

Pam Dawes interview by Naomi Hamill (57:20)

22nd March 2015

(00.00) NH: So this is Naomi Hamill recording for Manchester Aid to Kosovo project. Can you just tell me your name and where you were born, please?

PD: My name is Pam Dawes and I was born in South London.

NH: Thank you. So Pam, can you just firstly tell us a little bit about how you came to be involved with the Kosovars who moved to Manchester in the late nineties.

PD: Yes, I got involved because my friend phoned me up and said, would I go and help with the donations of humanitarian aid collections that were being collected in Urmston¹ because Manchester Aid to Kosovo had just formed in a pub. Five guys in a pub had been watching the news and just felt they had to do something. They couldn't just have a drink and carry on with their lives. So something had taken off really quickly in the Urmston area and my friend was involved. They moved from the pub, and I think I was away the days it actually formed. A week later it had moved into an empty Co-op supermarket and the donations were streaming in from throughout Manchester. And it could have ended there. My house full of bin bags 'cause I was sorting out stuff. People were giving me clothes, blankets, food, that sort

¹ A town in Trafford, Greater Manchester

of thing and we knew we were on course very quickly for a very, very big convoy² to go out to the camps in Albania. The convoy went to Albania.

I wasn't on the convoy but by the time it went out three weeks later, I knew the whole team. I knew, been involved with, a lot of the drivers and they were an incredible group of people and became friends. And when they left we actually did a farewell concert and fundraiser at The Trafford Centre. That was where my friend and I - one of the original group of guys - thought perhaps we could make some money for this work by doing a concert and he'd sort of said to me, "Do you know anything about Manchester music?" and I said, "Not much!" (laughs) "M People and what is it... Oasis?" And his experience was limited - although I think he was a bit of a DJ - but we decided we'd work together on that. And there had been a CD, we had already made a CD of a lovely song called 'Let love live again', the charity had.

So I was sort of moving into that area very early on from the blagging role that I'd got in the Co-op of phoning and getting more and more pallets and more and more donated specific things that the camp directors were telling us were needed. And one of guys was already in Albania co-ordinating what was needed and getting back to us. It could have ended there but it didn't.

² Paul Guest convoy diary <http://makonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/To-Hell-With-Hope.pdf>

The convoy went out - I wasn't part of the convoy - I think there were about forty MaK people on the convoy. But quite soon after that the aid kept coming in and the aid kept going out. My original friend, Veronica, who called me and said "Please come, we need you!" She committed about eighteen months of her life - she was quite an elderly lady by then, she was amazing - so the aid program went on at Manchester Airport Freight Terminal and Veronica headed it up. I was involved in music projects and trying to get an album together.

And then the Kosovars were evacuated to Manchester so what could have been just a short term project, suddenly changed because the people were here.

NH: So how had you first heard about the situation in Kosovo?

(4:08) PD: I didn't really know much about Kosovo and I was helping a little bit at a Christian organisation called Maranatha, and Dennis, who headed it up, I remember once - I was working there - and he was pacing around in the office. He quite a political person, and he spent a lot of time in parliament, he had been a councillor, and involved with a party and he was just really politically conscious. And I can remember my ears pricked up because he was angry and he was saying, "The government has to do something about Kosovo." This was the end of '98 and I had never heard of Kosovo, I didn't know where it was.

NH: So how did your relationship with Kosovo develop after all these convoys and everything?

PD: Of course the guys never even got into Kosovo because it was a war zone and it was quite, in a way frightening and it was frightening for them and their families because we didn't really know how it was going to escalate. And even, I think, when they were there, a [bus] convoy was actually accidentally hit by NATO because they thought it was a military convoy. Things like that were happening. Of course they came back and they were very emotional because of their experience with the refugees in the camps and how they had been received.

And there was one particular camp director, Bob (Johnson)³, who they formed an amazing relationship with, an American, who made them feel they'd done the right thing and had spent time really thanking them and perhaps talking to them about his life and his knowledge of the people so that they started to understand the history. And they all came back - I'm sure - changed people and so that affected me.

I met the Bogujevci⁴ children, and other children, at Blessed Thomas Holford School because in connection with the album - we were trying to produce to raise funds - we had found out that they had written a poem, the Kosovar

³ Camp Director, Bob Johnson, email available in this archive

⁴ Saranda, Fatos and Selatin/Jehona recordings recording available in this archive

children, only about six months after arriving with no English, they had written a poem, and one of my friends was teaching there and said, "Come down Pam, because I know you are involved in Manchester Aid to Kosovo and meet the children and you can get a copy of the poem." And I had already got an idea that we might use it on the album, which we did, we arranged it with a hip-hop beat and it's on the album⁵.

And when I went down there and found, I think, there were about twenty, Kosovar children and young people crushed in what was the medical room because the **head**⁶ had said, "We don't have the staff, we don't have the money, we don't have the teachers but these children should be kept together. They will support each other." And his school agree to take quite a large group in Trafford. I was really, really affected emotionally by the children and by this beautiful group of teachers that they'd drawn in: a nun; a very loving maternal woman; a teacher who spent half his time at Manchester United⁷ and the other half at Strangeways prison. They were all handpicked. And they were the people that really helped the healing process. So the children initially were just in this tiny room with the teachers and I was invited in and I think that was quite a turning point for me.

⁵ 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/>

⁶ Lou Harris, Head Teacher, recording available in this archive

⁷ Bernard Brown was teaching Manchester United international players English and also teaching in Manchester prison

NH So what happened next?

(07:43) So what happened after that was that I got to know a lot of the families and a lot of the children at that school. They got involved in the album; they found that exciting as that was new and different. They came to the launch of the album in the Lowry centre; they met artists such as Badly Drawn Boy and were really astonished that, you know... I remember them saying, "He's so famous and he's so rich but he looks poor." (laughs) The way he dressed. And they met him and he was very lovely with them. I think their expectations were very different of what 'famous' people were going to be like and then they found that famous people could just be very gentle and lovely and not ostentatious. Damon certainly wasn't ostentatious.

(09:00) And we went up to Scotland - because we have a house in Scotland - and took a group of them and that was actually an amazing experience. And when we were up in Scotland they kept telling me, "This is quite like Kosovo!" And they said they would like to make a park and the children actually said, "Could Manchester Aid to Kosovo make a Peace Park in their home town?" whilst we were in Scotland and started drawing plans for it. Selatin got quite excited about that. Because they had been really helped in their reception centre - which had been a centre for elderly people - and they'd been really helped by the fact it had a lovely park outside and play equipment. And they loved the parks and gardens of Manchester, and these

were completely new for them. So they thought, "Maybe people back home could benefit from what we've received."

But at the time all this was developing and the album was developing, we decided as Manchester Aid to Kosovo to find out more about MAG⁸ - The Mines Advisory Group - because they were Manchester based and we had read that they were working in Kosovo. So I also got quite involved with them because we thought perhaps we would be able to fund some of the work in Kosovo, which we did, with the sale of the album.

And so they had invited me to Kosovo. So I went to Kosovo in 2000 and saw for myself, really, the destruction from the war and the fact that, I think, at that stage, there was still about 60% of the housing stock was shelled, ruined, burnt: terribly badly damaged. The roads were terrible. I went to minefields with MAG and saw how critical that problem was. So that had a huge affect on me and I met some of the people who had come to Manchester and actually gone back very quickly to Kosovo, as well, on that visit. So that was very, very interesting for me to see people who had. There were one or two families who had come on a very short term basis and wanted to get back quickly. And it was hard but it was very interesting to see how they were trying to rebuild their lives back in Kosovo.

NH: Can you describe your first impressions of Kosovo when you were there?

⁸ <http://www.maginternational.org>

PD: When I was there in 2000, it was so totally different to going there now. Crazy driving because you were driving from Skopje. You couldn't fly into Prishtina in those days, it was a military airport. Driving in zigzags on the roads, with other traffic, driving in zigzags 'cause you were avoiding potholes and huge craters and things. So the actual journey from the airport actually into Kosovo, I'll never forget, and then just the amount of completely destroyed towns and villages and wondering where the people were. And beginning to see signs of new life such as small schools that had been rebuilt often by countries such as Sweden and Denmark, I found out, had quickly gone in and people had rallied round trying to build school and hospitals. I think the houses took longer. There were signs of new building and I found it terrible sad because in my mind then were the stories and film footage of the war and so I was thinking, all the time, about the terrible suffering and the areas where there weren't many people around and quite probably that was because some had been evacuated, but many had been killed.

NH: So you came back to the UK after you had visited Kosova and you got to know the children or the family more. What happened next?

(12.44) PD: Yes, I got to know, was really fortunate because some people were living close to me here. So that was lovely, they were in my community. And they were quite isolated, the children went to school, and thrived at school. From my knowledge, they were placed at brilliant schools where huge efforts were made to help them make friends and cope with that. You

have to remember a lot of the children spent a huge amount of time in hospital, in and out of hospital, as well, so the schools did such a great job helping them to feel part of the school community. The school, I mentioned, after about a year, I think they weren't in the medical room but fully absorbed into the school.

So I got to know some of the parents. At the time, in the early stages, I knew two widowed fathers who were coping with injured children, having lost their wives and some of their children, and their parents, in a massacre⁹. So I was slowly getting to know them. Then this family asked me what I thought about the children, who had survived the massacre of their family, going back... going to Belgrade for the first time. Going to Belgrade and giving evidence against the unit, the Scorpion unit, who had come in and massacred the family.

(14.17) 21 women and children were herded into a garden by armed police and soldiers. They were a unit which wore a mixture of uniforms but they were basically paid and armed by the state. So it was part of the state ethnic cleansing front line. They had arrested one of the men and another had fled - to Canada - but basically there was a court case being led by the

⁹ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/jul/10/warcrimes.balkans>

Humanitarian Law Centre¹⁰, which was a Serb led law centre in Belgrade, and they wanted the children to come out and give evidence.

And it was very, very difficult because the fathers were nervous about the children. The children, in a way, had to give evidence because the fathers were not involved in this as they had hid and fled as in ethnic cleansing it is often the men and boys who get killed. They didn't expect this group of very young children and their wives and their mother to be shot.

And I think I got very close to **Selatin**¹¹ because Selatin used to say he wanted the paramilitaries to be tried and he knew it rested on the children giving evidence. He wanted it to happen but he also wanted the children to be safe. And so we spent maybe about six months looking into the possible ways of doing it. I had friends who were lawyers, who were saying, "Bring them to us, we will provide video facilities." They were being very kind and saying all that can be done at Chambers in Manchester but basically the lawyers in Belgrade were saying, "We're not ready for that." And also I felt that the lawyer wanted the children to go, and I understood why. But they didn't really have video facilities in the court in Belgrade for it to be dealt with at a distance.

¹⁰ <http://www.hlc-rdc.org/?lang=de> See recording by Bekim Blakaj, Exec Director Kosovo HLC, in this archive

¹¹ Selatin Bogujevci recording available in this archive

(16.20) And so I was the link with the British Embassy, so I spent a lot of time co-ordinating with the British Embassy in Belgrade, who also wanted this trial to happen because it was Serbia's first domestic war crimes trial of its own war criminals, and it was an important trial. But they were very, very supportive and sympathetic because they knew that this was the first war crimes trial where children's evidence had been heard, because they're generally not regarded as good witnesses. But there was no choice. Every other adult had died.

So that was, I suppose, hugely challenging for all of us. And then when we were close to making an arrangement, which was very cleverly worked out by the British Embassy, whereby, Selatin did not want Serb soldiers to protect, and police, to protect the children because Serb soldiers and police had killed his family and already shot all these children. Every one of them had been recovering from bullet wounds. The Serb police, actually Djindjic¹² was killed - and may or may not have been connected with this trial - he was killed the day the trial opened in Belgrade. And after his assassination there was a special group of witnesses being protected by vetted police because those witnesses were so vulnerable because it was an inside job. It was negotiated by the British Embassy and the police and these 'specially vetted' would also look after the children. Plus some police who were ethnic Albanian, living in parts of Serbia, they were like Kosovan police, because the

¹² Serbia's Prime Minister

borders had changed regularly at that time (they were Serbs) but the family would connect with them as Kosovar ethnic Albanians.

(18.14) And that's what we did. So I went to Serbia with the children and their fathers, and that was in 2003. And we were in safe accommodation and it was very difficult but the children were extraordinary and gave very, very good testimony. They were extremely honest so I was impressed by that and as you would expect the British Embassy - who had helped a lot in the preparation for this - they were with us every step of the way, on every single journey. From the safe accommodation to the court, for example, we would be with - I think he was called the Second Political Secretary, or Under Secretary - anyway, one of the senior Embassy Staff, in the vehicle. And the vehicle would never be stationary. Police would be weaving around it to make sure that in any traffic jam, we got through. So they protected everybody amazingly.

(19:10) That was quite an extraordinary experience because, I think, the honesty of the children had filtered through to the Scorpions unit, and the fact that, in a way that, I suppose, they represented innocence, and they were reflecting - maybe some of them - on perhaps what they had done that day: these little children coming back, I was glad with perfect English, I was glad - I thought that was a really strong point in our favour - and challenged a lot of people's preconceptions. But anyway one of the paramilitaries turned State's Evidence, after they had left and returned, 'cause it wasn't

concluded when they were there. And he said, "I can't live with myself. I'm going to go into court and I am going to tell the court everything that happened."

(19.55) So this court case actually developed into a much, much bigger court case and that paramilitary even managed to obtain a video of home movies¹³, which the unit watched, of killings at Srebrenica in Bosnia, which were very much wanted - but the Commanders had put out a call for these videos which they used to watch as a kind of 'home movie'. And this particular man who was affected by the children's evidence had found, we heard, the last copy. And that was given to the lawyers and it eventually went to the government, and the state police, and was shown on television. So from the children and Selatin deciding, "Yeah, we ought to do it: we should." It actually turned into something massive¹⁴.

NH: The court case was one thing. So you'd been to Kosovo just the once before?

PD: (20.48) I had been to Kosovo in 2000 on my own, actually with the Imperial War Museum North¹⁵, because they were looking for artefacts for the new museum here. It was being created; it wasn't open. So I was working

¹³ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/jun/05/balkans.warcrimes>

¹⁴ <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Articles/Detail/?lang=en&id=53124>

¹⁵ <http://www.iwm.org.uk/visits/iwm-north>

with them and the Mines Advisory Group were also invited, so kind of they... and then the following year, actually I think 2002, I went with Manchester Aid to Kosovo in connection with the Peace Park¹⁶. And when we went over, we thought we were going to be offered a little patch of land to develop and we were (laughs) offered 22 acres of land - beautiful, beautiful site and that became a massive project for Manchester Aid to Kosovo.

(21.36) NH: So can you talk about that?

PD: When we were asked to create the Peace Park, it seemed a wonderful project, a very appropriate project but we didn't know anything about parks, creating parks or gardening really. We didn't know anything at all, most of the people in Manchester Aid to Kosovo at that time. But we all knew that we really wanted to do it.

And it was a strange cross-over from the music project because I was working on this Manchester album which was getting bigger and bigger. And I was very lucky as because in 1999/2000 as well as Badly Drawn Boy, who I have mentioned, Elbow were just beginning really, they were in their early twenties. People like Mr Scruff were big in Manchester and Doves were very big in Manchester, well, when I say was very big, within the indie scene. And I'd got to know Elbow through the album project and they'd offered us one of their best tracks ever, which is called 'Scattered Black and Whites', which was

¹⁶ <http://makonline.org/home/peace-park/>

perfect. That came out on our album before they put it out on anything so they were very, very kind.

And I went down to the Eden Project¹⁷, to see them, because they were performing there, and they were friends, really. Whilst we there, people at the Eden Project - I knew one of the stewards and she said to me, "You know, you really should tell the management about the Manchester Peace Park. They'll be interested." And I thought this was a huge step and that I wasn't confident about approaching them but she pushed me in that direction. I went into this beautiful management offices, set high on the bowl above the Eden Project and at the reception when I said "I'm from Manchester Aid to Kosovo, I came down with Elbow, really, and I've been told that you might be interested," and a voice behind me said, "I'll see you, I'm very interested in the Manchester Peace Park." And it was the Artistic Director, Sue Hill, who then drew a team of people together and by the end of that day, the Landscape Architect of the Eden Project, Jane Knight, had arranged to come out and see the Peace Park.

So the Peace Park then developed with the Eden Project¹⁸: which was a miracle. And we went on to do more concerts and from one of them, I think, we raised about fourteen thousand pounds. So that was an amazing coming

¹⁷ <https://www.edenproject.com>

¹⁸ <https://www.edenproject.com/sites/default/files/documents/eden-project-peace-park-kosovo.pdf>

together of music and the horticulturists, and ecologists and Manchester Aid to Kosovo. We went on to do so many things with Eden: art projects and residencies, and they have just been the most wonderful partners.

NH: So how has the Park developed? What's the story of the Park?

(24.26)PD: The story of the park is that it was a very challenging, very challenging, piece of work. One of the early challenges was, even with my knowledge of landmine issues, and Paul, who was chairing MaK at the time I think, **Paul Guest**¹⁹, coming from Manchester Ambulance Service; we were really concerned that it had to be a safe place. So one of the first things was actually working with the de-miners in Kosovo, who were mainly Brits who had been in the Army - or were still in the Army some of them - and had developed a real specialism in that and they were being called regularly to check out ordnance which was being spotted all over Kosovo including included cluster bombs.

But they came to us and they used all their GPS readings and tracked that there had never, ever been anything found on the park. There had never been even dead animals found in a group - where sometimes they think that can be caused by a triggered explosive - and they pretty confidently stated that they thought we could develop the land as a park.

¹⁹ Paul Guest recording included in this archive

25.37 So that was the beginning. Then, working with the Municipality, and trying to turn this patch of land and woodland which had been loved by the local people -it's in Podujeva, north east Kosovo - and children would go there for their special day, once a year, before the war. Going back, I think, couple of generations, it had been the place to go and celebrate and have games but it had been completely messed up in the war. It was a terrible mess when we were there. It was really a case of, not creating a brand new park, but of improving and claiming back this cherished land. We're still doing it. That's where all our activities with children take place. Really, from those days when we started working together with local people, children would be hanging around, and then one of the volunteers, who was a teacher, started doing separate work with them, because they got in the way a bit, really (laughs). Some of them were great, the teenagers, but the very young ones, couldn't do very much and so that developed into the Children's Programme.

Artists came to help us. That developed into an Art Programme²⁰ which has resulted in, I think, probably twenty to thirty residencies in the UK for artists and lots of artists going out there. And I think, by now, a couple of hundred volunteers have been involved in activities on the Peace Park, from the UK, and an equal number in Kosovo. So it's very much developed into teamwork:

²⁰ <http://makonline.org/home/art/>

not just Manchester going out and doing stuff, although initially it was a mixed group of people that were evacuated from here with Brits from the UK. But a good development is that more and more of the local people work with us now. And it's not finished and it never will be but it's looking amazing.

NH: Can you describe it to us. What does the Park look like if you walk around it?

(27.30) PD: The park is on the edge of Podujeva, which is a big town close to the Serb border, very close to the Serb border, so that's one of the reasons why we think it was hit so badly, way back in March 1999, and for many weeks after that. It's on the edge of a town. Podujeva municipality has got a population of about 130,000 people: most of them probably live in Podujeva town, but there are lots of villages, about 80 villages. And it's on the edge of a railway station. There was a train which has not worked since the war. I think sections of the track were bombed by NATO. I think the Serb army was hiding in tunnels and I've heard there was quite a lot of fighting around the railway. The railway may not be in that location again. But it's next to all sorts of fascinating railway installations, and the station house and there are pumps where they pumped the water into the trains from a reservoir, which is actually on the Peace Park. So that's all quite fascinating.

And it's got a field, probably about a third of the site is a flat field, then there's woodland dense woodland and then there's a summit. And the summit has a disused Serb Orthodox Church on it because there was a small

population in the town. And now it has a beautiful garden, which was planted in 2008, with thousands of shrubs, and trees and roses. So there is a Peace Garden within the Peace Park.

There's a children's play area, there's the beginning of sports facilities, but we want to put a bit more money into those sports facilities if we can. Loads of people play football there and there's a trim trail for athletes. And then there's this beautiful woodland a dense woodland with little paths intersecting the woodland and a summit with incredible views at the top of the park.

And there's art as well, in the garden itself we've installed a beautiful life size nude figure, sitting on a bench, called 'Thinking Man' and some other pieces of art, Slowly, slowly we are developing it and trying to do education because that piece of art actually got stolen for its metal value, so we have disasters but we keep going a step at a time, trying to do more and more education about public property and public art. And the community is beginning to really recognise this as a piece of land that they own and that they can look after and develop themselves. That's what they want.

NH: So MaK's evolved into more than just a group of people making a Peace Park, can you tell us more about MaK as an organisation?

(30.35) MaK's developed into a charity which has quite diverse projects. Nearly everyone involved in MaK is a volunteer and always have been. The

two paid staff are gardeners of the Peace Park in Kosovo so although we are a tiny charity, we are totally committed to paying their wages and trying to raise funds so that the Peace Park will, for quite some years, be controlled by our paid staff who we also train up to some extent, who are fabulous, but we try and support them in many ways.

So MaK has volunteers from all walks of life. Quite a few teachers are involved in MaK because the educational side of the work has become more and more important to us and more important within a recovering Kosova.

(31:37) So we've developed an IT project²¹. We're always open to suggestions from our volunteers So for example, one of the Summer Club²² leaders was doing a PhD actually, at Oxford, and she had noticed that there were very few computers. It was under a hundred computers for thousands and thousands of children. And so she was keen to do something about that. We have now created about 15 IT suites, with donated computers, and then preparing these: loading them with what is needed in the schools. And they have gone into primary schools and secondary schools, very much in our area. Something we decided was to try and make an impact on one particular area rather than spread ourselves really thin. So we're very much focused on Podujeva.

²¹ <http://makonline.org/home/education/it-projects/>

²² <http://makonline.org/home/education/childrens-summer-club/>

And we also have students and school student come out with us which is fabulous, making connections with the young people there. So they come out and work: sometimes on the park, sometimes in the Summer School. We have practical groups who are just involved on the Peace Park and have been involved in building teams.

(32.55) And we're really open to receiving new volunteers in MaK. We're always interested. We want to do more arts projects; we want to do more music projects. And we're keen to try and have more of an impact medically 'cause a lot of help is needed there - so very interested if anyone would be interested in introducing more therapies. We have a link with a Psychiatric Day Centre and we are trying to create a garden there as well but also introduce the idea of using the park for therapy for clients there. And a lot of these ideas are fairly new. So we're taking it just one step at a time and that seems to be the way it works.

So MaK is now 16 years in and it's built on relationships so relationships with people here, in the UK, inside the Kosovar community and also outside the Kosovar community, and also relationships in Kosovo.

NH: So for you personally, what does Kosovo mean to you and what does MaK mean to you?

(33.55) MaK is a huge part of my life. It's changed my life. That day I took the black bags full of clothes and blankets really changed my life in a way totally, because it's affected my whole family.

My mother-in-law, who died last year - aged 96 -, was one of the English people who pronounced Podujevë best. She was a linguist, but, you know, she would talk about MaK and all the wonderful friends she had made through Manchester Aid to Kosovo and it affected her life, hugely: ask my kids and my husband.

It's been very, very hard at times.

When I went to Belgrade prison with the children, they had to I.D. a prisoner. I could not really express to anyone the sense of darkness and evil, really, especially when I was with this beautiful 13 year old little girl who'd been shot so badly - holding her hand - and she had to stand in the prison. And this group of 'body builders' came out. I think there was two-way glass so they couldn't see us. And I remember that day just feeling completely overwhelmed by some kind of power - maybe it was a spiritual thing, in some way I thought it was - and the fact the man she I.D.ed was smiling and all the other men, who she didn't I.D., were making themselves look really fierce, so I felt that there was something they had set up there, the prisoners.

And when I say it's changed my life, in some ways it's been really, really hard but... Obviously I've listened to people's experiences and the deaths of the

children, particularly, are very, very hard to deal with - even though I never met them - but they were as beautiful and as wonderful as the all children I know. They were just the unlucky ones...

And yet, it's brought such richness to my life.

(36.40) It's also puzzled me because things have happened, for example, the surviving children in the family that I'm closest to - which is the **Bogujevci**²³ family - three surviving girls were all born on the same day - different years, none of them twins - they were all born on 12th June.

And then, to go on, when they were awarded the Anne Frank Award²⁴ for Moral Courage, because of what they did going back and giving evidence - some children actually selected them and wanted to give them that prize - and when the Anne Frank Trust contacted me and they were asking about the children and I strangely said, not, "Oh, they're 13" or whatever, for some reason, just for some reason as it was very formal said, "I'll give you their dates of birth". And then we found that the girls were all born on the same day as Anne Frank, and the Director just couldn't speak. And then we found out that Kosovo was liberated on June 12th, which is the same day.

Sometimes you start to see a pattern that you can't understand.

²³ Selatin/Jehona, Saranda and Fatos Bogujevci recordings available in this archive

²⁴ <http://www.annefrank.org.uk/>

And you sometimes wonder, "How did Saranda survive?" I think she received about 15 bullets, I don't know exactly. And you do question, and you just have to lay it to rest in a way and say well I don't understand it. It's bigger than I can understand. But there have been very many occasions like that when I have felt overwhelmed. And the children are puzzled by certain things but, you know, what can I say?

So it's changed my life; it's enriched my life;, at times it's made me, not really weep, because I think I got quite hardened quite early on. And maybe doing things like being involved with the Mines Advisory Group: I was in hospital in 2000 watching children die from standing on landmines who'd just been out playing football. And things were happening that were hardening me up. And then after that I went to Belgrade and listened to evidence. And I think, in a strange way, maybe I was being prepared.

(39.00) So there has been that side that I wish no-one had to know about and no-one had to listen to because it's bad, it's bad that little children get blown to bits and it's bad that little children get shot. But for some reason I ended up doing it. I don't really know why.

And I kind of felt that the music project, which I did get deeply involved in and I'm still involved in, was almost like a gift to me - 'cause I love music - and that that helped with all the darkness. That was just what was going to lift me to another place and a release. I was actually able to do that, almost before

the other side got really difficult. I was already deeply involved in the music, and continue to be.

(39:55) When people were brought in 1999²⁵, they hadn't chosen to come to the UK. They'd been in camps, often in Macedonia, just over the border, some in Albania, too, and they were allocated to host countries all over the world. If people had relatives, they could perhaps mention that so they might be linked with relatives who had already emigrated and the evacuation was massive so basically people were going as far as Canada, I think, Australia. But the neighbouring countries, particularly Switzerland and Germany I think hosted the highest numbers of refugees and so the UK was part of this humanitarian plan because Kosovo had, in effect, been destroyed. 50% of all the primary schools were damaged, about 60-70% of the housing stock was classified as either gone, burnt or destroyed or very, very bad. There were no jobs. The roads were terrible. Medical services had collapsed and were pretty minimal. It was very, very critical that humanitarian responses from throughout the world made it possible for people to stay alive, in effect, because people couldn't continue living in these incredibly overcrowded camps.

We know that people were sometimes just given a few hours notice that they might be coming to the UK, and with regards Manchester, maybe they didn't

²⁵ See timeline in this archive

even know until they were on the plane that the plane was going to actually land in Manchester. When they got to Manchester, maybe they thought they would live in Manchester but they actually might go and live in a tiny village, such as one of our families in Ulverston, in Cumbria, in a very, very rural setting. So it was extraordinary, the different locations and the effect it could have on your life. To some extent, just random allocation.

In Manchester... we know that over 4,000 people were brought to the UK and well over half of these people were thought to have special needs. Now that could mean that you had young children and that life would be difficult without a degree of support, or it could be that you had a very serious illness, it could be that you were dying and in our Manchester community there were people in all those groups. And there was an agreement that the hospital services and the social services, housing facilities, would actually be adequate in the north and it would be better to avoid the overcrowding of the south-east and London.

So Manchester, Leeds and Glasgow received the bulk of the Kosovar refugees that were evacuated to those airports because they were regarded as needing particular support and - I can only talk about Manchester - but in Manchester it was really well planned and the reception was extremely warm and the facilities were in place, largely because of volunteers and voluntary organisations really rallied around. Places like disused schools had been converted with massive effort. For example, a lot of our aid which was

collected in places like schools and churches included emergency resources which went to people when they arrived, it not only went to Kosovo, but included huge amounts of clothing and toiletries, and wheelchairs and things like that, that people were known to need. If any need wasn't met, there were often organisations, frequently led by churches, where the appeal would go that we need certain things, in a reception centre. It was a very effective and efficient, loving response, really, when these people came, often just with the clothes that they were standing up in.

(44:16) And then there was a question of going back. So it was quite quickly realised by the United Nations Mission in Kosovo [UNMIK], that people who had on the whole had arrived about May/June and in Manchester - a few more in September of the severely injured families and young people, who had been receiving a little bit of medical care were transferred out to get better care - it was realised by United Nations that with the Kosovo winters (which were freezing) and the state of collapse in the country (because of the war and huge bombing campaign by NATO as well as all the problems that had been caused by the Serb army destruction of the country) returning was not viable.

And they actually sent out requests to all the host countries saying, "Hold back, these people cannot be forced back quickly because - although there's a degree of peace and stability - there's nothing."

(45:44) In England, it started to affect the planning, long term. So, for example, people who were in emergency accommodation like a converted school, the local authorities started to say, "We'll allocate these families now to a house or a flat" and the families were very, very grateful although they'd enjoyed often being together and supporting each other for that first few months - sometimes it went on 'til about a year. They were ready to have a little bit more space and they'd started to feel they understood the way things worked here. And the children were often at school.

So throughout Europe there were different responses²⁶. For example, in Germany and Switzerland, they forced back very quickly - although they had received very high number of refugees - they forced back thousands of people. I think Germany forced back nearly 7,000 people in 2000 whereas in the UK, we had a much smaller number of, I think, just over 4,000 people who were evacuated and about 37 went back. Some of them might have been quite happy to go because, you know, they wanted to go back, because of families and their family was back or they thought they could rebuild their lives straight away: they had some need to get back quickly.

But for many people it was desperately worrying because they knew their homes had been destroyed. There weren't going to be particularly generous

²⁶ <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/X2H-Xref-ViewHTML.asp?FileID=9230&lang=en>

allowances and help to get back on your feet. And people were feeling broken in those early days. It was a huge thing to go back and completely rebuild your home and sort out where your children would go to school, if the school hadn't been rebuilt. And if you needed any kind of medical help, you had no idea where you would get that. It was very, very daunting for people and perhaps more so when they felt they'd been greeted lovingly. They had been greeted lovingly, and a lot of need - on a very basic level - had been met. But there were roofs over people's heads. There was a neighbourly feel in a lot of the communities with support from a lot of different organisations including churches, including Muslim organisations. I know someone for example, who is a hairdresser and he went in regularly to reception centre and was very, very much appreciated by the men - he was a man's hairdresser - and it was great as it was a way that friendships were made. That's what was happening in England.

There was a policy to go and look and see how your home was and people were given free flights and invited to do that. It was done too early, I think, in the snow of 2000: people came back a bit shocked and shaken up. And then - I think, gradually - people got part of their communities. At first it was difficult to work: of course, a lot of people wanted to work so that had to be sorted out 'cause it was illegal. But gradually people started to really become part of the host communities. Definitely, that happened in Manchester.

(49:23) There were long terms needs.

For example, the Bogujevci family, there were five children who were receiving medical treatment and they were brought to Manchester because it was one of the best places - probably in the world - to treat them for multiple gunshot wounds. And the surgeons were saying, "We haven't finished: this is not something that we can do in a year, this is going to be a series of operations and physio." And they were making fantastic progress but that particular family were given a refusal of asylum. Initially you came under a special invitation, really, as an evacuated person and then people were told, well, you need to apply for asylum and then strangely enough these people who had never actually chosen to come to the UK for asylum, were refused asylum. So it was a very awkward situation legally, and emotionally, especially, if you remember that people hadn't really made that choice to go to any particular country. In a way, the choice had been made for them.

But it seemed as if, all over the country, communities were getting behind individual families and children and saying, "These people are contributing so much". Particularly schools said that: "These pupils have been so wonderful, they came with no English, they were already contributing enormously to the school community," partly in their ability to talk about human rights and their own experiences. Luckily, the government actually listened. We fought quite hard in South Manchester for several families in that early stage or roundabout 2000. The doctors and surgeons, and all the people who had been involved in what had been extremely skilled care that would probably

have just come to nothing - if it had ended suddenly - they of course, supported it and said, you know, in medical terms, "This is not a plan. This is not a strategy. This is crazy. Compassion cannot run out just after several months of care."

And the government re-thought this. At the same time, the United Nations Mission in Kosovo were saying, "Don't force a return. The country cannot cope." This is going to be a long term program to get this country - which also had the complexities of different ethnicities wanting to come back - trying to retain stability. That was an enormous internal issue - that had to be sorted out - whereby Albanian and Serbs would be able to live together: so this all resulted in a much more relaxed attitude to the evacuated Kosovars staying on in England. There had been appeals. There had been rethinking in Kosovo. There had been responses in some countries, for example in Canada, where a lot of people were evacuated - and I think it's under populated - they wanted 15,000 more because they said, "These people are great!" And actually the Kosovar government back at home said, "You can't have them (laughs) because we need to rebuild our country!" It was very interesting.

People settled in England and that's really the background to how some people are still here.

(53:00) There was also an amnesty for families where children had been born in the UK - after the war - it was felt that the UK was their home. They'd never known anything else. Some people wanted to go back. We know of

someone ²⁷whose parents went back very quickly and their son, who had been widowed, felt that he couldn't bear to see that his elderly parents had gone back, their house was destroyed and they'd lost everything. They had no income; their jobs had gone and he could work in Kosovo as an interpreter; he had good English; he was bilingual. And he thought he could go back and be involved in rebuilding and support his family: and he went. But he was in an exceptional situation. Sadly, he went home as a widower. They had been brought here because his wife was desperately ill with cancer. She became ill during the exodus and she died in Manchester. But he went back quite early and there were people like him who wanted to get back. And people still feel, a little, Kosovo is home. Kosovo is my land. Kosovo is where all my memories are.

More will return. Just last year, one of the children who was evacuated decided to go back and work in Kosovo²⁸. Some now have got British passports so there is a much greater freedom to travel in and out of the country. And some people still don't have legal documents. It's quite complex: they're still on kind of emergency documents, so it's different for everyone.

²⁷ Amir Lamaxhema recording included in this archive

²⁸ See Saranda Bogujevci recording in this archive

On the whole, in the Manchester area, it was felt that very few people were in any way forcibly made to return and people were welcomed to make Manchester their home.

(54:56) Ends

(57:20) recording ends