

ORAL HISTORY INDEX AND SUMMARY

Interview with: Fatos Bogujevci

Date: 16/1/16

Location: Manchester

Total duration: 1 hour 11 minutes 32 seconds.

Interview by Pam Dawes and summary by Kelly Bücher.

The interview plays as one long recording

1.	Start time	Finish time	Approximate duration	Brief description
	00.00	1:11:32	1:11:32	Fatos talks about his life before the war as a child in Kosovo and when he first noticed changes due to the war. Fatos describes the massacre of his family which he and four other children survived in Podujeva, Kosovo. He describes being taken to Prishtina Hospital for treatment. He describes the Liberation of Kosovo, meeting British medics, his medical evacuation with his cousins and recovery in both Manchester. Fatos talks about giving evidence in Belgrade against the Serbs who massacred many members of his family and the outcomes. He discusses the Bogujevci // Visual History exhibition.

<p>Pen sketch</p>	<p><i>Fatos speaks of an innocent childhood with his extended family in the bustling town of Podujeva, close to the Serb border in NE Kosovo, enjoying visits to his relatives in the countryside. As a child, he became aware of developing problems. His father and uncle lost their jobs as electricians at the power station and he witnessed the escalating presence of Serb police and the military in his town. On March 28th 1999 an armed, uniformed, Serb unit, responsible for ethnic cleansing, entered Podujeva. The unit forced Fatos and all the women and children in his family into the corner of a secluded garden. They were all shot, together with their close friends the Duriqis. Left for dead, five Bogujevci cousins, including Fatos, survived. After the Liberation of Kosovo the children were found and medically evacuated by the British Army. Fatos attended a Catholic Secondary School in Trafford and went on to college and university. Along with his young cousins, Fatos gave evidence in Belgrade against the unit responsible for the massacre of his family. He and his cousins have received the Anne Frank International Award for Moral Courage. Fatos married Aulona, also from Podujeva, and lives in South Manchester. He is an artist and employed as a graphic designer.</i></p>
<p>Summary of interview content</p>	<p>(00:00) Fatos talks a little about his life before the war when he was a child living in Kosovo. He talks about being from a town called Podujeva which is in Kosovo. He was born on the 16th July 1986. He lived with his parents and grandmother in a small house with his older sister Nora and two younger sisters, Jehona and Lirie. He also lived with his youngest brother Genc and was next to his uncle's family. There were quite a few people living together and it was a great atmosphere.</p> <p>He went to a school called Shaban Shala. He says that life before the war was really good. He has really good memories of playing with the other kids in the neighbourhood.</p> <p>He says that his best memories are those of visiting his uncles in the countryside. They used to get really hot summers and really cold winters.</p> <p>He says that as a child, he could not really understand what was going on until problems really blew up. He says he remembers his parents have difficulty going to work but his school was not closed. He didn't have much contact with Serb kids so they didn't feel the changes as much. So it was harder for him to notice a change until he saw tanks coming in through his town and he started hearing gunshots in the night. He says he also saw police patrolling the streets. He talks about being 12 or 13 when he first heard gunshots and saw tanks.</p> <p>He says that his mum used to work in hospital as a nurse and his dad worked in a power plant in Obiliç, which is near the capital Prishtina. He says that his mum had a lot of trouble going to work and getting back. He thinks at one point she had to really run back home because there were snipers everywhere and they were just shooting people that they saw in the street.</p> <p>Fatos talks about Serbian troops moving into different villages around the town centre. He says it was getting very scary at night and then the N.A.T.O. started bombing Serbia so they could also hear air strikes at night. He describes this as being scary. He says that the police station used a siren, a very frightening sound, too.</p> <p>Fatos talks about them constantly thinking of ways to stay safe and avoid Serbian troops. He says that people had to move from house to house to try to stay safe.</p> <p>He says that one day the Serbs started shooting from the top of the police building and they all just ran. He describes a Serb army vehicle parking in front of their house. They ran to another house at the back of their garden to try to stay safe when the troops started smashing windows.</p> <p>(07:20) Fatos says that they stayed there for a couple of hours and then they saw Serbian police army forces going into their neighbour's houses, breaking the windows and taking the people out. He says that as they were leaving the house, about 5 or 6 Serbs came into the garden and told them to drop all their stuff that they had with them. He says that then they</p>

took them through their 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 men to take them back into their neighbour's garden. That's where they were all shot and left for dead.

He says that there were eighteen of them in the garden, all women and children, who were shot: his family and his dad's friend's family, the Duriqis. He says that the fathers were not there as it was generally thought that men were in the most danger so they hid elsewhere.

Fatos says that the group were a Serb army unit called the Scorpions.

He says that there were just five survivors: himself, two of his sisters, his brother and his cousin, who all pretended to be dead.

After the Scorpions left the garden, people came in - possibly medics - and took a few of the children to Prishtina Hospital (commandeered by the Serb army) where they stayed until the N.A.T.O. troops came into Kosovo.

Fatos says that the Scorpion units were using Kalashnikov AK47s.

Fatos describes the treatment they received in Prishtina Hospital. He remembers travelling in the same vehicle as his sister, Jehona. He says that when they first arrived, he was left on the floor of the reception for ten or fifteen minutes. Fatos says that the hospital was run by Serbs. He says that his was given no pain relief or anaesthetic, even when they were removing bullets from his wounds.

He says that, at that point, he didn't know who else was there and had survived. He had only seen Jehona's jumper. As he was taken out of the operation room, he remembers seeing his younger sister, Liria, in the corridor. He says that she was just crying and telling some people that she was really cold.

He says he and his younger brother Genc spent time in a room together with little contact with medical staff. They were fed a little food but not much.

(10:51) He talks about Genc's injuries. The staff had decided to leave a bullet in his leg. He was about six or seven at the time. Fatos says that the girls were in a different department. He and Genc had only found out that they were there a month or two after. He says that he was very unsure about who had died and who had survived that day in the garden. He describes reassuring his younger brother that their mother was fine but really knowing that she had not survived. He says that until this incident, they had not really expected overt violence towards women and children.

Fatos describes his sister, Lira's injuries. He says that she was shot in the throat so her condition was definitely worse than his. From that night in the Prishtina Hospital, she was taken to Belgrade Hospital where she stayed until September of the same year. She had to be taken there in order for her life to be saved as Prishtina Hospital was not capable of dealing with her injuries.

He says that no one saw her again until she came to England when she was ten-years-old.

(20:40) Fatos describes his father coming to see them in the hospital which was a really dangerous thing for him to do. Fatos talks about his father coming to visit them in the hospital and how he did not recognise Fatos' little brother, Genc, at first, as he had lost so much weight. He says that he would bring them food and water whenever he could. Fatos says that they were given leftovers and watered down milk so lost a lot of weight, as they were not being fed properly.

He says that Serb soldiers were being treated in the hospital so it was very dangerous to move around the hospital as well.

Fatos says that later on they were put in the same department with other Albanian patients who had either got trapped as patients in the Hospital when the war started or some of them were brought with the same injuries as them.

He talks about the danger his father was in when he went to visit his children in Prishtina Hospital. Fatos says there were some but not many ethnic Albanians living in Prishtina at that point and they were quite hidden.

He says that his father had been living in the hills, at the time of the massacre in the garden, so it took some time for him to get information about what had happened and he had heard conflicting accounts. Even when he saw his children in hospital, he was still not sure who else might have survived.

(27:55) He says when some of them were more mobile; they would go and sit in the hospital garden together.

Fatos describes a French TV crew coming to the hospital and telling them to say that they had been injured by N.A.T.O. bombing. He says that they did as they were told as it would have been dangerous for them not to, even though it was not true. Fatos says that his cousin Saranda had been shot sixteen times.

He says that things changed when Kosovo was liberated. He recalls hearing N.A.T.O. air forces in the night but they didn't know what was going on at the time. He says that after a few months he and Genc were taken to a different building of the hospital, so we were away from the girls. They spent about three or four weeks there. He remembers seeing troops that looked different to the Serb troops.

(32:45) Before seeing the British troops and N.A.T.O in the hospital, he describes Russian soldiers being in the hospital and shooting, singing and celebrating inside the hospital and how the children just pretended to be asleep. Fatos describes seeing less and less Serbian staff at the hospital.

(35:00) He says that only a few days later when they were outside the hospital, his dad's cousin who was with them and spoke English, approached some British Army troops and after telling them their situation, asked if they would provide the family with any help to which they replied, "Of course." He says that within the next few minutes, they called someone and they came and picked them up. They took them to a nearby military hospital where they gave them initial treatments and from there it was just one meeting after another.

Fatos says that after that everything changed for them. He says that Jehona and Saranda still needed treatment because they were really badly injured. Genc was ok at this point, as well. He was starting to walk as well.

(37:00) Fatos says that British Army surgeon David Vassallo helped them and saw the girls a few times. They didn't return to Prishtina Hospital. They then went to Manchester in England for further medical treatment.

Fatos says that the bodies of the members of his family that were killed were found and buried properly with proper funerals.

(39:37) Fatos says that he believes the British were in charge of Prishtina and Podujeva at this point.

(41:11) He describes his flight to England via Italy as surreal. He says that he did not know they were coming to Manchester or where it was beforehand. Although he had heard of Manchester United. He describes his memories of first landing in Manchester. He remembers it being like something out of a movie and how everybody was really nice to them

Fatos talks about living in Meadow Court in Hale, with other refugee families from Kosovo. He describes how all the rooms were prepared for them when they arrived and that they had their own rooms.

He says that the girls had to go to hospital and they had to spend a lot of time in hospital. He would go and visit them with his dad, most of the time.

(44:42) He talks about attending a local Catholic Secondary School, Blessed Thomas Holford in Altrincham. He talks about going to the mass on Friday which he considered weird but harmless for them to be present. Fatos describes being taught English in school. He talks about everybody being nice to them: the teacher and the other pupils. Fatos talks about his involvement in writing a poem about his experience of the war in Kosovo soon after first arriving in Manchester. The line he contributed was

'Twenty thousand hours in a day'

(47:50) This describes how the days seemed to go on forever when they were constantly in fear and traumatised.

He talks about leaving school with his G.C.S.E.s and how he then went to Six Form College. He says that he went to Sir John Deane's College in Northwich. He did his A levels there. He says that he studied Graphic Design, Media Studies, I.T. and Business Studies.

(51:00) Fatos talks about designing the logo for charity Manchester Aid to Kosovo. He says that he wanted to do something peaceful but with an Albanian identity. He wanted to use a flower and the Albanian double-headed eagle as well. So he combined the two to create the logo.

(52:40) He talks about the 'Manchester Peace Park' in Podujeva. He says that it has been developed thanks to Manchester Aid to Kosovo and is a place where children can play like the parks in Manchester. It was the children's idea.

Fatos talking about going to Sir John Deane's College to study 4 A levels and then to Salford University where he graduated in Graphic Design. Fatos says that he finished University in 2009. Then he went back to Kosovo to work in about 2010. He had been going back to Kosovo every summer. He says that a lot of people were returning to Kosovo at this time to contribute to society.

(54:06) Fatos talks about going back to work in Kosovo where he got to work on some really huge projects as a Graphic Designer. Whilst he was there, he met a girl, as well. He decided to come back to England to work. He talks about now having a British Passport but previously having had some issues with asylum shortly after the family was medically evacuated to England.

(56:23) Fatos says that they had never actually applied for asylum and were brought here by the British Army for medical treatment. He says that they did not feel it was right for them to explain their reason why they wanted to stay here. They were brought here because they needed help and at the time of the asylum issues they thought they still needed help. He says that his sisters were still undergoing intensive medical treatment at that time. Fatos says that his Head Teacher, doctors, Pam Dawes of Manchester Aid to Kosovo and Beverley Hughes, M.P. were all very sympathetic about their wish to remain in Manchester.

(59:30) Fatos describes going to the Domestic War Crimes Trial in Belgrade as a witness when he was fifteen/sixteen-years-old. They had Natasha Kandic from the Humanitarian Law Centre in Belgrade with them, along with a lawyer over there, who were working on their case. The children went to Belgrade in 2003 to give evidence. Fatos describes the accused, Sasa Cvjetan, being sat maybe just a couple of metres away from them in the courtroom whilst they gave evidence against him. He says that they had to go back and give testimony

again a few years later with 100% convictions against the indicted men.

Fatos talks about winning the Anne Frank Trust Award for Moral Courage which was presented to them by Anne Frank's cousin in London at a prestigious ceremony.

(1:02:00) He says that then they went to together with some other young people who had won other awards to Holland for a couple of days. And they visited Anne Frank's house and museums.

Fatos talks about the legal case being driven by a Serb activist, Natasa Kandic and her staff.

Fatos describes that after they had all graduated from University, they decided to present an art exhibition to tell their story. He says that it starts with the first installation of how life was before the war in Kosovo. And then it moves into another installation where it shows the actual tragedy of the war where they lost their family and the effect that had on their family. And then it moves into the period of the time in Prishtina Hospital and then finally an installation shows their journey on the path to justice. He describes the exhibition in Prishtina as having the most visitors of any other show at the National Gallery. It broke visitor records. And then from Prishtina they showed it in the National Gallery of Tirana in Albania. He says that from there they took it to Belgrade where it had a massive impact as well. There was a lot of media coverage and the Serbian Prime Minister came to the opening.

(1:09:48) Fatos talks about the exhibition being shown in Belgrade and describes protests outside the gallery. He says that a lot of people gained a chance to see exactly what had happened in Kosovo. There were people participating in workshops so he would say it had a very positive effect on some people.

He talks about wanting to bring the exhibition to Manchester. Fatos says that the exhibition his family created, with curator James Walmsley, is called "Bogujevci // Visual History".

Fatos talks about the foundation he and his family have set up. They think that it is important to work with victims of war. They have set up their Bogujevci 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 people are affected by conflict.