

**Fatos Bogujevci interview with Pam Dawes (1:11:32)**

**16<sup>th</sup> January 2016**

(00:00) PD: It's the 16<sup>th</sup> January 2016. Pam Dawes with Fatos Bogujevci recording for Voices of Kosovo in Manchester Oral History project.

Fatos, do you think we could start by you telling us a bit about your life before the war? Your life at home in Kosovo when you were a child?

FB: I come from a town called Podujevë which is in Kosovo. I was born on the 16<sup>th</sup> July 1986. I lived in a small house with my older sister Nora and my two younger sisters, **Jehona**<sup>1</sup> and Liria, and my youngest brother Genc, together with my uncle and his family. So there was quite a few of us living in the same house but it was always a great atmosphere because we were all very young. We were about the same age to we enjoyed, you know as kids, playing with each other.

I went to a school called Shaban Shala. I was in the same class as my cousin Shpend.

Life before the war was really good; I'd say I've got really good memories. I think we had a really good time: we just enjoyed just playing around. We used to get together with the kids from our neighbourhood and it was just a great atmosphere.

PD: And you were on the edge of the countryside but quite a bustling town?

FB: Yes, even though I spent a lot of time in the countryside, where my uncle used to live. I'd say I've got the best memories from my time visiting my

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<sup>1</sup> See Selatin/Jehona and Saranda Bogujevci recordings in this archive.

uncles in the countryside. It used to get really hot summers and really cold winters.

PD: You must have, even though you were a child, realised that trouble was brewing. Things were getting more and more difficult?

FB: Well, as a kid, you don't... you can't really understand what's going on until, like, it really blows up. My first memory of things starting to really change was, obviously, around my family because my parents were having difficulty with going to work and dealing with the Serbs at work, so the first stories I got were through my family. My school wasn't close to a Serb school. Kids that went to a school near a Serb school felt the difference a lot more than us 'cause we didn't have much contact with the Serb kids. So it was harder for us to notice a change until we saw tanks coming in through our town and we started hearing gunshots in the night, and just police patrolling the streets.

PD: How old were you, do you think, when you started to hear gunshots and see tanks?

FB: About 12 or 13 at the most.

PD: What work did you parents do, Fatos?

FB: My mum used to work in the hospital as a nurse and my dad worked in a power plant in Obiliç, which is near the capital Prishtina.

PD: And were they able to keep working?

FB: I remember my mum had a lot of trouble going to work and coming back. I think at one point she really had to, like, run back home because there were snipers everywhere and they were just shooting people that they

saw in the streets. And I don't know much about my dad but I presume he had difficult times in work as well because he used to work with a lot of Serbs as well.

I'd say the schools were fine until, obviously, the teachers felt that it was unsafe for us to attend.

Serbian troops started moving into different village around the town centre. And it was getting very scary at night and then the N.A.T.O. started bombing<sup>2</sup> Serbia as well so we could also hear, like, air strikes at night.

And as a kid it's a scary sound to hear every night because it's not something that you've heard before... you've seen before. It was something that you've only seen on TV and I remember at night, whenever the strikes - the air strikes - took place, they used to play this really, you know, this siren from the police station, which was a very frightening sound.

It was obviously getting very, very scary so constantly we were thinking of ways to stay safe and try to avoid any contact with the Serbian troops. So at night someone would keep a watch, obviously, tell us if anything was going on in the streets and sometimes we'd move from one house to another. And I remember, one time, we were at my house and my auntie had left her house to go to Prishtina - to the capital, Prishtina - because they found someone to take them there (because it was a bit safer over there). And during the night, as we were leaving our house, they played this siren. And the police station - which was very close to us - as soon as we left our garden to go to through the back of the garden into our auntie's house they started playing the siren. And then the Serbs started shooting from the top of the police building and we all just ran. We didn't see, like, where the shots were coming from. We

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<sup>2</sup> The air strikes lasted from March 24, 1999 to June 10, 1999 and led to the withdrawal of Yugoslavian forces from Kosovo and the establishment of UNMIK a U.N. mission in Kosovo.

only knew that they were coming from the... we only heard that they were coming from the police station. So we had to run and get inside. So this was something that we had to do quite often, like every few nights.

And then, obviously, things started getting even worse until one day we heard a Serb army vehicle parking in front of our house. And then, basically, in the garden where we used to live, there were three houses: there was our house and my dad's uncle's house in the same garden and the house at the back of the garden, like, no one was living there. So as soon as this vehicle parked in front of our house and they started breaking the shop windows, we all left our house to go to the back of the garden to the other house because we thought it was a bit safer over there.

(07:20) And well we... we went there. We stayed there for a couple of hours and then we saw Serbian police army forces going into our neighbours' houses: just breaking the windows and just taking all the people out. So we started leaving in that house as well. As we were leaving the house, about 5 or 6 Serbs came into the garden and told us to drop all our stuff that we had with us, on the corner of the house. And we started walking towards the road because we presumed that they wanted us to just join the rest of the people in the roads and just leave: flee the town. But they told us to stop and instead took us through our other neighbour's garden to the front of the police station. At that time someone who seemed to be in a higher position ordered the other guys to take us back into our neighbour's garden and that's where they just started shooting. And... left us for dead<sup>3</sup>.

Then...

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<sup>3</sup> 'Podujevo 1999- Beyond Reasonable Doubt' (English and Serbian): Humanitarian Law Centre, Belgrade, Documents Series.  
<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/jul/10/warcrimes.balkans>

PD: How many of you were in the garden?

FB: There was eighteen of us in the garden. It was all my family and also my dad's friend's family who had come from a village nearby because of the situation being worse in that village.

PD: Who was that?

FB: That was Enver Duriqi's family.

That was his father, his mother and his wife and four kids.

PD: And were the dads with you, Enver and your own father?

FB: No, they weren't because, at that time, everyone was talking about how the Serbs are just killing the men. And we thought during the whole time, we thought that they're not going to touch... they're not going to kill - even though we were seeing in the news that they were going around killing kids and women as well - we thought that the men would be more in danger than us. So every night they would go into, like, other people's houses and try and hide from the Serbs. So that morning they weren't in the house with us.

PD: And you were mainly women and children in the garden?

FB: Well it was just women and children in the garden, actually. And they stopped Enver Duriqi's dad in front of the police station and that guy that ordered the others to take us back into the garden told someone else to take him into, like, a restaurant in the street. And all we heard was just a few gun shots as they took him in. So they, obviously, killed him there and then ordered us to go: walk back into the garden. And that's when they started shooting.

PD: So this was Serb army?

FB: Well later on we learnt that it was a Serb army unit called the Scorpions.

PD: And there were 5 survivors?

FB: Yeah, after they started shooting. We all - well myself and my brother, my two sisters and my cousin, Saranda - we pretended to be dead and we didn't move. There was still people struggling to breathe so there might have been others alive at that point, as well. And then they left the - the people that shot - they left the garden. And then another unit came in and gave us first aid and from there they took us to Prishtina Hospital where we stayed until the N.A.T.O. troops came into Kosovo.

PD: Did you notice what kind of guns the Scorpion unit were using?

FB: Yes, well, we were shot with AK47s.

So most of them had Kalashnikov AK47.

PD: So afterwards you were taken to the hospital. Those of you who survived, you were found by other people?

FB: Yeah, well we were taken to Prishtina Hospital straight after what happened.

PD: Were they uniformed, the people who took you out?

FB: Yes, they had, I think, they had police uniforms with, like, a white overcoat.

PD: So they were maybe a Serb medical unit.

FB: They were probably a Serb medical unit, yes.

PD: And what happened in the hospital, Fatos?

FB: Well this all happened in a short time so as a kid it was really difficult to comprehend what was going on. When we were first taken to Prishtina Hospital, I remember I was in, I think, in the same vehicle as Jehona so I could see her jumper, like, just above me. And as soon as we went to Prishtina, I remember I was just taken out of the vehicle and just left. I was left on the floor of the reception of the hospital and I was there for about ten/fifteen minutes on the floor.

PD: Who was running the hospital<sup>4</sup>?

FB: Serb medical staff.

PD: So there were no ethnic Albanian doctors in the hospital at that point?

FB: No, we hadn't met anyone. From the reception floor I was taken into the operation room where they removed about five or six bullets from my legs.

PD: Did you have pain relief?

FB: I didn't, no. I didn't even have, what's it called?

PD: Anaesthetic?

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<sup>4</sup> See Prof Tony Redmond recording in this archive. Tony Redmond was responsible for the re-establishment of medical services after the Liberation

FB: I didn't even have a local anaesthetic.

PD: So were you, all five of you, admitted to Prishtina Hospital?

FB: Yes. Well at this point I didn't know who else was there. I had only seen Jehona's jumper. As I was taken out of the operation room, I remember seeing my youngest sister, Liria, in the corridor and she was just crying and telling some people that she was really cold.

I remember they just left her and she was alone just crying in the corridor: in the hospital corridor.

And then from there I was taken a room where they brought my younger brother, Genc, in as well. And then I spent a few... I think a month or two with just Genc in one room. I spent the first few nights alone in the top floor of the hospital with just Genc. They would just come and bring us a bit of food and that was it. We didn't have any contact with anyone else.

(10:51) PD: How was Genc coping? Was he injured as well?

FB: Genc had one bullet in his leg. He was... he didn't have much pain 'cause they had treated his wound and they had left the bullet in because... I don't know... they just decided to leave the bullet in. Genc was about six or seven; I was about twelve or thirteen.

The girls were in a different department. We had only found out that they were there a month or two after.

PD: Were you clear in your mind about who had died and who'd survived or were you very unsure?

FB: I was very unsure.

I knew Jehona, my sister Jehona, might have been alive because of seeing her jumper on the way to the hospital. I remember seeing... I knew Liria was alive because, obviously, I'd seen her. And I was with Genc, but I didn't know about anyone else.

I remember Genc was asking me what happened and if mum is alive and I had to lie to him, tell him that mum is fine and she ran away: "She had to run away and she's fine." And I told him not to worry about anything and it would be fine.

PD: But in your heart?

FB: Yeah, but in my heart I knew that, well, most of them were killed there. I definitely knew my mum was killed because, obviously, I'd seen her get shot in the back twice. I didn't want him to... obviously, deep down, I knew he knew what had happened, as well, even though he was only a kid but I didn't want to say it to him.

PD: So just to go back. Was this one of the first occasions of real overt violence against ethnic Albanians that had happened in your town?

FB: Well we heard stories of people getting killed, and just a few months before everything kicking off, basically, there were protests in the streets. So it was, kind of, building up to this.

PD: But as children?

FB: But as children, no, no. We'd never heard of... we had never heard of anyone getting...

PD: So you were all very, very shocked and, obviously, traumatised and injured?

What happened to Liria?

FB: Liria was shot in the throat so her condition was definitely worse than mine. From that night in the Prishtina Hospital she was taken to Belgrade Hospital where she stayed until, I think, it was September of the same year.

PD: Why do you think she was taken there?

FB: Because, as I said, she was shot in the throat and the only way for her to survive was to be taken to Belgrade where they had more experienced doctors and they would be able to save her life.

PD: So it's very strange that some of the paid, presumably, armed soldiers were killing you and then other Serbs were trying to save your lives?

FB: Yeah but... I know it doesn't make much sense but... I don't know why they decided to take her to Belgrade.

PD: Were you able to speak? Presumably not, before she went?

FB: No, no, no.

PD: Your last contact was seeing her crying in the reception?

FB: No-one. No. No-one of us saw her until she came to England.

PD: How old was Liria when she was taken on her own to Belgrade?

FB: She was ten-years-old.

PD: She was ten?

FB: Yes.

PD: Could you tell us what happened with your father, Fatos? He at some point made contact with you I think?

FB: My dad and my uncle had initially made contact with my cousin and sister. As I said before, they were in a different department in the hospital. I had found out that they were there but I couldn't go to see them because I couldn't walk. Genc, who started walking during this time, had gone to meet her [his sister or cousin] with some other Albanian patient who had been in the hospital at that time.

And then my dad had gone through with other people. He went from Prishtina, like... from Podujevë to well different villages around Podujevë. And then they ended up in Prishtina. And then with some family - with someone we know in Prishtina. He came to the hospital and that's where we saw him.

(20:40) PD: So Fatos did your dad manage to come and see you?

FB: Yep. At this point my dad was staying with some family that we had in Prishtina. And he would come and visit us every few days. The first time he came over, I remember, I was in my bed in the room. And Genc was at the door and he had just seen my dad coming up the stairs. And he was like, "Oh! It's dad" and we didn't even recognise him because he had lost so much weight, and yeah... he came in and then every other day he would bring us food and drinks and whatever we needed.

PD: Were you being fed by the hospital staff?

FB: Well, as breakfast we would get a cup of milk, well a bit of milk and water basically: it wasn't even decent quality milk, and just a loaf of bread in the afternoon. It was... we would get food but all the leftovers from what they had given to the Serb patients. So the food wasn't great: we had lost so much weight as well.

PD: So were they treating Serb soldiers in the hospital?

FB: Yeah they were. Yes.

That's why it was very dangerous to move around the hospital as well.

PD: Were there many children there that you knew of?

FB: In the beginning, as I said before, myself and Genc were in our own room. And then, at one point, we were moved into a different room with Serb patients as well. So that experience was really frightening as well because even though we were kids, with really awful wounds, they would treat the Serb patients much, much better than us.

And then later on we were put in the same department with other Albanian patients who had either got caught in the Hospital when the war kicked off or some of them were brought with the same injuries as us.

PD: So when you first saw your dad, had he seen the girls or did he just see you and Genc?

FB: Yeah, he had seen the girls on the first floor 'cause they were on the first floor. And then he can come up to meet us.

PD: And so he was having to be a bit like a fugitive finding his way secretly to you?

FB: Yes, it was really dangerous for him, as well, to come and see us. Even when he came in, like, we couldn't spend that much time together because there was always Serbs soldiers walking around and the doctors and the nurses didn't like him coming to see us. Sometimes we would go outside and try and find, like, a secret place in the hospital garden thing, to just spend a few minutes together. But there would be, like, Serbian soldiers coming around and asking him for his I.D. and telling him that he shouldn't be there and if he wanted to be with us he should just take us with him and stuff like that.

PD: So in the capital at that point, in the middle of the war, were there just small number of ethnic Albanian people still living in Prishtina or was it extraordinary for your dad to be there? Or had some people hung on?

FB: Well there were people living in Prishtina: not many but there were a few. But you wouldn't see anyone walking around in the streets or anything.

PD: They were hidden?

FB: Yeah, they were just keeping away from any contact: contact with any Serb troops or any Serbs in general.

PD: So when your dad visited, he hadn't been in the garden? [the location of the massacre] Did he know what had happened to his family?

FB: When I first met my dad, the first question he asked was, "Can you just tell me, are they gone or not? Have they been killed or not?" Because he had been, for a few months, he had been just walking around... asking people if they heard anything. And at one point, he even went back to our house and even met one of our Serb neighbours. But people would tell him all sorts of stories and some would tell him that they had seen us even though they didn't because people - I don't know why they would tell him, to be honest - some people probably told him just to make him feel, like, feel better.

PD: He was trying to get information?

FB: Yeah.

PD: In any way he could. But he was basically living in... what... the hills at that time?

FB: Yeah, he was living in the hills: walking around trying to find out if anyone would know anything. So at this point he kind of knew that something horrible had happened to us but he just wanted confirmation from me. I told him, you know, "I think they might have all been killed."

He obviously knew about Jehona and Saranda, who were in the same hospital at this time. But we didn't know about Liria.

PD: You didn't really know if she'd made it?

FB: No, we didn't.

PD: You knew she was terribly injured.

FB: I knew she was injured. I knew she had been brought to the hospital but I didn't know whether she made it or not.

PD: At some point were you able to be together with Saranda and your sister, Jehona?

FB: Well a few weeks after - I'd started walking a bit, obviously using crutches - so I started to go and visit them. In the department where they were placed in there were a lot of Serbs, from all sorts of units, so I had a really difficult time to visit them. Even when I went there, I could only stay for a few minutes and then just leave. A few times they would stop me in the corridor and just mess around. Obviously I couldn't say anything: I couldn't even speak Serbian at that time so I was just trying to avoid them and just leave as soon as I could.

(27:55) Later on, when they started feeling better, we would meet in the hospital garden sometimes - in secret - and just spend a few minutes together or if we had food or anything that we could give to them, or sometimes they would give to us. For example, one time, I remember we had a visit from this French TV program and they brought some food and toys with them. And they had given us the food after the interview and I remember taking some food to them and we just shared our food in the hospital garden.

So we... I'd see them every few days but obviously I couldn't spend much time with them.

PD: So the French TV crew came in during the conflict?

FB: Yes they came in with... well they just wanted to film kids, basically. They took myself, Genc, and some other Albanian kid who was with us there; he had been shot in his leg and he had lost his family as well. They took us to a different room downstairs. They - together with the doctors - they filmed us. I

remember, Genc was asleep so they told him to just show his wounds. I remember just rolling his pyjamas, just showing his wounds. And they told us to say that we had been in our garden and a N.A.T.O. bomb had fallen into the garden and that's how we got our injuries.

PD: Who told you to say that?

FB: The French crew and the doctors.

PD: Why do you think the French said that to you?

FB: They must have had contact with the doctors before and they must have known each other; they must have had something planned.

But, obviously, as a kid, you're not going to argue anything: especially not in front of a camera.

PD: So the explanation you were told to give was that you were victims of N.A.T.O. bombing.

FB: Yes.

PD: All of you?

FB: Yes. There might even be a film - that film - somewhere.

PD: And did you feel the girls were progressing in any way or were their injuries really handicapping them at this point? Or what... how did it seem to you as the cousin and brother?

FB: To be honest, I didn't see much improvement because they had so many injuries.

PD: How many... how many bullets had they been hit with?

FB: I think Saranda was hit with about 16 bullets. I'm not sure about Jehona but they were going into operations every other day. And seeing them was just not good, anyway.

PD: To remove bullets?

FB: Yeah, to remove... treat them, yeah.

PD: And then everything changed because Kosovo was liberated?

FB: Yes.

PD: What are your memories of the Liberation?

FB: Well, in the hospital we didn't know what was going on at all. All we heard was N.A.T.O. air forces in the night. But we didn't know what was going on at all!

After a few months, I was taken - myself and Genc was taken to a different building of the hospital so we were away from the girls. And we spent about three or four weeks there. And the first time, I remember being in the hospital corridor and just looking outside the window, and I saw some troops. I didn't know who they were - I noticed they had different caps from and different uniforms from the Serbs. But, obviously, I didn't know. I didn't even expect for N.A.T.O. or anyone to just turn up outside the hospital. And I just ran away. And then after... a few minutes after, some other British troops came into the

hospital and I remember just seeing them walking around as they were just inspecting what was going on and then they left.

PD: What happened next?

FB: Can I tell another story before that?

(32:42) Before seeing the British, the N.A.T.O. troops, a few weeks - I think it was - a few weeks beforehand. It could have been a month, actually, when the Russians came in. They had just invaded the hospitals. We had... (because at this time I was in the Children's Hospital, where the rooms were separated with, like, glass: you can see from room to another)... and we had... on both sides we had Russian soldiers. There was just three of us in one room, us kids. There was another Albanian girl in the next room, alone. She was alone. And on each other side we had, like, four rooms of just Russian celebrations: just celebrating and singing, firing their guns, all night. And we just pretended to be asleep. And this happened for a few nights and then they had moved away. And at this time - well a few days later - was the time when I saw the British troops outside the hospital. But because I had seen the Russians before, I didn't know what was going on with it: it was just going to be someone else coming into the hospital.

PD: So were the Russians in Prishtina before the Liberation or were they part of the Liberation?

FB: I think they had come in before the Liberation<sup>5</sup>.

PD: Hmm.

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<sup>5</sup> Fatos' account confirms a belief that Russian troops had entered Kosovo early without NATO agreement. <http://edition.cnn.com/WORLD/europe/9906/11/kosovo.08/>

FB: Yeah, they had come in. The Russian troops had come into Kosovo. Well, I found out later on: I didn't even know at that time they were Russian.

PD: And what happened to the Serb hospital staff at the time of the Liberation?

FB: I don't remember exactly but all I remember is that they just started disappearing, like not turning up. And then, as they were coming in, I remember some doctors were there but the nurses and the, like, the other staff had left.

(35:00) And only a few days later, we were in hospital, well, outside the hospital. My dad had come to visit us and we had got together and we were just staying outside. A few British Army were walking by and my dad's cousin who was with us spoke English so we told her to ask them if they could provide any help for us. And they said, "Of course." And within the next few minutes, they called someone and they came and picked us up and took us to a nearby hospital camp thing, where they gave us initial treatments. And from there it was just like one meeting after another.

Who was your uncle's cousin, who you were with outside?

FB: It was, her name is Valbona Bogujevci.

PD: And she spoke to the British military in English? And that was a crucial point: obviously they said yes, they could help?

FB: Yes, as soon she told them who we were and why were there, I remember, within maybe two or three minutes, a British Army vehicle turned up and within... it was all within a few minutes.

PD: And everything changed?

FB: From that point everything changed. We were seeing them every few days. At this point I was fine; I didn't need any more treatment because my wounds had healed.

PD: Were you able to walk normally?

FB: Well, yeah. Obviously, I was using...

PD: On the mend?

FB: Yeah.

PD: And the others?

FB: Well Jehona and Saranda still needed treatment because they were really badly injured. Genc was ok at this point, as well. So the girls were having to meet the British Army medical staff more often than we had to. David Vassallo? (37:00)

PD: Yeah, probably.

FB: David Vassallo saw the girls a few times.

PD: And so you were able to be with your dad?

FB: Yeah, we were.

PD: And your uncle?

FB: Yeah, we left the hospital. We didn't want to go back to Podujevë because it was still... the Serbs were leaving Kosovo and people were coming back and it still wasn't safe. And we were staying in Prishtina with my dad and a few other family as well.

PD: And what happened after that?

FB: And from Prishtina we went to our house in Podujevë and then my dad started to arrange for us to come to England, to receive further medical treatment<sup>6</sup>.

PD: Before you left, was there any kind of investigation about what had happened to your family?

FB: Well my dad was doing all that part. I was a kid. I didn't know much what was going on. All I knew was that they found the bodies. They had the proper... they had to rebury them, properly. But no further investigation. Like who had done it or why or anything else.

PD: And what was happening as far as you know - I know you were a child, but what was happening in terms of Kosovo? Who was running Kosovo at that point?

FB: All I can say is from the point where we saw the British troops in Prishtina - as we were walking around, like, having to go to the house where we were staying at - all we saw were British troops. By this time, I think most of the Serbs had left, especially the armed forces.

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<sup>6</sup> See MaK timeline and report in this archive: In a global humanitarian response to the conflict, the British government evacuates dispossessed Kosovars to Manchester, Leeds and Scotland. 4,346 of the most vulnerable men, women and children are selected from refugee camps. 2,400 arrive in the North West. *"People had few belongings, what they brought with them instead was bewilderment and dignity, grief and dispossession."* ('My Name Came up' Refugee Council, 2000)

PD: Yes, I think the British were in charge of Prishtina.

FB: The British, yeah, and Podujevë, I think.

PD: Could you tell us what happened next? You came to England?

(39:37) FB: Yep. My dad was together with the same cousin, Valbona. He was arranging for us to come to England. She was helping my dad because she spoke English. And they had arranged for us to come to England. It was all happening so quick so I can't remember much in this time because it was just one thing after another.

All I knew is that I was really happy that everything was over and it was time to make progress.

PD: Do you remember anything about the flight to England?

FB: I remember we had to first fly to Italy, I think. It was a massive jumbo jet airplane. And then from Italy... I think it was a military flight from Kosovo to Italy. And then from Italy to Manchester it was a commercial flight. Yeah, from Italy to Manchester it was a commercial flight.

But it was all surreal at this point because you moved from this horrible situation where it was just war and conflict everywhere into seeing this totally different place: to a place I'd only seen in films, movies. Flying through Italy. Flying through Europe. And then coming to Manchester.

PD: Flying over countries that were at peace?

FB: Yeah. Yeah.

PD: And beautiful?

FB: Yeah.

PD: Not that Kosovo isn't beautiful? (laughs)

FB: (laughs) Yeah, at that point it wasn't beautiful.

PD: Did you know you were coming to Manchester?

FB: I didn't. All I knew is that I was coming to England. I probably didn't know where Manchester was. I'd only heard of Manchester United but I didn't know where Manchester was.

(41:00) PD: Do you remember landing?

FB: Yes. The first thing I saw, like, flying over Manchester was just like lights, and just this really beautiful view that you only see in movies.

And then I remember I was really tired, obviously, because we had to come into Italy and from Italy into Manchester. And then as soon as we landed, I remember walking through the airport. And then we met some people in a lounge and they had prepared us food and, like, chocolate bars, and all this stuff, and I was just really happy to see everyone being so... so nice.

And then from there we were taken to, like, a camp centre thing, where other Albanian refugees were staying.

PD: Where was that?

FB: That was in Meadow Court in Hale<sup>7</sup>.

When we got there, all the rooms were prepared for us and we had our own rooms. And we had food prepared. There were other Albanian families there which were really nice. So yeah, it was just a totally opposite - it was just a contrast of what we had experienced in Kosovo... came in September and Liria came over, I think, it was in November/December.

And the girls had to go to hospital, well, every few days, and they had to spend a lot of time in hospital. I'd go and visit them with my dad most of the time.

But at this point it was totally different, as I said before. We had, like, we had video games. We had rooms full of toys. And we had... we could go outside and play football in a park. And we had English kids coming to visit us so it just, like, it was really, really nice.

Yes, and then, I think in January, I started going to school.

PD: Because, presumably, you'd had no English? Or had you learnt English at school in Kosovo?

FB: No, I didn't know any English.

PD: Didn't have a word of English?

FB: No. I didn't know any English at that time.

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<sup>7</sup> Empty sheltered accommodation for the elderly had been prepared in Hale Barns, Trafford. See Cllr David Acton, leader Trafford MBC 97-14, recording in this archive and Rev Bruce Thompson.

In January I started, I think, year 8. I was in the same class as Adrian, some other Albanian boy. And then we started learning English and we had our tutors come with us into different classes to help us learn English and provide any help with other subjects. And they were always great.

We'd have English classes for, like, two/three hours a day, I think.

So yeah, I've got good memories from that time.

PD: Which school was that Fatos?

(44:42) FB: That was Blessed Thomas Holford in Altrincham<sup>8</sup>.

PD: So that was a local Catholic Secondary School?

FB: Yes.

PD: How did you feel - because I think your faith is Muslim - how did you feel finding yourself in a Catholic School?

FB: Well, we are Muslims but we didn't practice Islam so there wasn't a massive... with meeting people, there wasn't any... I couldn't see... I couldn't notice that it was a Catholic School. Only on Fridays, though, we had the mass; it was a bit of a weird experience seeing all these kids listening to the priest. It was just a weird experience.

PD: Did you go to the mass?

FB: Yeah. We went for the mass every Friday. We didn't have to go. We could stay in class but we went because there was nothing wrong with going.

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<sup>8</sup> See Head Teacher, Lou Harris, recording included in this archive

PD: So you know quite a lot about Catholicism?

FB: I do (laughs). Yes.

PD: And then you all were gradually assimilated into the school. And you learnt English very quickly.

FB: Yeah, the teachers - all the teachers - were great. They were always really nice to us: even the kids, as well.

I think we really needed English. So the way we were taught English was really good.

And then a few years after we started school, we had to do our G.C.S.E.s. So we had to not only learn English but we also had to revise for our G.C.S.E. exams. And we did exams: I think we got, like, 8 G.C.S.E.s which was really good.

PD: I'm just going to ask you: do you remember, I think, very soon after you arrived, you and some of the other Kosovar children wrote a poem together? Do you remember that?

FB: Yeah. Yeah, I remember writing the poem with the other Albanian guys.

PD: And we recorded it. I met you and we were doing some... doing some fundraising work with musicians to raise money for Kosovo and did an album<sup>9</sup> and the poem was recorded for the album. And I remember the line

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<sup>9</sup> MaK's first album of Manchester music for Kosovo (inc the poem and Badly Drawn Boy, Doves, Elbow, Ian Brown, I Am Kloot, Lamb, Mr Scruff, New Order, Jane Weaver) Cohesion, (2001).  
<http://makonline.org/home/music/the-cohesion-story/>

'*Twenty thousand hours in a day*'<sup>10</sup> was - if I remember rightly - a line you wrote. What... could you - it's very powerful - could you explain when you'd felt that each day was almost... time was frozen? '*Twenty thousand hours in a day*' is a very powerful phrase.

(47:50) FB: Yeah, we wrote the poem with our English tutor, Mr Brown. And we all... he basically asked us about our feelings of the war and how we experienced the war. And the line '*Twenty thousand hours in a day*' kind of explained how we felt during the time of when the war kicked off: so between the time when the N.A.T.O. airstrikes took place, being shot and taken to Prishtina Hospital. I think, as a kid, those were the worst days because that's when it first starts to... when you first start to, kind of... what's the word? That's when everything starts to change. From, like, being a kid and going to school, then everything just building up, then everything just suddenly changes and then you start hearing gunshots and airstrikes and bombs. And I think those times were the scariest for us.

PD: So in that terrifying time it was as if time was frozen.

FB: Yeah that time when we had to move from one house into another, just having to stay up all night, scared, like, whether we're going to get someone coming into the house or the bomb's going to drop into the garden.

PD: So, kind of, like constant terror?

FB: Yes. Yes, exactly.

PD: So that's helped me to understand '*Twenty thousand hours in a day*'.

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<sup>10</sup> The poem, '*Twenty thousand hours in a day*', written as a liturgy (1999) for the weekly school mass which the Muslim children attended, is included in this archive and is also a track on the MaK Cohesion album (2001)

FB: Yes.

PD: So you left school with your G.C.S.E.s and went to Six Form College?

FB: Yes, I went to Sir John Deane's College in Northwich. I did my A levels there. I studied Graphic Design, Media Studies, I.T. and Business Studies.

PD: Four A levels?

FB: Four A levels, yes.

To be honest I enjoyed college the most, even more than University. Because everyone there was really nice and I'd made really good friends. The subjects I was doing were really good. So yeah, I enjoyed that time, very much.

After I got my A levels, I applied to a few Universities and decided to stay close to Manchester and went to Salford University. For one year I did the Foundation Year in Art and Design and then another three years doing Graphic Design.

PD: So it sounds, like, from Sixth Form College you know that art - or art linked with computer studies - was going to be your future?

(51:00) FB: Well, what really... when I first decided was when I designed the MaK logo I think.

When I was still in school we had this project to design a logo.

PD: For Manchester Aid to Kosovo?

FB: Yes, and I decided to do a logo for Manchester Aid to Kosovo<sup>11</sup> and that's when my career was chosen (laughs).

PD: And we still use it!

FB: Yeah. Yes.

PD: Do you want to describe it because it's interesting, the logo.

FB: At that time I wanted to do something peaceful but with an Albanian identity. And I wanted to use a flower and the... maybe have the Albanian double headed eagle as well. So we combined them together: we created this logo where you see the Albanian double headed eagle with a flower.

PD: And that leads really well into the decision about the park because it was very much your decision, you children, if I can call you that, soon after you got to Manchester and you'd seen the parks and garden. You'd mentioned that you used to play out in the park as soon as you could, after your arrival. You wanted to make a Peace Park<sup>12</sup> in your home town. And do you remember when you made that decision?

FB: Well, as I said before, like, coming from Kosovo, from this conflict, to U.K. where we could enjoy parks, and we could enjoy things that we hadn't seen before, we wanted to create that kind of atmosphere in Kosovo, especially after the war. So we thought the best way to do that was, maybe, create a park where kids can go and play and basically just be kids and enjoy themselves.

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<sup>11</sup> See this archive and <http://www.makonline.org>

<sup>12</sup> <http://makonline.org/home/peace-park/>

<https://www.edenproject.com/sites/default/files/documents/eden-project-peace-park-kosovo.pdf>

(52:40) Yeah, we chose the name 'Manchester Peace Park' because obviously we wanted to create a 'little Manchester' in Podujevë. Now that's been developed thanks to Manchester Aid to Kosovo as well and a lot of great volunteers. And now it's a really beautiful place where kids can go and just enjoy themselves and play games.

PD: So it was a good idea?

FB: Yes.

PD: So you enjoyed Sir John Deane College then you went to Salford University and graduated in Graphics?

And what happened next?

FB: Well, I had finished University and I was looking for jobs. I wanted to do some work experience and then I graduated from Salford University. I was looking for jobs, even if it was just work experience. And I thought I'd apply for some jobs in Kosovo, as well, and I received an answer from this company in Prishtina saying that they'd love to have me there. And I looked at their website and the work they do and it was a really wonderful company<sup>13</sup>. So I thought: *Why not? I'll just go for a few years and see how it goes.*

(54:06) PD: So what year did you go back to Kosovo?

FB: Well I finished University in 2009. Then I went back to Kosovo about 2010. I was going back to Kosovo every summer so I kind of knew what to expect but living there was a lot different because I had spent about 10 years in England, so dealing with people over there - and there was a difference. I really enjoyed my time over there. I was working with some wonderful

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.ogilvyks.com/>

people. We created really good work. We were working on massive projects so, yeah...

PD: So that was just at the time when cultural life - it's a very creative and buzzing country - everything was beginning to blossom again, I guess?

FB: Yes, especially in Prishtina. At this time, a lot of people from abroad who had fled Kosovo were coming back and trying to contribute.

PD: You mean ethnic Albanian people?

FB: Yes. Ethnic Albanians, yes.

PD: Had come back - come home?

FB: I stayed there for two years and even though I was working on some really huge projects - I don't think I would have had the chance to work here, especially straight after graduating - while I was there I met a girl there, as well. I decided to come back to England - at least for a year or two - so I could get some work experience here as well, in case, later on in life, I decide to come back. And then I started a job here. Well, I started working as a freelancer at first and then started a full time job in Accrington.

PD: By this time you had a British Passport. There had been some issues about asylum, I think way back, when, really, you were just all beginning to recover from your injuries. But a lot of people had, I think, rallied round and supported the family and you actually got permission to remain in England.

(56:23) FB: Yeah, that was another challenge at that time. It wasn't something that we really wanted to deal with.

PD: Because you'd never actually applied for asylum really? You got brought here by the British Army.

FB: No. Exactly, we didn't feel it was right for us to explain our reason why we wanted to stay here. We were brought here because we needed help and at that time we thought we still needed help. And going back would just be basically going back in time. I mean it would have been a really difficult situation for the girls because they were still undergoing treatment. And obviously I was in school and I was trying to progress. So having to go back to Kosovo was something that I really didn't want to do.

PD: But that battle was won?

FB: Yes, thanks to...

PD: Your Head Teacher and doctors and MaK and lots of people.

FB: Yes, everyone helped us.

PD. I think also Beverley Hughes, M.P. and other M.P.s actually were very sympathetic<sup>14</sup>.

FB: Yes, most of all, I think, the biggest help we got was from you (laughs).

So...

PD: So you're just telling us that you met a girl when you were working in Prishtina as a Graphic Designer. And can you tell us a little bit about that?

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<sup>14</sup> See Cllr David Acton, leader of Trafford MBC 1997-2014, recording in this archive

FB: I met her in my town, Podujevë; she lives about five/ten minutes away from where I used to live. We started going out and then when I came back to England, it was, obviously, a really bad time because we wanted to live together and we had this visa issue which we had to sort out as well.

After I came back, a year or two after, I sorted the visa out and now we live together in Timperley.

PD: And you're married?

FB: And I'm married. Yes, I got married this summer.

PD: And I think there's going to be a baby?

FB: Yes, Aulona is pregnant, yes. We're expecting a little boy.

PD: That's very lovely.

Fatos, there's one thing that I'd like to ask you about: the fact that you, and your cousins, actually took a position whereby, if it was possible for the paramilitaries to face the courts, you would be willing to testify. And you did. You were very young when there'd been some arrests and you actually went to a Domestic War Crimes Trial in Belgrade. How old were you? Do you remember when you went as a witness?

FB: I think I was about fifteen/sixteen-years-old.

PD: So all of you went?

(59:30) FB: Yeah. Natasha Kandic from the Humanitarian Law Centre<sup>15</sup> in Belgrade together with a lawyer, a Serb lawyer over there, they were working on our case. And I think they had contacted my dad and asked him if we wanted to testify in the War Crimes Tribunal.

PD: War Crimes Trial. Yes.

FB: Yes.

PD: It was Domestic and not at The Hague.

FB: Not at The Hague, no.

And I remember my dad just sat us down and asked us if we wanted to do it.

And we told him if he thinks that, it was best for us to do it, then obviously it won't be an easy thing but we'd do it, and we'd just get it over with.

And we went back to Belgrade in - I think it was 2003 - we had identified the accused. And we gave our testimony in front of the accused as well.

PD: Because, I think, the Serb court was functioning on a very different level to, say, how an English court would have functioned in terms of children giving evidence: you were in the same room sitting giving evidence, very close to him.

FB: Yes, he was, the accused.

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.hlc-rdc.org/?lang=de>  
<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/jul/10/warcrimes.balkans>

Evidence was given both in Serbia and The Hague.

See also recordings by Selatin/Jehona, Fatos, Saranda Bogujevci, Pam Dawes and Paresh Patel available in this archive.

PD: Who was that?

FB: The accused was Sasa Cvjetan and he was sat maybe just a couple of meters away from us.

PD: And you all gave evidence?

FB: Yeah, we gave our evidence and we just left, basically. And then we had to go back a few years after, as well. He was convicted, yeah.

PD: And what... I think one of the paramilitaries also gave evidence against him?

FB: Yeah.

PD: Which was crucial.

FB: Yes, it was.

Then a few years after we had to go back because at this time they had got... arrested another five, I think it was. And we gave evidence in that trial, as well.

PD: With convictions?

FB: Yes.

PD: 100%?

FB: Yes.

(1:02:00)PD: I know you were nominated for the Anne Frank Trust<sup>16</sup> Award for Moral Courage.

FB: Yes.

PD: I think that was after going to Belgrade the first time. Did that come as a complete shock to you that you got this amazing award?

FB: Yeah, that came as a surprise but obviously it was a good feeling to know that someone had recognised our courage and someone was, like, actually following what we were doing.

PD: I think you were actually nominated by other children that make nominations; a reading group in Leicester read a newspaper and nominated you.

FB: Yes, that's what made it really special.

And we went to London to a very prestigious ceremony and we got our reward. And then as an award...

PD: Who gave you your award, do you remember?

FB: I can't remember exactly the...

PD: I think it was actually Anne Frank's uncle<sup>17</sup>.

FB: I could have been. I think it might have been.

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.annefrank.org.uk/>

<sup>17</sup> Buddy Elias, Anne Frank's cousin

PD: Which is extraordinary. One of the survivors of the Frank family.

FB: Yes. And then we went to together with some other kids who had won other awards; we went to Holland for a couple of days. And we visited Anne Frank's house and museums and it was a really nice trip.

PD: So the legal case has been driven by a Serb activist, really, Natasa Kandic. Could you describe her?

FB: We met her ever since we had to go to Belgrade. We've met her a few times. I think she's just an extraordinary woman, even the people she works with, her staff in Serbia, as well as the staff in Kosovo, who now act independently, I think. They're all great at what they do. And Natasa has been a really good person to be in contact with regarding the justice of our family.

PD: I'd like to ask you about your art, as well, because you're a graphic designer. You're also an artist and you and the other artists in your family, Saranda and Jehona, you decided that you wanted to depict your experience through art. How did you... what did you do? Could you tell... could you tell us?

FB: Yes. During this whole time there were, obviously, a lot of newspaper articles and documentaries being made about us so there was a lot of stories being told. And at this time we had finished - we had all graduated from university - and we thought it would be a good time for us to tell our story in our own words. And the best way to do that, we thought, was through an art exhibition.

So we got together with my cousin Saranda and Jehona and James Walmsley, who was acting as a curator - who is still a curator of the exhibition

- and we came up with ideas of how we could best show our journey, from before the war to the point of graduating from university and just moving on in life. The exhibition is told in... through four parts, as a journey. It starts with the first installation of how our life was before the war in Kosovo. And then it moves into another installation where it shows the actual tragedy of the war where we lost our family, and then the effect that had in our family. And then it moves into the period of our time in Prishtina Hospital and then from there it shows our - through a different installation - it shows our journey of justice. It's a multimedia exhibition.

When we were first planning the exhibition, we knew it had to start in Kosovo and then probably finish in Manchester as a touring exhibition. We've showed it in the Kosovo National Gallery where it had a huge success. I think it had the most visitors ever.

PD: Of any exhibition?

FB: Of any exhibition, yeah. It broke the record.

And then from Prishtina we showed it in the Nation Gallery of Tirana in Albania.

And then from there we took it to Belgrade where it had a massive impact, as well, where there was a lot of media coverage and even the Prime Minister came to the opening. And now we are planning to bring it to Manchester.

PD: What was the aim in going to Belgrade?

FB: Well, wherever we have showed the exhibition, we've had our main objective of telling our story and our courage. In Kosovo the aim was to make

people talk more about the war and give the war victims a chance to tell their story. In Albania it was a different aim because I thought - we thought - that it was important to show it there because not many people from Albania had any real contact with war victims from Kosovo. We felt it was important for people over there to actually see it. And in Belgrade we thought it was important because we felt that not many people over there knew exactly what had happened in Kosovo as well. Because there were... a lot of them were basing their view of the war in Kosovo through what they were seeing on TV. And a lot of them knew what was going on but never actually accepted it. So we thought it was a chance for people to accept what was happening in Kosovo and have real contact with war victims and let them decide.

PD: Do you think that aim was achieved?

FB: There were a lot of people that were against the exhibition being shown in Belgrade. We even had protests outside the gallery. We had security around us 24/7. So there were, obviously, a lot of people against showing the exhibition. But we did have a lot of people come to us and thank us that we gave them a chance to see exactly what had happened then.

There were people participating in workshops – yeah, so I would say it had a very positive effect on some people.

PD: So who went to Belgrade?

FB: For the exhibition?

PD: In terms of your family?

FB: It was just me, Saranda and Jehona.

PD: You, Saranda and Jehona?

(1:09:48) FB: Yes and Ilir and Aulona as well.

The next important step for the exhibition is showing it to the English viewers, the English public. So it's important to show it either in Manchester or London, depending on what gallery we can get.

PD: What's the name of the exhibition?

FB: The exhibition is called 'Bogujevci // Visual History'<sup>18</sup>.

PD: Which is exactly what it is.

FB: Yes.

As we were working with the exhibition, we had a lot of contact with victims of war in Kosovo and we thought it was important for someone to work with those victims. So we set up our Family Foundation. The aim of the Foundation is, through arts and culture, to work on different projects which support war victims: not only in Kosovo but anywhere where there's conflict.

So we are hoping after we are, kind of, done with the exhibition the next step will be to work with war victims and use our story, and our experience, to help other people.

PD: Is there anything else you'd like to say, Fatos, before we end?

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<sup>18</sup> <http://cargocollective.com/jehona/BOGUJEVCI-Visual-History>  
<https://www.facebook.com/Bogujevci.VisualHistory/>

FB: What I hope to do now is, obviously, progress in my career and start a family here and... that's it (laughs).

PD: (laughs) All the best to you. Thank you. Thank you very much for doing this recording.

FB: Thank you.