

Case Study - Nusreta Sivic

Before the war, I had a rather good life working as a judge. I had everything to hope for. I had a normal, happy life. However, when the local government was overthrown by the Serbian Democratic Party “SDS”, I lost my job. I thought that this was the worst thing that could ever happen to me. Later, I realised that was only an introduction to the worst thing that could happen to a human being.



I was told to come to the police station for questioning but I was taken by Serb forces to Omarska concentration camp. The camp was almost all male, but there were 37 women. I saw and experienced horrific things: tortures, murders, rapes. Things that one cannot even imagine human beings are capable of doing. I was regularly raped and beaten. I was the only remaining judge, all the other male Muslim and Croat judges had been killed.

The moment I arrived in free territory in Croatia, and was able to speak, I started immediately to talk about the horrific crimes in my city. I worked with Jadranka Cigelj, another female survivor of Omarska, to collect as many testimonies as we could, and in 1995 we were invited to help prepare the first indictments for the ICTY.

I have testified many times against the perpetrators and architects of these crimes. My great satisfaction was the impact I had on other women—also war rape victims— who heard my story and decided to tell their stories as well.

I returned to Prijedor some 15 years ago. It was difficult to come back. One day, I was walking down the street, and saw one of the guards that I testified against. He had been released, having served two-thirds of his sentence. We stared at each other. He was the first one to lower his head.

My motivation to speak up is all those who are no longer alive. There are many brave people who are trying to speak out that are not getting the spotlight. Some are trying to silence them, others to manipulate their suffering for political ends. Those that have the courage to speak out need to be supported and given space to talk. Only then can we build a better future.

Case Study - Predrag Pašić



My life started with football. I was born in the maternity hospital next to the Kosovo stadium. I started playing football as a child and it eventually became my professional life. I have had beautiful moments and I am happy that I was raised through sport.

When war broke out in Bosnia, and Sarajevo was surrounded, I was offered the chance to leave with NATO forces. But I couldn't leave. Sarajevo is the city I was born in. I was an idol to many generations while playing for F.K.Sarajevo. Therefore I considered it my duty to remain in the city that created and shaped me.

As everyone know me through football I realised it was through football I would be able to make a significant impact. The decision to open a football school came from the realisation that the children of Sarajevo were endangered most by the war. They had no life, activities, playing time, nothing.

We expected 6 or 7 kids as it was wartime but at our first training session some 300 boys showed up. That left us speechless. Those children gave us the power to survive. Everyday of the war children came to train. We could hear the sound of the war outside, the shelling, the shoots of the snipers. Some of the children's parents were on opposing armies but everyone played together peacefully. The children did not understand hate, they saw everyone was the same. Kids that wouldn't even get the chance to meet were playing wearing the same shirt and on the same team.

After the war, I was approached to take part in Football Rebels , a documentary with Eric Cantona about footballers doing something positive with their own people.

We do not see enough courage today in Bosnia. Unfortunately, the struggle we went through in the war has turned us into observers today, observers of human rights violations, of segregation, of pillage. We have developed this new custom of war – to be satisfied that we have food and water. We don't seem to have the motivation to be brave again. We own it to the victims to have courage and to change the legacy of war.

Case Study - Lejla Damon

I was born in Sarajevo on Christmas day in 1992. My birth mother was a Bosnian Muslim, who had been held at a concentration camp and raped. My parents were in Bosnia reporting on the war when they came across my story. They arrived at the hospital to interview my birth mother.



She told them that she didn't want to hold me because if she did, she might strangle me. Like many other children born of rape, I would have ended up at an orphanage had my parents not decided to adopt me. So I became one of two children smuggled out of Bosnia during the war.

I was told at seven years old that I was adopted. I had started asking questions about when and where I was born. I didn't learn the horrific circumstances surrounding my birth until I was 18. They told me that my birth mother had been imprisoned and sexually assaulted, and they explained the consequent trauma she had suffered from, which made her incapable of looking after me.

I know instinctively that my survival was not guaranteed; born in a hospital under siege is not a particularly secure start to life. So I remain driven to make the most out of everything. I went to teach in Ghana for three months last year, which was a wonderful experience. In my second year of university, I applied to be part of the Youth Engagement Panel for War Child. The panel is made up of people born in conflict-related situations.

This experience has been incredibly rewarding and equally helpful as I now know there are many people who have a similar story to mine, but a far less positive outcome. I'm a great supporter of NGOs and charities that work hard to better peoples' circumstances, so perhaps I might look into developing a career there. For now, I intend to carry on working with War Child, educating and being educated. I strongly believe education is the most important thing you can be given in life.

Case Study - Dr Ilijaz Pilav



Everything you read about Srebrenica before the genocide is true. It was a place full of life, and people came here to experience modernity. It was one of the most developed municipalities in the whole of the former Yugoslavia.

Bright and hardworking, Ilijaz, graduated top of his class in surgery, and his professor offered him a job. It would mean specializing in the field, but Ilijaz ached to return to the easy life of his home in Srebrenica after many years away, and recalls saying: “Professor, I don’t want to stay here. And where I’m heading I will never need surgery.” Little did he know how wrong that prediction would turn out to be. With only two years of general practice under his belt, he found himself aged 28, one of only five doctors at the beginning of a war, caring for more than 50,000 inhabitants.

War surgery is the most difficult form of surgery and it was even worse under those abnormal conditions. We had no instruments, no anaesthetic, no antibiotics, no painkillers or sterilisers. We had nothing other than the utter need to help people. Try to imagine an ordinary table upon which a patient is lying. You’re speaking to him, trying to calm him and persuade him to go through such pain while their arm or leg is being amputated that you are certain you yourself could never bear. And you’re using a saw for cutting wood to do it. There are no appropriate words to describe the suffering the patient felt, or your own suffering for them at that moment. There were so many injured we stopped taking records and I was constantly in surgery. I slept at most two or three hours a night. The centre of town was being shelled every hour and there was conflict on the outskirts.

The memories of that time are traumatic to Ilijaz who is still a doctor. For all of the survivors who recount their experiences it is an exercise in reliving some of the worst moments of their life. We are not entitled to silence. We have to be witnesses. If my mission during the war was to be a doctor, then it is my mission to be a witness after this crime. By telling our stories we are maybe fulfilling some part of the obligation towards those that did not survive to tell theirs. And by telling our story, we are imposing the need on someone in the future to prevent something similar happening again. After all, what has not been written down is as if it never happened.