



25th ANNIVERSARY

REMEMBERING SREBRENICA

LETTERS FROM BOSNIA

Dear Friend,

Imagine one small village filled with people, children, animals, surrounded by nature. Imagine one girl and her family. Her siblings, four of them, two brothers and two sisters were what she cherished the most. That girl was me and I will try to explain in short what life meant for me before and during the war.

My name is Sabaheta. I was born in 1978 in a village close to Srebrenica. Although I never travelled anywhere to see other places I considered my village the most beautiful in the world. I was surrounded with people I loved, with my family and relatives. I didn't like school much but I loved my school friends. Even though I had to work hard both in the garden and in the house to help my mother, I was a happy child and I considered my childhood the happiest part of my life.

Life was peaceful, everybody worked mostly in agriculture to maintain their families. We had enough food even though our mom was an unemployed housewife and a widow. Sometimes we had even more food than the others, because we had a mill and at that time having enough flour was considered to be something huge. Mom would always help those who didn't have enough to eat. She would provide for us and I remember feeling like any other child in the village who even was richer than I was. I was happy inside and thankful for what my family had. I think life could have been so wonderful for my family if there wasn't for the war that happened.

For a moment we thought that it would not come to us, however we were so close to Serbia that it was just a matter of time when we would be forced to leave our homes. It happened in 1993. I remember being in the field and digging out the potatoes my mom sent me for.



All of a sudden I heard some buzzing sounds but I didn't know what they were. When I realized they were bullets and they were flying around me, I ran as fast as I could towards the house. I can't remember being so frightened ever again. It wasn't long before shelling started. People were running into thick forests but many of them died like that. There was no time for proper funerals so people were buried where they were killed. I wish I could forget those scenes.

When we left our village and went for Srebrenica, we didn't know what to expect there. We thought we would be safe there, because there were 'foreign soldiers' who would protect us. However, that was such a deception. The two nights we spent in Potocari UN base were the two worst nights and days of my life. The screams during the night were something I can never forget. When you see a Serb soldier dressed in a uniform of UN soldier, walking around and trying to deceive you with his bad English, and when you fear so much that he will take you by the hand force you to leave with him never to come back again was the biggest fear of every living soul who was located in Potocari at that time.

I don't know which was worse for me, those nights or the day when the buses came to pick us up. The scenes when one or two soldiers were told to stand in front of each bus, to control that only women and small children could enter and men and boys were separated to the other side, were the scenes you can never forget, even though you have been trying for the past 25 years. I imagine in my head, over and over again, how my brother Abdulah must have felt when they separated him from our eldest sister, who was with him in that crowd. I keep imagining what was his death like and I just pray that it was all quick and that he didn't suffer. He was only 18. That is something you can never forgive to them. My son is now 19 and he is still like a boy to me. I keep seeing my own brother in his image and cannot comprehend how someone can kill someone so young and innocent. I think I will never get to understand that and I know my heart cannot forgive.

My mind cannot forget either. I must say that I cannot understand those who can forget. In today's world when we have freedom of speech, freedom of expressing ourselves, we must use that freedom. We must use that freedom of speech to tell the world, not just about genocide in Srebrenica but the war in general that happened in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We cannot stay passive about this, not now, not tomorrow, not in 20 years from now. Each and every one of us, who remember, who survived, who lost everything, must speak up, must find the way to speak up and spread the truth. We must do that because in time, if people forget about those atrocities, they can and will happen again, to us or to someone else. Nobody can prevent us to tell, that we were witnesses to the genocide, we are the survivors, but if we are silent on this matter then we must never forgive ourselves.



It is enough just to go to Potocari and see those tombstones, to realize that genocide happened there. I consider of utmost importance that young people should come to the Potocari Memorial Centre and see for themselves. If young people don't learn about the consequences of the war then we achieved nothing. There are so many of those denying genocide ever happened that we must realize it is our priority to teach young people about this and to pass on the truth. One saying says that history is written by the winners, but I consider that history is written by those who are witnesses of one time, survivors and those who write and share their testimonies.

If each one of us use the freedom of speech then I am sure the truth will prevail and genocide deniers will not be as loud as they are now. It is up to us to fight them not with weapons but with words, and I am sure that we would win this time.

Sincerely,

Sabaheta Muratović,(maiden name Salihović)

Srebrenica