

Fatime Gashi interview with Naomi Hamill (10:31)

31st January 2016

NH: This Naomi Hamill recording an Oral History for Manchester Aid to Kosovo.

Would you be able to tell me your name and date of birth?

FG: Fatime Gashi, 09/09/1996.

I was born in Skopje, that's where my mum's from and my dad moved there from Kosovo because of the war and everything that was happening in Kosovo. So he came there, met my mum and I was born.

NH: I know you've heard this from your mum because I know you were very little when it all happened but are you able to tell me a little bit about how your dad ended up in Macedonia?

FG: Well basically, the Serbian government, or whatever, in Yugoslavia, they wanted him to join the army and he was there for three months and obviously he didn't want to be part of it. And then the Croatian government, they took all the Albanians from the Serbs because they knew, obviously, that they were forced into joining the Serbian army. And they said, "Where do you want to go, Kosovo or Macedonia?" And my dad chose to go to Macedonia because he had an auntie that lived in Macedonia. And so he moved there

because he thought it would be safer. And then he met my mum there. And then they got married and I was born.

NH: Do you know anything about what happened just before you came to England because you were three when you came to England, is that right?

FG: What I've been told is that there were some camps in Macedonia so I was there for quite a while and then they were giving us the option to go either to Germany, France, America and I think we signed up for England and from that we did come to England 'cause, like, they did accept us¹.

I do remember we went to some club - a community club or something like that - where we stayed for quite a while. It was in Bury. And, it was all the people who had come from Kosovo at the time. I think loads of them stayed at that place for quite a few weeks until we finally got a house here.

I went to nursery. I remember nursery and everything like that. I went to a nursery in Bury as well. And I went to nursery and primary school and everything.

NH: Did you speak English when you went to the nursery?

¹ 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)

FG: No, I didn't know any English back then. But obviously, because I was a child, I was still learning to speak at the time so I did learn English. And then at one point... I didn't know any Albanian at all until... because when you go to school with all English people. And I hadn't been back to Kosovo until I was eight years old. So I'd forgotten my language. And then, obviously, I could speak to my parents a little bit, but not fluently. And then that's when we finally got the right to go on holiday again because everything had calmed down. So I went to Kosovo: back home.

And then, the first year, no one understood a word that I said back there. But after going there for several years I learnt it again.

I'd say a few words. But they'd be like, 'What's she saying?' and things like that. Every year I'd go back and ... well, not anymore because I'm fluent, but... and they'd be like, "Oh, you know a bit more Albanian, now. You're learning to speak better because the first time you came, we couldn't understand a word." Yeah, it is nice to see the difference.

I go back to both: I go to visit my family, my mum's side and one of my dad's, part of my dad's side in Macedonia in Skopje and then my dad's side in Kosovo.

NH: Where is it in Kosovo that he comes from?

FG: Lipljan, Suvi: it's a little village.

NH: So, your mum was saying something about you being scared of the police when you were a little girl. Can you remember any of that?

FG: I don't know, because as a child you're always scared of police but apparently it's because like, obviously, every that I'd seen in Macedonia, which I don't really remember because I was a baby, but, yeah, I guess I was scared of the police.

(04:07) NH: Your mum just told you a bit about what the camps were like, would you be able to just tell me some of the things she told you?

FG: Well, basically, we was there for three months and we were sleeping in tents. We'd have a little spongy mattress thing but obviously nothing comfortable. And then, there would be three families in one tent, sharing a tent, which I think is a lot of people for a tent. And then, also, they'd give us canned food. Did I say... did I mention we were there for three months? And yeah, it's just like a camp really, it's nothing special.

Basically they had some big like basins, sort of thing, where they'd heat water up. Like on a fire, outside the camp. They didn't have ovens, obviously. And, so they'd heat up the water on the fire and then they'd go somewhere a bit

more private, like a toilet I think it was, and then they'd use a jug to shower with, a jug and the water from the pan.

She was seven months pregnant at the time. Eight months pregnant, actually. Yes, so she was... that was when she had her first scan as well. She'd never had a scan beforehand, obviously, because she was scared of the hospitals in Macedonia, because of the way that they treated her. When she gave birth to me - they were horrible to her. She asked for water, obviously, and all they did was throw some on her face, and that was it, to try and cool her down. Whereas giving her a glass of water to drink - they didn't care about if she was in pain or anything and they just literally let her, like, left her.

NH: And, why did they treat her so badly?

FG: Because she was an Albanian from Kosovo. Obviously, she wasn't Macedonian, from their own country. So, they hated Kosovans, as well. They're basically like Serbian people: they don't really get along with Kosovans so that's why they treated her like that. Obviously, she was married to my dad who was Kosovan and because of everything that's happened that's I think why they discriminated against her.

They wouldn't listen to her, they wouldn't pay any attention to what she was saying and what she wanted or anything like that. They'd shout at her. Like, one case was they gave her a broken thermometer, the nurse gave her a

broken thermometer and when she gave it back to them they started screaming at her, saying, "Why've you broken our thermometer?" And it was only a thermometer; it wasn't anything expensive but they just had an excuse - used it as an opportunity to shout and scream or whatever.

NH: She was talking about the difference between Macedonia under those circumstances and she was only here [in Manchester] a month and then she had to give birth.

FG: Give birth to my brother.

NH: So what was it like for her when she first went into the hospital?

(07:20) FG: Well, obviously she was surprised at how different it was. First, the hospital itself: the way it looked was a lot better. But she was saying that there was air conditioning and everything here. She didn't even know she'd need water but obviously they gave her water as well to drink and things, keep hydrated, and they just treated her so well. She would have cried from happiness as well, but obviously because she was scared, like to give birth.

Kind of glad I don't remember it!

They put us on the list and thank God we came to England. Like, it's close to home because obviously America is great but it would have been so much harder to go and visit out family, back, like after.

And then, like I said earlier, I was at that community centre thing, where we stayed there for a couple of weeks. And, they were really nice people. They helped us; they spoke Albanian; we had translators and everything. And, they also gave us a phone, so we could call back home and see how everyone is. Obviously, some places wouldn't have a signal in Kosovo but the people that we did connect to; they told us about other family members and things. And we heard that most of them, all of them, were safe. So it was good to hear. And, that eased us a bit. Now we've settled down in England, we like it here a lot.

NH: At first, was it quite difficult for your mum?

FG: Yeah, she was really emotional. Obviously like, she'd just left her whole family behind in Macedonia and my dad's left his all in Kosovo. It wasn't easy for them but they've learnt to live with it now.

My family definitely see themselves as Kosovar, but me too, I'll never forget the culture, ever. And, even though I didn't know the language at one point in my life, now I'm so strong about it. I'm going to teach my kids, my little sister and make sure everyone in the family knows how to speak it. I do like to keep

the Kosovan culture. I am kind of strict with it, I don't know why but I just don't want to lose it: part of my identity and I'm happy that I'm Kosovan.

(08:43) NH: So what do you do at the moment? Are you studying?

FG: I'm studying Biomedicine at Uni. And, that's another thing I don't think if I'd have been in Kosovo I would have had this opportunity. Whereas here it's been amazing, I've been through school and everything and now I'm in Uni.

Well, I'm either thinking of doing medicine and becoming a doctor after it as graduate entry or become a lecturer, do a PhD and become a lecturer of one of the modules, not to sure.

NH: Is there anything in particular that made you want to become a doctor?

FG: I don't know, I think I've just always liked to help people. People have always said that I've got a nice heart and so... I don't know, because of everything that I've been through - I also had meningitis at one point and I've seen what the doctors did for me - so I thought, I wish I could do that for someone in the future. Save people's lives.

NH: That was when you were a little girl? Was that when you first came to England?

FG: No, it was when I was in Year Three, around eight years old - completely surrounded by doctors. I was like, "I want to be one of them one day."

NH: Have you ever been into a hospital in Kosovo?

FG: Yeah, it's a scary place. Yeah, I've been once and I don't really remember what for but they don't look as hygienic and everything as they do in England, obviously. And, thank God, I've near been to hospital there for myself because I'd be too scared of the doctors, I don't know why. But yeah, I have been and it's not up to the standard that it is here: which is quite sad, actually. I don't know, it's kind of important for hospitals to be clean and they need the right equipment but I don't think they do there yet.

NH: Would you ever be interested in going back and doing anything there medical wise?

FG: One day I'd love to open my own little practice there. That would be amazing.

NH: Thank you, that's really interesting.

FG: Thank you.

