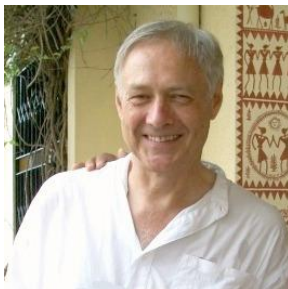


On the Record: Return to Srebrenica

Issue 17. The blogs of Iain Guest, July 2008



The author of these blogs, Iain Guest (left) first visited the BOSFAM weavers in 1993, during the war in Bosnia. After AP was established in 1998, BOSFAM became an early partner. The first of several AP interns (Peace Fellows) volunteered at BOSFAM in 2003. Iain visited eastern Bosnia in 2008 to profile BOSFAM members who had returned to Srebrenica and to advise BOSFAM on the making of memorial quilts (above). BOSFAM modeled the first Srebrenica Memorial Quilt in 2007 on the AIDS quilt. Contact Iain: iain@advocacynet.org

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#1. Return to Srebrenica

Sarajevo, Thursday July 24, 2008: Today, I embarked on a visit to Srebrenica in Eastern Bosnia, scene of the 1995 massacre. The trip is being undertaken at the invitation of Beba Hadzic, director of the Bosnian women's organization Bosfam which is headquartered in the Bosnian town of Tuzla. Many of Bosfam's members lost relatives in the massacre. The Advocacy Project (AP) is helping them to develop and promote a memorial quilt that they are making to those who died.

AP exhibited the first twenty panels of the quilt in St Louis, which has the largest number of Srebrenicans outside Bosnia. Since then the weavers have produced 65 panels and attracted over 100 sponsors for the quilt, mostly in the Bosnian diaspora.

The Bosfam weavers are keen to expand this project and have asked me to visit and strategize with them. The timing is certainly fortuitous. Last week, the Serbian government announced that Radovan Karadzic, the wartime head of the Bosnian Serbs, had been detained after 13 years in hiding in Belgrade. Karadzic has been indicted by the Hague Tribunal for masterminding the Srebrenica massacre. His arrest was electrifying.

I remember Karadzic well from my own time as a journalist. He used to come through Geneva regularly to attend UN peace talks and loved to preen before a world audience. Lord David Owen, who headed the EU team in the negotiations, has written of his distaste for the man, but Karadzic ran rings around Owen and the UN during the war. Those who came nearest to calling his bluff were American feminists who slapped a law suit on him when he attended talks in New York. That discouraged Karadzic from visiting the United States, but the world was unable to halt his evil vision for Bosnia, and one result was the Srebrenica massacre.

Karadzic then compounded the crime by slipping underground for 13 years. A good part of the world's fascination with Srebrenica has to do with the fact that he and Ratko Mladic, the Serb general, managed to escape punishment for 13 years. Srebrenica is a symbol of impunity as well as brutality.

I arrive this evening at Sarajevo airport, to be met by Shweta Dewan, an AP Peace Fellow from Zambia who is working with Bosfam this summer. Shweta has driven up from Tuzla, where Bosfam's office is located, with Nadim a young Bosnian who lost a relative at Srebrenica and is employed by Bosfam as a driver. We drive out past Ilidza, a suburb of Sarajevo that still bears pock-marks from the war, and onto the rain-slicked road to Tuzla. It feels good to be back in Bosnia.

#2. Memory is Everything

Tuzla, Friday July 24: Tuzla is built on salt, and so much salt has been extracted that part of the city is subsiding. The old town hall has already been abandoned. In 1995, towards the end of the

war the Serbs lobbed a shell into the city center which killed over 70 Muslims (now called Bosniaks) – the worst single incident of the war.

But the city center has long since been transformed, and on a summer's night everyone under the age of 30 seems to turn out to drink coffee and watch each other. How they can afford it with unemployment at 40% beats me. But it is charming.

The Bosfam house lies near the city center within a stone's throw of the International Center for Missing Persons (ICMP) the organization that has been using DNA to identify Srebrenica massacre victims. Just over 3,000 have been identified so far and reburied. Thousands of body bags containing body parts remain stored in former salt mines, dug into the side of hills. With each passing year, it becomes harder to make a match, but they did manage to identify another 307 bodies this summer. All were buried on July 11 at Poticari, scene of the massacre. One Bosfam weaver buried two of her brothers.

From past visits I remember Bosfam house as a place of great tranquility, particularly in the late afternoon when the sun streams in and the women ply their looms, deep in thought. Bosfam can



call on about 15 veteran weavers, all of them highly skilled. Nura Suljic who lost a husband in 1993 and three close relatives in July 1995, is a ferocious worker usually the last to leave. The work is deeply therapeutic.

Left: BOSFAM House in the town of Tuzla

The house is huge and has been given outright to Bosfam by donors.

This means they do not have to pay rent, which is a huge advantage. The downside is that heating bills can top \$1,000 a month in the winter. Having their own comfortable center has also reduced the incentive to return to Srebrenica. A small number of former Bosfam members have returned so far.

About seven or eight weavers are currently making panels for the memorial quilt in Tuzla, and Beba Hadzic would like to involve women from Srebrenica itself in the enterprise. She reckons this will keep them connected with Bosfam and also provide them with a skill and – hopefully – an income. Of course it will also mean more panels for the quilt and a widening audience for Bosfam's message internationally.

But Beba knows this will not be easy. Back in 2004, she conducted a year of training for 12 women in her own apartment in Srebrenica, with a grant from the Dutch Refugee Foundation. Two of the women were Serb and the trainings were coordinated by Miljica, a Serb friend of Beba's. But the center could not be sustained when the grant expired.

There is money available for Srebrenica – the UNDP spent \$24 million in the town last year – and Bosfam might be able to get some of it, particularly if they work with local NGOs. But would Beba and her friends want to make such an investment, after what they have gone through?

Srebrenica has not been kind to Beba and her relationship with the town is deeply complicated. She was expelled at the start of the war in 1992 without just the clothes on her back, and has desperately trying to salvage mementoes that remind her of happier days.

Photographs are particularly valued, and she has been contacting friends and relatives for photos of her former life. She brings out one, which was taken at a party. It shows her at a restaurant with two former teachers that she knew well when she was director of the Srebrenica primary school.

Mevludin Smajic, who is laughing, had two small daughters and had just been hired to teach at Beba's school when the photo was taken. The second, Redzep Bektic, who directed one of the smaller village schools, was taller and looks more restrained. Beba is the most serious of the three.



*Fellow teachers:
Mevludin (left) and
Redzep Bektic, with
Beba Hadzic. The
two men were
murdered at
Srebrenica.*

Both of the men were murdered at Srebrenica. The image is certainly powerful, as is the

fact that so few photos exist from before the war. Memory is everything.

#3. Return to the Crucible

Sunday July 26: We set off from Tuzla to Srebrenica early in the morning with Shweta and myself squeezed into the backseat of Beba's small car together with Antigona Kukaj, another wonderful AP Peace Fellow who is volunteering this summer in Tuzla with the Bosnian office of

the Landmine Survivors Network. Beba's husband is at the wheel. Rain is falling and the sky ahead looks dark and menacing.

We are returning along the route that Beba and her husband took back in May 1992, after they were cleansed from Srebrenica.

Three years later in 1995, as the town was falling, a long column of Muslims tried to escape through the hills and was cut to pieces by the Bosnian Serbs. In 2005, Sabri Ben-Achour, an AP Peace Fellow retraced the route of the doomed column with Zulfo Salihovic, his host, who had been at the head of the column in 1995 and survived.

This entire area to the east of the Inter-Entity Boundary Line (IEBL – the boundary that separates the Bosnian Serb Republic from the rest of the country) had been cleansed of Muslims by 1995 and remained stubbornly resistant to their return for years after the war.

This is now beginning to change. We pass through the small town of Konjevic Polje, which is now entirely Muslim (Bosniak) apart from a scattering of Serb graves and a large Orthodox church that was built in the front garden of a Muslim family. The owner, Fatah Orlovic, has been trying to get it removed for six years, so far without success. The fact that she is trying is a sign of the times.

These skirmishes create frustration and also elation. We pass through Kravica, a small village that has a grim reputation on both sides. Serbs were killed here in 1994 after the Muslim soldiers in Srebrenica began to push out from the besieged enclave under their able general, Nasr Oric. The following year, over a thousand Muslims were rounded up in the surrounding hills as they tried to escape Srebrenica, and brought here to an abandoned farming cooperative where they were bludgeoned to death.

Oric was acquitted by the Hague tribunal of having ordered the massacre, but seven Serbs are currently on trial before the special court in Sarajevo on a charge of genocide. A verdict is expected any day now. Muslims have been prevented placing flowers at Kravica, on the orders of Milorad Dodik, the powerful Prime Minister of the Republika Srpska.

Relatives have also been rebuffed in their attempts to commemorate another brutal event at Bratunac, a small town that lies at the end of the road out of Srebrenica. Historically, Bratunac has played the dowdy cousin to the more glamorous Srebrenica, but it played a key role in Srebrenica's destruction at the start of the war and during the massacre. After the first Muslims (including Beba) were expelled in April 1992, scores of Muslims from Srebrenica were murdered in a school gym in Bratunac. Their relatives have tried to commemorate and lay flowers, but were prevented by the local authorities.

Many western diplomats blame Dodik for reinforcing the division of Bosnia, and resisting reconciliation. But each of his rebuffs to the relatives also feeds their sense of outrage and keeps Srebrenica in the news. Following Karadzic's arrest, Dodik offered to help Karadzic's family and asked the international community to allow Karadzic's wife to travel to The Hague (always assuming he is extradited). If only he had shown similar remorse towards his victims.

#4. Potocari

The story of the Srebrenica massacre has been told many times, including on the website of the Advocacy Project. Beba Hadzic was among those Muslims expelled in the first days of the war, in April 1992. The Muslims who remained in Srebrenica then regrouped and pushed the Serbs back. For the next three years the town became the main refuge for Muslims who were cleansed in Eastern Bosnia.

The pocket collapsed in July 1995. Some 7,000 tried to escape across the mountains to Tuzla, but were cut to shreds in the woods among horrific scenes. The remaining, numbering over 30,000, were ordered down the road to Potocari at the foot of the hill, to the old battery factory which served as the base of the UN Dutch Battalion.



Scene of Infamy: the battery factory at Potocari has been turned into a museum

Men and boys over 15 were separated from the women and killed all the way down the road to Bratunac and beyond. The rest were bussed to Tuzla. General Ratko Mladic supervised the early operation, sweating and puffy-faced.

I first visited Srebrenica in 1997 after serving as an OSCE election observer in Vlasenica, and again in 2000 elections. My polling station was a former milk factory which lay on what had been the front lines at Potocari. We used to look out over the Battery Factory through a shell blast in the back wall.

At this stage – five years after the end of the war – there were no Muslims in the town. I remember watching Serbs from the town, many of whom had certainly been involved in the killing, meticulously counting ballots (all of which had been cast by Serbs). This coincided with the Florida show-down between Bush and Gore, and the Serbs shook their heads as they listen to the tales of hanging chads on the radio. “America does not get democracy” observed one.

Back then, there was also no memorial at Potocari. As Peter Lippman wrote in his early diaries for the Advocacy Project, the first stone plaque was broken up by Serbs, and it was not until April 2003 that the first reburials took place.

Today the place is the scene of a large elegant memorial center, and massive cemetery. Every year on the anniversary of the massacre, relatives and sympathizers gather here to reburial the remains of those identified during the previous year. The crowds have grown steadily since 2003, and the Potocari site is fast assuming the sort of global recognition afforded to other notorious memorials, like the former Khmer Rouge prison, Tuol Sileng; Auschwitz; the Rwandan church of Ntarama, where the bones of genocide victims still cover the pews and altar; or the Navy Mechanics School in Buenos Aires, where 5,000 disappeared Argentinians were tortured and killed in the 1970s.

At Potocari, newly-buried graves are marked by a green wooden headpiece, a number and name. The name is removed after a year, and after two years the headpiece is replaced by a slender marble gravestone. The symmetry of the cemetery is broken where spaces have been left for relatives that have yet to be identified. Beba's brother in law was reburied here last year. Two empty plots are reserved for his brother and son.

I find it interesting that Srebrenica has grown in importance as a symbol, as evidenced by the number who attended this year's commemoration. This is partly explained by guilt that the world let the massacre take place at all; partly by the awful nature of the massacre, which seemed almost inconceivable in this day and age and partly by the fact that the two main authors – Mladic and Karadzic – have remained at large for so long. The fascination of Srebrenica is explained by impunity as much as the act itself.

This will continue as long as Mladic remains at large, and Karadzic's trial will also keep the spotlight on Srebrenica. Eventually, however, the intensity of the fascination will fade, as it has with the other outrages mentioned above.

Not, however, for the relatives. As long as victims remain unidentified, their relatives will continue to grieve. As we stroll among the graves, Beba reminds me that until a victim has been identified he is "missing" and his relatives remain in an emotional limbo.

People in this fragile state can break down at any time, and it is not uncommon for weavers at Bosfam to start weeping uncontrollably. With over 5,000 Srebrenica victims still to be identified, this tragedy has many years to run.

#5. Magbula

We stop off at the home of Magbula Divovic, one of the Bosfam weavers who returned home from Tuzla three years ago. Magbula lives just up the road from the Potocari memorial – the place where she was separated from her husband and youngest son in 1995. She remembers how Mladic, the Serb General, reassured the crowd that the men would be returned.



Magbula Divovic (left) with Shweta Dewan (2008 BOSFAM Peace Fellow), Beba Hadzic from BOSFAM and Antigona Kukaj (Peace Fellow with Survivor Corps)

Magbula's husband was found and re-buried at Potocari. Her son is still missing. He was fifteen in 1995. A few months younger

and he might be alive.

Magbula is well known to the Advocacy Project. I have one of her large carpets at home, and she visited the US in July 2005 with Beba on a speaking tour at our invitation. There were some wonderful moments. I remember her face when we drove past an exotic character in Hartford who was roller-skating in the opposite direction, naked from the waist up, carrying a huge boom box and a poster which read "Guns suck!" Magbula's jaw dropped. She would sit in the back and smile "Ideas! Ideas!" as Beba and I chattered on in the front. It became a standing joke.

But for much of the time Magbula would sit for long periods with her head in her hands, gazing out of the window. We woke up one morning at our house in Washington to find her frantically sweeping the back yard. "I have to work," she told us. "It takes my mind off things." Weaving serves the same purpose. She was one of the Bosfam regulars before she returned, and has two looms in her small house.

This has not been a good few months for Magbula. She returned to look after her aged parents. Her house was renovated by aid agencies, and she devoted herself to raising a couple of sheep and tending to her garden. But both of her parents died recently, and she had to hand her sheep over to be slaughtered because of an outbreak of brucellosis.

After Karadzic was arrested last week, carloads of young Serbs raced up and down the road, past where Magbula's husband lies in the Potocari cemetery, blowing their horns and shouting Karadzic's name. Magbula was thoroughly unnerved and she vents her anger on us with a minor tirade against the Serbs. Beba has trouble keeping up with the translation.

Magbula has cooked a massive meal for us of boiled chicken, chicken soup, bread, vegetables, pastries, and coffee. She craves company, and Beba makes a point of visiting whenever she can. But Magbula is deeply lonely, and tears come to her eyes as she describes the nights as a torment. Shweta and Antigona are deeply moved and hug her tightly. The Bosfam widows have this effect on visitors.

As we leave, promising to return, I ask if Magbula has photos from the past. The answer is no. Like Beba she left without anything, and has been writing to relatives for photos. He has one prized photo of her son and grandson, who are now in Tuzla. We leave her to her flowers and isolation. What Magbula needs most is company, preferably of other women.

#6. Srebrenica

Srebrenica must have been stunning before the war, with its Alpine setting. But for most of the past 13 years it has boasted some of the most picturesque war damage in Bosnia. The massive wrecked supermarket in the center of the town, where the single road divides, must have been captured by countless foreign cameras including mine.



*Alpine scenery:
Srebrenica as it would
have been seen by the
Serb besiegers*

The wreck is no longer. In its place, there is a spanking new Povloni supermarket. The cinema, too, replaced. This morning, the town sparkles in sunshine. The Malaysian mosque is gleaming, and the cinema being restored. People are out at cafes. New buildings, like the

green stucco headquarters of Care International, strut their stuff.

Behind this veneer, eye sores no doubt remain. The Domavia Hotel seems little changed from when I first stayed here in 1997. It was used by soldiers during the war, most of whom probably died – and some carved initials in the cupboard door. The same stuffed wolf still sits outside the door of the mayor in the municipality. Those who survived the siege will have plenty of their own memories.

But by and large the physical change is dramatic and testament to the huge sums spent since 2003. Srebrenica has definitely changed.

Beba Hadzic acknowledges the changes. She meets and greets several old friends in the street, and they embrace without embarrassment. Include one of her relatives, a Pasagic, is from the upper end of the town where she was born.

But Beba herself is not ready to make peace with the past. She takes us up to visit her old family home. The elegant house is set back from the road, with full pear trees and vines spilling over a veranda. Before the war, occupied by her parents, and the families of her brother and sister.

Beba's and her own family lived in the lower end of the town, in a spacious apartment where we stayed last night. As director of the primary school, she enjoyed considerable social standing in the town, and owned a house by the lake. Life was good. She had many Serb friends. She was particularly close to Milenko Zivanovic who called her mother "Mum" before he went off to become an officer in the Yugoslav army.

When fighting began in the town in April 1992, Beba gathered her parents in the apartment. Serbian soldiers arrived and ordered them out before paramilitaries arrived – a favorite tactic to panic civilians. They were bussed to Bratunac, where they stayed briefly with friends.

Beba's husband would have been taken to the school gym in Bratunac and bludgeoned to death had it not been for the intervention of a Serb friend, who was subsequently drafted and killed in the war. Beba is still shaken by how close her husband came to death.

Bratunac was cleansed shortly afterwards. Beba's friends in Bratunac hiked back up the hills to Srebrenica and stayed in Beba's flat. At one stage, 12 families lived there during the siege.

After the town fell, thousands of Serb families moved into the empty buildings. The family home was occupied by Serb refugees from the town of Dornji Vakouf. The apartment was taken over by Milos Mukosavlavic, a Serb who had worked with Beba's husband in the mines and knew Beba's family well.

Beba's husband came back in 2001 to work in the municipality – an act of great courage. One of his first actions was to demand the apartment back, as allowed by the Dayton Agreement. Mukosavlavic objected, but eventually moved out in a bad humor when Beba and her husband insisted. He caused considerable damage and even stole the faucets.

Up at the other end of town, Beba herself tried to revisit to the family home but was told to leave by the Serb occupants who told her to be thankful she was still alive and not be greedy. She tried to pick her own pears, but was ordered out.

One can imagine the hurt and humiliation felt by this proud woman. She devised small acts of resistance. On one occasion, she found that a Serb neighbor had taken painted wood panels from her apartment that she herself had painted. They held sentimental value. She went out and bought new, larger panels, and made sure that the Serb woman came over to see them back on the wall, just to reassert her sense of ownership. Normal behavior in an abnormal environment is an act of survival.

#7. The Empty Town

Monday July 28: Standing in the debris of what used to be her family house, Beba Hadzic confronts the central fact of Srebrenica today: the place is virtually empty. Srebrenica the symbol may be growing, but Srebrenica the community is shrinking.

Several cars are parked on the street, but their license plates are from Holland, Sarajevo, Sweden. The Muslims who inhabited this part of the town were all middle class, educated and cultured. They are either dead or have built new lives as refugees. They may return for a weekend here and a few days there, but almost no-one plans to return permanently.



Srebrenica clean-up - but no people

“Why would we want to come back?” asks Beba as she picks through the plaster and rotten window frames. The only reason is a connection with the past – and in Srebrenica that is bittersweet. Beba’s neighbor is busy rebuilding his house, but he is a businessman and can afford it. He has no

intention of returning. In the entire street, we count less than twenty people living permanently in over 150 houses. There are almost no lights at night – no twinkle in this Alpine village.

This impression of an emptying town is born out by random figures. Before the war, over 37,000 people lived in the Srebrenica municipality. Today, the best estimate is around 10,000. 7,600 inhabitants over the age of 18 are entitled to vote in the October elections, which would also put the population at between 10,000 and 11,000. 598 children – Muslim and Serb – are enrolled at primary school. This is just 10 per cent of the pre-war enrollment (5,898).

There seems little chance of this changing soon. The road is littered with abandoned factories. Before the war there were seven companies operating in the Potocari industrial zone (including the infamous battery factory). Only two have been revived in the past 13 years and one – owned by Serbians – does not employ local workers. Most of the foreign aid has gone into rebuilding houses and infrastructure. The Danish Refugee Council has created 20 new jobs, since the beginning of 2007, but at a cost of 3,000 Euros apiece.

Another big impediment to the return of refugees is psychological. The Hague Tribunal has only indicted thirteen individuals for the Srebrenica massacre, and almost all were big fish like Karadzic.

This still leaves hundreds of locals who may well have had a hand in butchering Magbula's husband and Beba's brother in law – a fact that they find chilling. In 2005, a joint commission of Serbs and Bosniaks determined the exact number of massacre victims (8,372), and fingered about 800 locals who might have been implicated. Several are still in positions of power.

This is deeply troubling for the massacre survivors. Beba was stunned to turn on the television after the massacre and see Milenko Zivanovic, her former close friend, at Mladic's side after the town was taken. She was even more stunned when Zivanovic put his face through her car window when she parked in the town a few years back and asked what she was up to. She was shaking all the way back to Tuzla.

Milos Mukoslavavic, who occupied Beba's apartment after the war and stole the faucets, is standing for the post of mayor in the October elections, on the ticket of Dodik, the Prime Minister of the Serb Republic.

Millions of refugees have swallowed similar fears and one can only admire their bravery. Beba herself is fortified by helping other women. She is by nature a person of authority, and channeling her energy into helping others is one of the ways she copes and survives. As such she exemplifies the philosophy of our good friends at the Survivor Corps (formerly the Landmine Survivors Network), who say that the best way to survive war trauma is to give back to one's community.

But would Beba return to Srebrenica – and could she make the commitment to open a weaving center, always assuming the money could be found? She ponders the question. Srebrenica is still an unfriendly place, to Beba. Here she is vulnerable – even the current mayor (a Muslim) is no friend. But in Tuzla, at Bosfam House, she is among friends and in control. In time this will change, but if Beba comes back it will be at her own speed and on her own time.

#8. Hasnija

The return of refugees has been easier in the hills around Srebrenica than in the town itself. This afternoon, we are traveling out to visit a Bosfam member, Hasnija Music, who returned here from Tuzla in 2003 and could be a prime candidate for any Bosfam training.

Those familiar with the Advocacy Project may remember the wonderful profiles of Bosnian Muslims that were written for us by Peter Lippman from 1999 onwards. Peter traveled deep into eastern Bosnia and met some heroic characters who were simply determined to regain their homes. They began by pitching their tents up here in the heights, in the bitter winter.

These villages are still attracting most of the returns and seem to be further ahead with ethnic re-integration. This may not be surprising. You can do more with land than a small apartment.

Hasnija Music and her husband Omer have their own awful memories of 1995. Omer joined the death march through the woods, and somehow made it out alive. His father was killed in the massacre and has been reburied at Potocari. Hasnija's brother and sister in law are still missing.



***Happy to be home:
Hasnija and children***

Headed by Omer's mother, nine surviving family members returned in 2003 to the plot of land near Osmaci that they had left during the war. They thought that their land was infected by landmines, so they began to rebuild two new houses a few meters away with help from a foundation associated

with the former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. Beba has high praise for the foundation. Unlike some agencies, they provided everything, including furniture. The house is certainly sturdy.

There is no intimidation from local Serbs. Two of Hasnija's children (who were born in exile) go to the local school which currently has three students (compared to 35 before the war). Still, says Beba, that's a start. Mirsada, the oldest, is as bright as a button and getting excellent grades. During the first two grades they learn Cyrillic – this is the Serb Republic – but move to Latin in the third grade. This is an acceptable compromise, similar to the pre-war arrangement. We don't have time to investigate whether the curriculum is biased towards the Serbs, as I was told on a previous trip.

But while the Music family has much, they are still pitifully vulnerable. The electricity company refused to reconnect the lines, because Omer did not rebuild in exactly the same spot, so they have brought in a line from the other house. This is potentially dangerous.

All nine family members rely on the pension of Omer's mother, which brings in the equivalent of 225 Euros a month. Under the pension system, husbands who lose wives are entitled to a pension, and vice versa, based on contribution to the system. But the pension for a lost child is much less, even though the child might have been the family breadwinner. Omer does odd jobs in farms.

Beba feels a powerful urge to protect this young family. She fears what might happen if Omer's mother dies, and is always looking for work for Omer. Today she has bought candy for Mustafa, the youngest child, and clothes for the two girls. Young Mustafa can't believe his luck as bar

after bar of candy comes his way. Shweta, who is much drawn to appealing young creatures, snaps away with her camera.

This is a family that could clearly benefit from a Bosfam training program. By the time she leaves, Beba can already picture Hasnija sitting happily at a loom in Tuzla beside one of her veteran weavers, working on panels for the memorial quilt.

#9. Final Thoughts

The sun is shining as we leave Srebrenica. A plan for the Bosfam weavers is definitely taking shape.

If money can be found, Bosfam will identify about 15 women like Hasnija from the villages or refugee settlements, who will be invited to Tuzla for several weeks of training over a three-month period. That will give them exposure to other women and teach them a skill. They will then be given a loom and wool to work on at home. Beba likes the idea of Hasnija at her loom while the snow falls silently outside. So do we all.

Setting up a training center in Srebrenica itself seems beyond Bosfam's capacity at the moment, but it could be done the following year if this first phase works well. Together the trainers and trainees will make a dozen more quilts, which will be shown in North America, Europe, in Bosnia itself, and even in Serbia.



Never forget: Beba Hadzic at the Potocari site, where her brother in law is buried

This is an ambitious plan, and after a moment of euphoria we all come down to earth. There is always the risk that the quilt will lose its appeal as Srebrenica loses its hold on people's imagination, as discussed in an earlier blog. This is unlikely as long as Karadzic is on

trial and Mladic can evade capture. Milorad Dodik seems intent on doing his best to stoke the anger of the survivors. And for Beba, Magbula and Hasnija, the pain will remain vivid until their relatives are identified and reburied. They hope to use the memorial quilt to keep the memory alive for as long as possible. This will require a mighty effort from many well-wishers.

There are other questions about this initiative. The quilt is not a profitable venture – indeed it is

currently losing money. But it can make a lasting contribution if it can provide women like Hasnija with an economic cushion against poverty. This will happen if the weavers can parlay their skills into a profitable business, and here they face a formidable obstacle. Bosnian carpets, even the traditional cilims, cannot compete against cheaper carpets from Turkey, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. They will need special marketing once the connection with the massacre wears thin.

In a wider sense, the same holds true of their former town. Underneath the veneer of the new supermarket and mosque, there is very little to show for the past thirteen years. Part of this was due to the inbuilt contradictions of the Dayton agreement, which created two states and gave the Serbs an opportunity to block the return of refugees. Part of it was our inability to face up to the horror of what we let happen here in 1995. The world recoiled in shame and disgust, and the hard men took advantage.

Is it too late, one might ask? This is the wrong question. Having let these people down, we do not have the luxury of abandoning them a second time. Instead, we should listen and follow their lead.

I expect to take many more coffees with Magbula in her little house, near the grave of her husband. I also hope to see Beba back in her house by the Lake. And of course there are many other massacre victims throughout the world who can learn from the awful experience of Srebrenica.