

Interview with Rev. Bruce Thomson and Pam Dawes (54.14)

Assisted by Selatin and Safet Bogujevci

8th April 1015

(00.00)

(00.00) PD: This is Pam Dawes, with Reverend Bruce Thomson interviewing for Voices of Kosova in Manchester and it's the 8th April 2015. And would you like to say your name first, Bruce and perhaps introduce yourself.

BT: My name, my name is the Reverend Bruce Thomson, I am Chair of the Lincolnshire Methodist District but from 1992-2002 I was Minister of Timperley Methodist Church in South Manchester.

PD: And we're here today, Bruce, in a Methodist Church, Sheffield, because it's in between Manchester and Lincolnshire and I'm here with Safet, Banush and Selatin, your old friends from the Altrincham area when you were Methodist Minister there. And I'd like to go right back and ask you about the thoughts that you had the concerns you had for Kosova, when you were a Minister. Before anyone arrived, these people were on your mind, and I wonder if you could tell us a little bit about the early days.

BT: It was in February 1999 that I watched a Channel 4 documentary entitled 'Death in the Valley'¹ and that was the situation in previous years in the Drenica Valley, which depicted horrendous suffering and violence and then as the days and weeks progressed and the conflict ensued, some of us were becoming more, increasingly concerned about the situation and the way in which it was deteriorating. It was during Holy Week 1999 that I was horrified by the scenes of people crossing the border what little possessions they were able to collect before being forced from their homes and villages. And also the theme of people being separated, women and children from their men folk, was particularly traumatic.

I remember Tony Blair saying, when he was asked about military intervention in Kosova, saying that 'our moral imagination has been fuelled by memories of the holocaust'. And during Holy Week, as the images were presented across our TV screens, I became increasingly concerned, so it was at the 8am communion on Easter Sunday morning, when we came to share the bread and the wine, I felt somehow that it was not quite appropriate. What happened was that I'd shared the story earlier in the service of political prisoners in Latin America coming to their first Easter Sunday, with no bread and no wine for the mass, and so what they did was, use imaginary bread and imaginary wine. I'd shared this story with the good folk around the

¹ <http://www.channel4.com/programmes/the-valley/on-demand/26568-001>

communion table on that Easter Sunday morning at Timperley Methodist Church.

So when we came to share the bread and wine, I invited the congregation to participate through imaginary bread and wine. We left the bread and the wine on the table because there were people going hungry and thirsty in the mountains of Kosova. And so, without exception, each of the members of the congregation that morning, gathered around the table and took from my hands imaginary bread and then passed an imaginary cup of wine around. At the end of the service, I asked them how it would be if we were the ones who were separated from our families, wouldn't we want someone to take into care those that had managed to cross the border. If it was me hiding in the forests and the mountains and my wife and two young boys who'd crossed the border, I would want someone, somewhere to provide them shelter, food and drink.

So it was that in the following days we began, some of us began to wonder how we could do what we could in order to provide shelter, food and drink for those who had fled the killings and the ethnic cleansing of Kosova. So I think it was about three weeks later we heard of the Manchester Aid to Kosovo² convoy³ setting off which was on April 23rd, St George's Day, and I went along and I was about to be inducted, just a couple of weeks later, I

² <http://www.makonline.org>

³ Paul Guest convoy diary <http://makonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/To-Hell-With-Hope.pdf>

think, as Chaplain to the Mayor of Trafford, so I was there really, in two capacities, unofficially in both cases, really, because even though I was Mayor's Chaplain Designate, I wasn't invited to participate in any way but I went along and heard the people talking and the crowds gathering and the sense of something being done. We had the previous Saturday contributed clothing and toys and all sorts of materials through the church, as many churches had done through Manchester, throughout Manchester in the days leading up to the convoy and I was overwhelmed by the sense of expectation and, and just hopes that were being engendered.

(05.50): And I remember praying for the convoy and putting my, placing my hand on the side of a lorry wishing that I too could be part of the convoy. But, you know, I'm not a garage mechanic, so I'd be useless if one of the trucks broke down; I'm not a truck driver, so that wouldn't help; I'm not a medic, and I would just be taking up space, valuable space. And to be perfectly honest, I don't think I'd had the courage, anyway, to take that terrific step, which so many people were prepared to do, to travel across Europe, potentially, to a war zone, if the war had crossed the borders. So I felt overwhelmed by it in all sorts of ways.

But, I do recall, a TV documentary series, some years before where Cliff Richard, actually, visiting Bangladesh had asked what he could do and a nurse said to him, in the sight of all this suffering, "Can you administer an

inoculation?" and he said, "No." And she said, "But what you can do is sing at concerts and raise money for us and go back home." So that's what he did.

So I went back home, still wondering what we could do. That was on the Friday. On the Sunday, we had a service on the Sunday morning, where I had put to the congregation this thought of doing something where we are. There were literally thousands of people fleeing across the borders. There was increasing pressure on finding safe places for those who had crossed the border and were now filling up the refugee camps. There was increasing pressure at home, in our own nations to provide centres and accommodation for those who needed it most. So I mentioned this to the congregation and said, "Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could provide accommodation for families that had fled the killing fields of Kosova?" At the end of the service, one of the ladies said to me, "Have you ever seen Meadow Court⁴?" I had not even heard of Meadow Court but it was just about a mile from the church between Timperley and Hale and it was a mothballed sheltered accommodation project. I was later to discover that it was earmarked for rebuilding, selling off into private hands and the creation of probably private housing, whatever.

But having got directions to Meadow Court, after lunch I jumped on my bike and travelled down to the centre and found something that was just

⁴ Empty sheltered accommodation for the elderly in Hale Barns, Trafford. See also Cllr David Acton, leader Trafford MBC 97-14, recording in this archive

extraordinary and I was overwhelmed really by the possibilities created by this particular place. It was boarded up. It was a purpose built sheltered accommodation, so I knew from experience that it would have sufficient bedrooms, bathrooms, sitting rooms, communal rooms, office space, to do almost everything we possibly could for a number of families whom we could bring from Kosova. It was a peaceful setting: there were fields on two or three sides of the accommodation, and there was a playing field opposite which was simply 'the icing on the cake' for the children and the young people, in my view.

So I returned home and I immediately contacted the Mayor, we just now, were about two weeks, week and a half away from his induction of Mayor of Trafford: Councillor Ray Bowker. And he immediately gave me the Director of Social Services' home telephone number, I think. So that evening, I contacted him and I said that I had seen Meadow Court, it was mothballed, it wasn't doing anything and there was this acute need on our doorstep, not far from where we were living. And he said that the Refugee Council, I think, were going to be meeting with various personnel across Manchester later that week and they'd already got somewhere in mind but they hadn't considered Meadow Court.

To cut a very long story short, by the end of the conversation, he'd promised to include Meadow Court in the visit and that he'd contact me once the Refugee Council, British Refugee Council, had come to their conclusions

about the possibilities, which he very kindly did saying that the British Refugee Council had seen the potential of Meadow Court and that they favoured that particular site, even though a second site also opened in Manchester. Their view was, as I recall and as I was informed, Meadow Court was the favoured site. It had all sorts of things going for it: the peaceful setting; residential accommodation; communal rooms; office; space for people to exercise and for children to play.

So that's how we came to identify Meadow Court.

(11.40): In between being granted permission to open up Meadow Court and the news that a number of refugees⁵ would be brought from the refugee camps to Meadow Court, we had a terrific job on our hands because the permission to go into the building was, literally, I think 48 hours before the flight was to arrive. And when we first went in, it was clear that a huge amount of work was required and that there were no council employees present other than someone who was just wandering round. There was no work force there... no-one was mending doors, windows, taking down various bits and pieces which needed to be taken down. There was no real work being done. And so we managed to get a team of people together from the Methodist Church, in particular, in Timperley and other churches in, in Altrincham and

⁵ 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)

Hale, as well as Timperley. A large number of people descended on the site and worked tirelessly for hours and hours late into the night in order to get the building ready for May 12th, the first flight.

All sorts of things needed to be done. Door handles were broken, light holders were broken: these had to be replaced. There weren't curtains at the windows, it wasn't perfect by May 12th by any stretch of the imagination at all but it was certainly in far better condition for a warmer reception than would otherwise have been the case. I really can't emphasise too much, really, the extraordinary amount of work so many people gave. They came straight from work - those who were at work - with their tool kits, their step ladders, their cleaning agents, bathrooms were cleaned, toilets were cleaned. Some curtains were hung, light bulbs were fitted, clothing arrived, in store, all sorts of things, toys, etc. etc. all before the first flight arrived on May 12th.

And then the flight arrived late, I was extremely tired and I felt that it was better for others to welcome our guests so I went to bed that night. It was very late when people arrived and so on, so I called in the next morning to find Meadow Court alive and beginnings of a home and the beginnings of a community that would become a very rich, meaningful family.

(14.34) PD: What were your first impressions of the refugees as they arrived?

BT: There was an element of shock, really, and silence. Even though the community was alive with people there was a lot of people sitting around dazed. There were quiet conversations being held. There were people who we had to identify as interpreters; some of the folk from the church who'd been up all night introduced me to two or three of the interpreters.

I really kept a kind of distance in those very first few days: I didn't wish to engage too much, really. I wanted people to find the space and there were others far better qualified than I, at least I thought there were people all around me, far better qualified than I, to meet the needs.

Obviously we're taught that when folk have lost almost everything, bar their hope - as someone once said to me - it's shelter, first and foremost; somewhere to just rest without fear of being attacked; simple food; simple drink. And then other needs have to be met at a later stage. I could see that this wasn't going to be a few weeks or a few months, I could see that this was going to be a very, very long experience. So in a sense, whilst we were getting tired already, the adrenaline, the rush, the desire to do things, meant that we realised, I think, that this was going to be a long process and we needed to build relationships in a gentle fashion.

I remember someone walking in with a bible under their arm and saying, "Cor, they're just like folk off the telly aren't they?" I don't think he realised what he was saying and what he was doing, actually, because that wasn't,

even then, in my imagination, the right approach. I think the right approach was to give people time and space, to meet people's needs, their immediate needs, and later other needs could be met, as they arose. But to simply go in and think that we were doing something wonderful for people because they looked 'just like something off the telly' or we had to convert people to Christianity or such things, that... that was not in my imagination and it wasn't in, certainly as I understand it, the imagination of the vast majority of the people who were part of the team that provided a home and provided food, drink and social needs in the days, weeks and months that followed. And I think that, that kind of view, that kind of approach stood the test of time and it was only many, many months later, it may have even been, 18 months later, that someone asked why I did this. And I had to answer, "Because this is my faith. I feel called by God to meet people's needs, I am a disciple of Jesus and I am taught to love my neighbour." And clearly some people hadn't been loved by their neighbours. We were simply trying to be good neighbours to folk who were now living in our community. It was very complex. It was extremely traumatic for everyone concerned, actually.

The first person I saw who was physically injured was Mr Sulejman, who had lost his teeth from a beating, I think, on the border.

(18.39): That was bad in itself but then to realise that Adriana was suffering from leukaemia, after all that she had been through, was simply very painful. I

recall that she and the family had heard Serb paramilitaries reloading their weapons, whilst they were in hiding, and she, at that stage, felt an incredible chill through her body. And I couldn't help but wonder whether or not the fear had somehow brought on this terrible illness. Shock can do great things, very quickly. It can do terrible things very quickly.

And it seemed so tragic that, for example, as we celebrated the end of the war in the summer of '99, we had a party with marquees and people were there and it seemed so sad that on such a sunny, bright, joyful day, Adriana would be suffering in such a way. And yet, she had such a radiant smile.

This was the thing that really occurred to me, actually. Not only Adriana but so many folk who were suffering so greatly, or had suffered so greatly, Remzi for example, and the **Bogujevci**⁶ children, maintained a kind of serenity that, kind of, challenged everything about our own situations. It seemed to put absolutely everything into perspective. When folk had been frightened out of their skin by ethnic cleansing and come to close to death, to find themselves in a refugee camp, flown to a strange land and then suddenly be in this extraordinary place and yet still retain such courtesy and such dignity and such common sense, put absolutely everything into perspective.

I remember, on that evening actually, at the celebration of the end of the war, seeing Remzi outside for one for the first times in his wheelchair, and just

⁶ Saranda, Fatos and Selatin/Jehona Bogujevci recordings available in this archive

contemplating everything that had gone over the previous weeks. He was a man who had immense physical difficulties and yet in the coming weeks and months would learn English to a very high level so much so, that he would even use words that I wouldn't use myself because they were almost straight out of Jane Austen, they were classic English literature terms. He described one person who was deeply troubled in the community as 'a confounded man', a phrase that I would never use myself, but you can just imagine Dickens or Jane Austen using exactly that phrase and actually, his description was spot on of that person. At that moment he was a confounded man: he was struggling with the situation.

(22.30): The children, the Bogujevci children, were something else, really. The way in which they were able to come to us and after obviously terrific trauma, I mean, I don't wish to treat this lightly at all - the nightmares must have been horrendous - but the immense maturity in such young people, again, was something which took our breath away. And it showed really, it was a terrific example, a wonderful illustration, of how even in the most darkest of nights a bright new morning could dawn. They had experienced a very long dark night and yet they still were able to welcome in the dawn and see that there was still life to be lived. And that was no disrespect to the families they lost, the members of the families that they lost, it wasn't treating their situation with lightness. They were very serious, very committed, but they were able to draw on their experience and somehow, we would say in the

Christian church, redeem it, so that it could be useful in the future, that it could be used in a positive meaningful way. And that is just terrific.

(24:05)After a period of time, the young people started attending the youth fellowship at the church for games, badminton, volleyball, pool, and that seemed to be going really well. We had, of course, been swimming together for a number of weeks on a Monday night, people would crowd into the minibus from the church and we'd go off swimming and so on and everything seemed to be moving forward very well. And then I remember one of the teenagers, **Adonis**⁷, going incredibly quiet and every time I visited Meadow Court, he was quite melancholic and distant. And I asked him a number of times what it was and he, he couldn't bring himself to tell me. And then one day when he realised, he must have realised that it was troubling me and that he have even wondered if this was actually, you know, causing me, that his silence was somehow causing me some distress - because it was - he said to me, 'It's your teenagers, Mr Bruce.'" And I said, "What is it? The teenagers?" I thought, surely one of them hadn't spoken out of turn or been offensive in any way, because I hadn't witnessed any of that, certainly not in my presence, and I hadn't heard of anything. "What is it, what is it about the teenagers, Adonis?" and he said, "It's just that they're only interested in music and football," he said, "They're not interested in politics."

⁷ Adonis Alaj recordings available in this archive

When folk have experienced something as Adonis had experienced, even in teenage years, there are some things far more important than music and sport. And for Adonis it was politics. Because politics decided life and death: who was to live, who was to die. And so that was another expression, really, of the way in which the trauma was coming out and also highlighted the immense frustration. I was very glad he told me that, because I needed to be reminded that even things were seemingly going forward at a pace and people were seemingly 'at home', there was still the issue of the seriousness of who is to live and who is to die: the politics of the situation. And that's the trauma coming through.

(26.44): There was a meeting, I think on the 7th May, which I think would have been the Friday at Trafford Town Hall for those that had expressed an interest in meeting the needs of the folk coming from Kosova, at the two centres in Trafford, well the two centres in Manchester. And not surprisingly there were a large number of people from Muslim Associations and I recall one woman from an Islamic Association very sharply challenging a man from her own community because his view was much more religious than humanitarian. It was a question about the mosque, attendance at the mosque, it was about fulfilling the lifestyle of a religious Muslim and so on and she - and only she could do this - challenged him very forcefully because she said, "Around this table are people who aren't Muslims but we are all here together today to meet the needs of our brothers and sisters." And so it didn't matter what creed people upheld, the most important thing was to meet people's needs.

So it wasn't a case of flying a denominational flag, be it Methodist or Catholic or Anglican, it wasn't about berating someone with a particular creed, "you ought to do this because this is your faith," it was simply about meeting a humanitarian need. Once you meet people's needs, people can ask questions: can ask questions at a later stage if they wish to do so. I didn't think it was our place to promote our perspective on faith. After all, and this is very important, the Kosovan Albanians that came to us at Meadow Court were, in the main, nominally Muslim, they had faced ethnic cleansing by people who were, in the main, Serb Orthodox Christian. So I had long been interested in the holocaust and I realised that 6 million Jews and countless millions of others had been transported, selected and executed by, in the main, baptised Christians. So here was another attempted genocide, right on our doorstep, right before our very eyes. Religion can sometimes be the problem. We know that it can also be the solution. But religion, used wrongly, can be a very serious problem and cause acute suffering and I didn't think, at any stage, that it would be wise, certainly not in the early days, for anyone to promote a particular faith perspective. Those sorts of questions, if they wish to be raised, by our guests, our friends - and now our family - at a later stage, could do so.

So when the children went to a Catholic School⁸ that was wonderful. When the Muslim Association came and sought to play cricket or go out for a picnic or meet needs that was wonderful. What did it matter which creed those helpers were seeking to uphold? I have no doubt the Muslim Association were inspired by their own faith. I was inspired by my faith and I've no doubt others were too. This was our faith: this is how we met it. This was a good expression, this is where religion can bring a positive change but it is also true, and it's important to acknowledge, that religion can be a source of great discontent and great suffering and I could see, before my very eyes, the divisions in Kosova and the former Yugoslavian Republic had been partly caused by religious affiliation.

PD: At one point, the compassion seemed to run out, the compassion of the government, in that people who had been brought - not really through their own decision, or their own choice, but they'd been brought to Manchester because their needs could be met here - were told, long before needs had been fully met, that it was time to return. And I know you're one of the people who fought that Bruce. Why was that and what did you do?

BT: Well it didn't take long for people from Meadow Court, our friends from Meadow Court, to experience this kind of inhospitable element within our community, our society. I recall someone doing some shopping somewhere when the shop assistant asking, "Where are you from?" and she replied,

⁸ Head Teacher, Lou Harris, recording available in this archive

"Kosova," and she said, "Why haven't you all gone back because the war's over, isn't it?"

When the last bullet is fired in a war, that does not signal the end of the suffering. When people are allowed to return home to their bombed out villages, erm, that doesn't signal the end of the trauma. And it doesn't signal the end of meeting people's needs. Each of the families at Meadow Court were there for a reason. If I remember rightly, the flight that brought our friends from Kosova to Meadow Court was the fourth to arrive in the UK. Therefore, there were people in each of those families that had acute needs and those needs had to be met over a long term, not a matter of weeks, months or a year or two. Those needs would be present for many years to come and it would seem very dispassionate and distressing for those who have been welcomed so warmly to then be forced to return to Kosova which would have denied those members of that particular family the medical access they needed, the psychological support, the social network that was required, in order to build people back up into healthy and whole human beings.

It would have been catastrophic for some families to have been returned to Kosova when there was still needs to be met: medical needs, psychiatric needs, social needs. And people had been traumatised so much, all we would have done is deepen the trauma - or revisit the trauma - in such a way

that the families would not have been able to experience the life that each of us would want for ourselves and loved ones.⁹

PD: So what did you do?

(34:54) BT: In order to challenge the move to force people back to Kosova, I think it was important to highlight amongst local politicians and the authorities that the need was still there. It wasn't a great drain on resources as some media would speculate but the people would be able to make a huge contribution in the future to our society and the world at large. So there would be a rich reward to be gained by helping people, who have experienced what they have experienced, to wellness again so that each person could make a great contribution. They would bring, each person would bring their own perspectives: fairly rare in society today unless of course, folk have come to our islands with similar experiences... refugees from war torn situations.

We had a very, I believe unusual, perhaps unique experience in Meadow Court in that the terrific amount of work that had taken place created not a disparate bunch of individuals or even a federation of families: we created a single community; a family where each person's needs were met by those who could meet them. After a while it became more than apparent that,

⁹ <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/X2H-Xref-ViewHTML.asp?FileID=9230&lang=en> see also MaK timeline and report in this archive

actually, there were great strengths in the community itself and that people would be able to help one another. Some people learnt English more quickly; some people were good at practical things; some people were able to teach; some people were able to nurse; some people were able to cook. Whatever it may have been, Meadow Court became not a disparate bunch of individuals or a federation of families who just happened to be living under a single roof. That was certainly how it could have been. But after a period of time, I think thanks to the network of support in the early days and the consistency of care, Meadow Court became a family. And it became even more clear when families started to move away. Some families chose to return to Kosova and when they did so it was a real bereavement. A family would return to Kosova and people would experience trauma again.

Even when people were starting to move out into local housing in Hale, in Timperley, in Broadheath, the distance in some people's mind is very small but I know if the families' minds the distance was very great. And I think that indicated the depth of the relationship that had been formed during the two, three years that we were together at Meadow Court. I think the last families left just under three years after it had opened. So between two and three years, when folk were beginning to move into alternative accommodation, it was very traumatic. It was like a family splitting up. So I think we found that this grounding would reap enormous benefits for everyone and we have seen in subsequent years how the children, in particular, have made huge contributions in our own communities and elsewhere in the world. They have

brought a very great deal to us not just as individuals but as a wider community.

(39:00): It went on beyond my time in Manchester, I moved from Timperley in 2002 and I think for another 12-18 months, perhaps longer, I can't recall the exact timeline but appeals had to be heard and it was just an enormous joy when appeals were granted so that people could remain in the country. It was a terrific sense of fulfilment after all of that.

(39:36): It didn't take long after the war for people to start asking me to visit Kosova if folk were to return, would I go and visit them in their homes and people were extremely complimentary and kind and generous anyway. But I couldn't do anything other than visit when the opportunity arose in 200, two years after the war. I was on a sabbatical from the Methodist Church. I had some time away from the church and was able then to travel to Kosova with Selatin and two of his boys and it was an extraordinary experience, it was overwhelming. The hospitality first of all was utterly overwhelming, food in abundance, and very humbling, almost embarrassing really, because the generosity was just extravagant and so undeserved.

It was also traumatic in that I was able to visit Drenica, which was the scene of the massacre that I had seen on TV in February 1999 that began my interest in Kosova. I was also able to visit the Bogujevci family home and the site of the massacre, just a few yards away. And I remember standing there

with a rambling rose against the wall against which the children and the women had been placed before being shot and there were rose petals all over the floor, which was very symbolic, and err I still carry to this day, two rose petals from the garden, in my wallet. I have it with me now. And I found the whole experience very traumatic. We took the journey that they were forced on from, I think, the home to the police station, from the police station to the site of the massacre and then we visited what had been the mass grave. And we also met a gentleman whose family had been caught up in the massacre and had returned from the hills to find out where their family was, and there was a digger, an excavator, just filling in the mass grave and he asked where his family was and the, one of the guys there, had said, "They're there," indicating the pit that was now being filled in. So I found that extremely distressing, to stand in such a place, and deeply humbling. It brought it, as if it needed bringing home to me, but to actually be there brought it home in a very, very real way.

And yet, life was beginning again, despite all this trauma, all this grief, despite all this bereavement, people were rebuilding their homes, and rebuilding their lives. I remember in Mitrovica the devastation in some of the streets was just awful. When I came home, the church managed to pay for the rebuilding of the home of a family which I'd stayed with. I'd stayed in a neighbouring house but one of the families I was with, had lost their home and the church managed to pay for the materials to rebuild the home. So I know many, many other people did far more and made a huge impact and

continued to do so for years to come and that's just terrific really. My contribution was brief: three years at most. The whole experience changed my life completely. You asked earlier on about the other faiths and my own faith, well, you know, I don't think I am prepared to believe that we have a monopoly on goodness and truth but goodness and truth can be found in every faith otherwise they would not have stood the test of time. I also am mindful of the beginnings of prejudice and discrimination, particularly the prejudice and discrimination that has a religious foundation, and I can see where it ends up. I knew that before, from meeting with holocaust survivors and hearing their testimonies and so on. I've also worked evermore, actually, in raising people's awareness of genocide since then, and particularly so through the holocaust, before the final survivors leave this life.

I think there is going to be a lull, actually. It's the same after the holocaust ended in '45 and the liberation of Auschwitz. In the early days people needed to tell their testimonies, they needed others to hear. And then there was a period of time, a quiet, when for whatever reason, society didn't want to hear it anymore. But then, as those who experience those events come to the last years of their life, there is greater interest as they need to share it before there is no one left to witness to these events. And I think in the early days after Kosova, there was, for a few years, a keen interest in hearing the testimonies. I think there was a keen desire to tell the story. But then it comes to a point when there has to be a period of quiet and if we haven't quite reached that yet we probably will. And it will be some years yet before

society truly revisits what took place - not just in Kosova but across the whole former Yugoslav Republic - and begins to come to terms with what actually took place.

(45:57) I wrote a book called 'Shelter from the Storm'¹⁰ subtitled 'Caring for the Victims of Kosova'. I was encouraged to write the book by my friends in Meadow Court, my Kosovan Albanian friends, because they wanted their stories to be told, and they wanted me to tell their stories. When I wrote it and submitted it for publication, the publisher wanted me to reflect more on my own personal journey because they felt that this would be of help to others in our community, in our nation, who might be inspired to undertake similar ventures in future conflicts and refugee crises so it became a meditation, a reflection of my own journey. But I insisted that there be four testimonies, at the back of the book, which would be our friends writing their own accounts so Sulejmani, Remzi, Amir and Saranda - who was just 16 [13] at the time when she survived the massacre - wrote their own stories. And I think that is as important as anything because it's an authentic account, fairly soon after the Kosovan war. However, there are lots of stories within the book, which I managed to keep in, which tell the story of the families as they left Kosova and really the first seven months at Meadow Court. It could only be up to a certain point. It would be impossible, for me at any rate, to write a comprehensive account of the three years that Meadow Court was in existence.

¹⁰ ISBN-13: 978-0716205692 Epworth Press 2003

But it tells the story of why we took part in it because people would ask, "Why are you doing those things?" I remember one of the interpreters, Shpresa actually, asking, "Why is it that you do this for my people?" And the book tries to answer that question. The book tries to give an account of what took place. The book tries to tell the stories of the Kosovan refugee friends that we have.

I can't recall whether I read Neil Belton's biography of Helen Bamber just before Meadow Court opened or just afterwards, but Helen Bamber was a young Jewish woman who travelled from Britain in 1945 to Belsen, on its liberation, to nurse the victims, the survivors, of the holocaust. And Neil Belton, in his book, 'The Good Listener: Helen Bamber, a life against cruelty' said this:

"There is a pleasure in working with people in extreme situations and a feeling of omnipotence that is close to despair, the carer wants to do more and more and feels more and more helpless as a consequence. Those who work with survivors are wary of identifying with the victim, of inflating their own capabilities, and of the depression that comes when that illusion is pricked."

It may seem an extraordinary quote but it is, in my experience, an accurate reflection of the drive to meet need, particularly amongst those who have faced extreme situations. Where does the energy come from? What it is that drives us? Is it something in our past, in our childhood? Is it such a resolute

faith that has to be expressed in activism? All of those things are possible but there is something mutual about meeting people's needs, especially those who've experienced such trauma. It is as if the gift is in the person whose needs are being met: that that person's gift to the person meeting their needs is much richer than the other way around. And what people bring having experienced such acute hostility from - should have been their brothers and sisters in humanity - teaches us lessons that we couldn't have otherwise. We have to face this trauma, this depth of despair, this horrendous hostility, if we are to understand what it is to be human. How quickly and low we can sink as a consequence of prejudice and discrimination. So the drive is enormous because something new is being gleaned. Some new insights are being formed. Some deeper understanding is coming into being because the person whose needs you're seeking to meet has so much to give. And the danger is though, as Neil Belton says, you begin to sense that you're omnipotent and you're not. You are the receiver as much as you are the giver.

PD: Thank you very much, Bruce.

Selatin, or Safet, before we finish, is there any question, or anything you would like to say to Bruce?

SB: I have many questions but I have the problem to explain in English but it's been better if any interview is Selatin not me (laughs). But my question is for

Bruce, Bruce is the, you know I can't explain. Bruce is centre piece of something for my family. I said, before and now and after that, any time, for the Bruce is same to my father. And the God he said to Bruce during the night in 1999 now to come to help me in my community from Kosova. I have to be Bruce anytime near to this community not but this is his job, you know [moving away from Safet's home area]. I understand him, but ... Sorry Pam.

BT: That's OK

SB: All the community but especially my daughter Saranda and Selatin's childrens. Bruce is the person...

PD Is there anything else that you would like to say?

BT: Gosh. Erm, No, I think we've said enough, Pam, haven't we?

PD: I think you've said things which are very clear. Thank you very, very much,

BT: You're welcome.

