

My Story

By Dzenana Mehmedovic, Sarajevo



Nobody wants to leave his or her home country because of war. That is exactly what happened to me in 1992. I had just turned seventeen when the war started in my country. The tragic about that was that we did not understand the terrible danger. Luckily some people reacted quickly and transferred us to a safe place. The way to Germany led us through Croatia. The time we had to spend in Croatia was not very nice. I wanted to go back to Bosnia because the thought of not being welcome or wanted was unbearable for me. I admire my mother for acting properly under those rough circumstances and for managing to get my three sisters and me to Germany. My father could not leave the country then.

Our first stop in Germany was an old military barrack in Osnabrück. We shared a room with 20 other Bosnians aged between ten and 60 years. It was not very funny but not for long either. The next five and a half years we spent in a home

for asylum seekers in a village called Asendorf. The fact that my family and I had a room for ourselves and some privacy made me happy. We were supposed to attend school again. The younger kids did not have a problem with that. However, for us, the 17-year-old teenagers, it was not so easy. We spent a lot of time in that home without anything to do really, so there was a lot of time to think which was not always so good. We were so young with so many plans and dreams and now just stuck with our memories, wondering how much longer this nightmare would last. At that point in time people I knew and who were close to me were killed in the war. I could not cope with that, especially because it didn't stop. I imagined that these people had not died but gone to a much nicer and safer place where they could relax and be happy. It was not easy either to accept the fact that someone had stolen my youth. When I could not fall asleep at night, I tried to imagine that I was back home in my bed. I tried to imagine the familiar noises from outside my old house. I felt as if I was back home again and, for a few seconds, forgot the burden and despair.



The Sarajevo Rose, concrete scars caused by mortar shells' explosions.

A few months had passed until we finally could attend a German school, the Berufsbildenden Schulen Syke (BBS). Although all was strange and new, I was happy and felt a bit more valuable. The feeling of learning and thereby being part of something normal again was good for me. Yet, this was not so easy either! Although I had learnt German at my old school, it was not enough to really follow the lessons in German. Sometimes it was nearly unbearable when



we had eight hours of school. I wished I could go „home“ after the fourth hour even though the atmosphere there was the same unbearable for me. Many Bosnian families lived there with us and every family had someone left behind

in Bosnia. Not a single day passed by without a family receiving the message that someone close to them had died in the war.

I felt school was my escape from life in that home and the home the escape from school. So, it was not easy but this school was the only chance we had and we were ready to do everything possible to take it. We could have never managed by ourselves if Germans had not helped us. Everything I achieved in Germany I owe to many good people, first of all, Brigitte Greve-Sievers. Also to Almut Ernst, our tutor Karl Lücke, our Spanish teacher Gisela Paterkiewicz who taught us in her way to love the Spanish language and many other teachers were a great help. Also our classmates helped us a lot. I was afraid to make a fool of myself in front of them, be it because of the language or not knowing how to react and behave in certain situations. Fortunately, the other students were very mature in that aspect. It is impossible to summarize in short how important this sort of support is for someone who comes out of a war and who has nothing. I would like to thank everyone who helped and would like to point out how happy one can be to have the support by such people who are willing to help! And one should never forget this.

Class Trip to Barcelona 1996 (right: Dzenana)

I can say I am proud of what I have achieved in Germany. It was the springboard for what came later in my life. After almost six years in Germany I had to return to Bosnia. Things did not look so good! I could not return to my old house because it was burnt and destroyed... Just like the rest of the whole country. Leaving as a teenager and returning as an adult was everything else than nice or easy. I didn't feel like a true Bosnian nor like a German. I did not know where I belonged to. For 20 years now I have lived in Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia Herzegovina. I have achieved a lot here, too! I currently work as a teacher for the Goethe-Institute but there is one thing which has not changed until today and that is the feeling of not really belonging anywhere. And I am not alone here with this feeling.

Ann.: Dzenana and two other Bosnian girls were in the first class of the newly found Vocational Highschool of BBS Syke Europaschule. All of them were excellent students. They passed their final exam („Abitur“) in 1997 as best of the year. One girl moved to Australia where she lives very happily now, the other girl went to Sweden where she sadly committed suicide later.

Gisela Paterkiewicz, teacher