblance of normalcy has disappeared a new normal will take its place. The thing about Sarajevo, that 'something' that captured my heart and that of so many who came to the city during those dark days, was how the city's residents survived without losing the essence of what made them 'Sarajlije'.





Bascarsija

January 1996

Sarajevo residents walk without fear of being shot by Serb snipers in the square of the old part of town called Bascarsija during the final days of the division of the city. As the guns went silent around Sarajevo most residents could not believe that the end of the war was truly at hand. Slowly the city began to come back to life, with a euphoria that became tempered by the realization of what had been lost and the question, what next?



Grbavica

February 1996

Civilians line up outside a Bosnian Serb militia post and wait anxiously for permission to cross the Bratstvo i Jedinstvo Most (Brotherhood and Unity bridge) and enter Bosnian Government-controlled Sarajevo. The tension and fear is strong, for most of them have not been to the other side since the war began almost four years before. They have no idea what they will see, or if the ones they left behind will accept them.

Crossing the Bridge

February 1996

A Bosnian Serb militia man watches as people leave the Bosnian Serb-held suburb of Grbavica and cross the Bratstvo i Jedinstvo Most (Brotherhood and Unity bridge) and enter Sarajevo.



Reunion

February 1996

Family members greet each other after four years of separation on the Serb-side of the Bratstvo i Jedinstvo Most (Brotherhood and Unity bridge).



Husband and Wife Reunite

February 1996

A husband and wife greet each other after four years of separation, on the Serb-side of the Bratstvo i Jedinstvo Most (Brotherhood and Unity bridge).



Prisoner-of-War Release

February 1996

Sarajevans react as a bus with newly-released Bosnian prisoners-of-war goes past, in the Dobrinja suburb of Sarajevo.

THE NATO AIR STRIKES

My greatest joy, and when I die it will still be my greatest joy. I'm sorry that NATO didn't come earlier but it was never too late. All of us honest Sarajevans were happy when at least they stopped shooting at Sarajevo.

Sacir Fazlic'

Citizen of Ilidza, a suburb of Sarajevo
Excerpt From: Sarajevo survivor testimonies from OPSADA (The Siege) by FAMA International





Soccer Field

February 1996

A Bosnian soldier walks through the Kosevo soccer field that was turned into a graveyard after the city's cemeteries filled up during the siege. The busiest professions in Sarajevo became the coffin maker and the grave digger. When I first went to Sarajevo in 1992 the fields were green, and even the nearby Lion cemetery had trees and grass. By the end of the war it seemed to me that the area of Kosevo hill had become a giant garden of death. The nearby Kosevo stadium, where the 1984 Winter Olympic opening and closing ceremonies took place, was like a mocking symbol of international solidarity that never came to save the people of Sarajevo. Only when the UN and NATO were about to crumble into irrelevance was anything done, and mainly just to save these organizations and their 'unity'.



Water Fountain

August 1999

Pedestrians stop to have a drink of ice-cold mountain water from a fountain outside the old Gazi Husref Begova mosque in Sarajevo's old town district of Bascarsija.



Chess game

August 1999

Unemployed men and old pensioners play a chess game with giant pieces in a downtown Sarajevo park.



Friends

September 1999

Alan Trtic, left, and his friend Sasha Prajzler play their guitars in a portrait amid the ruins of a section of the Sarajevo suburb of Dobrinja, which was virtually cut off from the rest of government-controlled Sarajevo during the Bosnian Serb siege of the city. Residents of Dobrinja suffered terribly in the siege, and people even resorted to burying their dead in their backyards and gardens as to transport casualties into the city was incredibly dangerous.

The Art of War

Out of the Rusting Detritus, a Macabre Beauty

Essay by Roger Richards

Originally published in *The Washington Post* on October 30, 1994

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SARAJEVO, Bosnia

Before me spreads a wall of rusting cargo containers, the kind stevedores wrestle onto merchant ships. They are the size of dumpsters, happily multi-colored, accordioned, pinged with rifle fire, stacked insouciantly atop each other near the riverbank and spread out side to side for a hundred yards or more, with small gaps between. You must take care to sprint across the gaps, and if you are old or lame you hop with a hitch in your step, like Grandpappy Amos, because the Serb snipers sighting down their noses from across the Miljacka River have splendid, twitchy reflexes.

There is a section of the wall that is a bullet-shredded tow truck. Both doors are wide open, as if the occupants exited in a hurry. The truck remains frozen forever in this moment of flight. Chained to its rear bed is the blue BMW sedan it was towing. This too has been shot to pieces. Windshield glass carpets the pavement, and at night, illuminated by street lamps or flames, they are a dancing river of rhinestones.

Here and all around is evidence of a malicious glee, a dark pleasure in the act of destruction.

A city under siege has an architecture all its own. It is an urban pentimento, a landscape of ruin through which peeks an old elegance. It was true of Carthage, of Khartoum, of Constantinople, of Sevastopol, and one imagines it was also true of Jericho. War is timeless, as are its sculptures.

The siege of Sarajevo has entered its 30th month, surpassing that of Leningrad as the longest sustained attack in this century. Over the past two years as I walked the streets of Sarajevo and its beleaguered suburbs, I encountered a new sort of urban art, an accidental landscape with macabre beauty.

These barriers are wrought from urban detritus—wrecked buses, trucks, cars and huge sheets of steel. One road was lined with six-foot-tall gym lockers and office file cabinets. The barriers go up one by one, overnight, in places exposed to sniper fire. They serve a purpose—shielding innocents from bullets. The engineers who built these things work furtively in the blackness, moving huge objects into the line of fire. They call themselves the Sarajevo Brigade. Their work has saved lives.

I came across the most impressive of all these in the suburb of Dobrinja. This area is right next to the airport, where most of the humanitarian aid to the city comes in. Of all of Sarajevo's residents, the people of Dobrinja may have suffered the most. For the first year of the siege, they were cut off from the rest of the city. The Serbs refused to allow regular aid to go in, so there was little food or medicine. The shells rained down, and the snipers shot anything that moved.

During the first winter of war people were forced to burn their furniture and carpets as there was no other fuel for heating. The dead were buried in front of their homes, in their gardens, and when the ground became too hard bodies had to wait for a thaw.

The barrier in Dobrinja is a huge pile of crushed automobiles and old buses more than 10 feet tall. Through a gap in the metal I see a pile of tires. As I stand to inspect it, I realize I am daring the snipers. Before I can take cover, two small boys emerge out of the twisted steel. They are playing some game involving running. They are as startled to see me as I am to see them.

Ramiz is 7. Senad is 9. They are standing on the snipers' ground zero.

The fact is, there is really nowhere safe in this city for them to play. To these children the war has made the wall of cars nothing more or less threatening than a playground.

The line of cargo containers and broken vehicles snakes part-way across the bridge that has become Sarajevo's Checkpoint Charlie, linking the city to the hills of Grbavica and Vraca. The sniper fire across it is fierce.

I walk out into the middle and look out across the muddy Miljacka. On either side of its banks are scalded ruins, buildings



Sniper Warning Sign 1992

A warning sign for pedestrians at an exposed intersection where a Serb sniper shoots during the Bosnian Serb siege of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, December 1992.

reduced to skeletal shells, every window blasted out, no sign of life. The scene is a cliché. You see this in history books, in those sobering aerial views of Dresden, of Nagasaki, places flattened by carpet bombing, or worse.

The astonishing thing here is that this was done mostly by small shells and rifle fire. A city obliterated chip by chip.

Like the sniper shields that rise gracelessly across this blighted place—ugly and beautiful but absolutely unignorable—there is irony too in this bridge and the horror it spans.

The bridge was named during the Tito era. Its name is a mockery.

I walk on toward the smoldering city, heart pounding, watching my back, on the Brotherhood and Unity Bridge. ●



Sarajevo 84 Olympics 1992

A sign welcoming 1984 Winter Olympic visitors to Sarajevo, a reminder of better days, stands outside the destroyed train station during the Bosnian Serb siege of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, December 1992.



Sarajevo. Remember.

An old man walks near the frontline in midtown Sarajevo in April 1993, one year after the siege of the city began. The road at right is the infamous 'Sniper Alley'



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Based in Miami and then Europe, his work with the agency included the US invasion of Panama, political upheaval in Haiti, civil war in Croatia and the siege of Sarajevo. He is a former Associated Press photo bureau chief in Bogota, Colombia, and a staff photographer at the Washington Times in Washington, DC, from 1997-2000.

He is the recipient of numerous awards from the National Press Photographers' Association, the White House News Photographers' Association, the Society of Professional Journalists and the Virginia News Photographers Association. He became a digital filmmaker in 1998, focusing on projects about war in the Balkans. He was awarded the first White House News Photographers' Association sabbatical grant for videojournalism in 2000 and was one of the first graduates of the famous Platypus Workshop that trains photojournalists how to become digital filmmakers and videojournalists. He is now a member of the workshop faculty.●

Book Credits

Publisher

Pedro Meyer

Edited by

Pedro Meyer
Benjamin Franco Serrano

Designed by

Benjamin Franco Serrano
Mariana Gruener

THIS BOOK WAS MADE BY ZONEZERO EDITIONS

JANUARY 2004

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