



Video Story Transcript

Hasan's Story: Escaping the Bosnian-Serbian War 1994

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Link to YouTube Video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iZt3TnE-EKo>

Note : The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

Hi, my name is Sue O'Halloran. I'm going to tell you a story that's an excerpt of a longer story. A story about the war that broke out in former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. This is a story of my neighbor, Hasan. Now I'm going to say it as if Hassan were speaking to you in the first person. I do not do a Bosnian accent, believe me, but I want to get a little flavor of Hassan's speech and most of all the spirit of my dear neighbor. So here's a little bit of Hasan's story.

I remember first day of siege. I was in college back then, 21 year old. It is March 4, 1992 and I wake up and I hear my father's voice out in the living room. "What is going on?" I have to tell you, my father is the type, never late for work, never miss a day of work. He never call in to say he's sick. I walk out to living room, sleepy and this is how my father greet me. "The whole city is blacked out. People are running around with machine gun. You can't go anywhere."

I sit down. I watch TV. We watch TV together. We watch our neighbors absolutely flipping out. Jus-just the night before, my friend, Christian, he was at our house. We are school friends, right. We are hanging out. And next morning he is in Serbian army whose job is to annihilate us Muslims. We listen to TV anchorperson say now our country, Bosnia, it is part of Greater Serbia and Greater Serbia must be cleansed of Muslims and Croats enemies. What, yesterday we are citizens, coworkers, neighbors, and today we are enemies? What has happened? What has changed? We still look the same. We have same skin, it is white. We have two eyes, we have mouth, we have legs, we have arms. What is different? What has changed?

Well, the shelling, it continued all day long. By us is a hospital for babies and one moment it is a hospital of dead babies. Who could do that? The children, of course, they don't understand; to them, ah, it is day of

school off, right? By us, across the street from our apartment, is a hill. The children are sledding on the hill and we hear screams. And we run to the window and there on our street is...is seven dead children in our street. The shelling, the sniper bullets could come out of nowhere. You're standing line. Now there are lines for everything! Line to buy water, line to get some food, line to get some wood. And all of sudden shelling or, or, or bullets come out of nowhere and suddenly the 20 people in front of you are dead. You are next in line but you, you are standing there spared, somehow. You understand, we cannot make sense of this.

It took us a while to understand what was going on. We thought it couldn't happen to us. Finally, I join army of Bosnia. For three long winters, army of Bosnia, we, we hold our city, Sarajevo. Is mystery to me, how we hold that city. We are exhausted. We are, we are no food. We are, we are, we are hungry. We are, we are just tired.

In other unit, a story circulate. We hear a story of an unbelievable suicide. This other unit, they're holding strategic mountain by Sarajevo. They, like us, no food, no water for days. They're trudging up snowy mountain, getting up high in mountain. They're covering, they're carrying the little packs of things they have left. When a pack horse walks to the edge of the cliff and jumps. The soldiers stood there stunned. And finally, one of them say, "Even the horses can't take it anymore."

This is how I feel. This is what I try to tell my parents one Sunday night. I am 24 years old and I tell them my grand scheme. I am leaving. They have one comment for me. "You are out of your mind! How will you get out of here?" they say. "The whole region is at war and our own people could shoot you for deserting the army!" "I don't care," I say. "I do not care. I have got to get rid of these pictures that are in my mind. These pictures that are driving me crazy. I have to leave!"

Long story, my friend, Dino, who is also in army, he leaves with me. We sneak out of tunnel. We get out of city, which is blocked. No way in, no way out. We find way out through tunnel and when we emerge from that tunnel, there before us like big, dark, black wall in the night is Mount Trebević, where just six years before Olympic athletes are skiing, the 1984 Sarajevo Olympics. Oh, so much joy on Mount Trebević! So much, much pride we have! The whole world is watching us host the Olympics and now Mount Trebević is surrounded by death.

Later, long in story, I tell you many more adventures. Almost caught, almost turned in, lying, hiding, cheating, whatever we can do to escape. And finally, we are crossing border. Finally, months later, out of Bosnia into Croatia. We are trying to get to town of Split on the sea side. Maybe we can get out of area from there. We are going there at nightfall. And as we approached the city at nightfall, we see...lights...lights. We are without lights for over three years. We are without electricity. So, so, so long. How I tell you? Speechless. Is like night stars fallen to the ground. Light exist. Light exist. I keep saying to myself, light exist. You see, it is like we are living in a cage in Sarajevo and you cannot believe. All existence has stopped outside that cage. You cannot think to yourself that out there somebody is going to eat normally in a restaurant or slept in beds or are going to the office or having a picnic in the park. But if light exists, see to me, that means if light exists that means life exists.

But the magic it start to fade, a bit. We get into Split and there are written on the buildings as graffiti, "Kill Muslims. Death to Muslims." We are not at war anymore with Croatia but it's still not a very safe place for us to be. But good luck. We find out that Dino, my friend, his cousin lived in Split.

We are able, long story again, to find our way to his apartment. We get there. It is covered with people. Wall to wall refugees, men, women, children. I do not care. I find a little piece of floor; I fall on it. I am going to sleep for days if I can. When this woman come next to me asked me where we been. I do not want to tell her

whole story, months of escape, right? So I mumble a few words and then she asked me where we think we're going. I don't know where we're going. Every step of the way, I didn't know what comes next. I didn't know where we were going but I say to her, "We go to United States." Just to get rid of her, you know, so I could go to sleep. She said, "Oh, well that's what I manage." And I'm half asleep, now I'm thinking, what this woman manager store or something why is she telling me this? Why won't she leave me alone? I want to sleep. And then she say, "I manage the office that sends Bosnian refugees to the United States."

I am awake now. This is first person I meet in Split? The person who can get me legally to the United States? And that's how it worked. A Jewish organization sponsor me and Dino to come to America. You know, Jews and Muslims, we have had long history together. Like in 1400's both of us pushed out of Spain. Well, during this war when the Serbian army set fire to libraries and other buildings, it is Muslims who run into the synagogue to save the sacred and priceless Jewish text. And now it is a Jewish organization sending me and Dino to America.

When I look back on it all now, over three years fighting a war, over three months escaping, I can't say that good did not come out of it. I am here. My family is safe. We are in America and we are safe. And strangely enough, it is the haters who made me realize who I am. In Bosnia, I, I don't know much about my village. I'm not that interested. But as the war and coming to the U.S. I start to get curious about my background. Why people hate me? Who are we anyway? And in U.S. I study Islam. And I find a mosque where I can study with other people, which is a good thing because Islam, I tell you, it is a religion of much discipline. It helps to help other people teaching, you practice with. And our mosque, our mosque join with Christian church and Jewish synagogue and we meet every week, six years now, to understand each other. We are becoming friends. And I can tell you it is better to live your life in community.

I...I am one of the lucky ones.