



25th ANNIVERSARY

REMEMBERING SREBRENICA

LETTERS FROM BOSNIA

Dear Friend,

My name is Salih Salihovic. I was born in a small village, in the municipality of Srebrenica. I lived there peacefully until war broke out in 1992. My dad passed away a couple of years before the war so I lived with my mum, my older brother Abdullah and my three sisters: Fatima, Sabaheta and Almasa.

Living in my village and growing with my siblings was the happiest time of my life. I used to spend most of my time with my friends from school. After school we would go to the nearby artificial lake on Drina river. I remember swimming over the entire lake with my brother so many times.

On the other side was Serbia. We were that close. We never told our mum that we swam over but eventually when she found out she spanked us. I didn't mind but my brother Abdullah was totally the opposite than I was at the time. He was an obedient child, full of compassion towards our mother, always there to help in the field and he never said 'no' to her. He was always calm and never did something bad like most of us youngsters did.

Mosque and faith were so important to him and I believe that faith gave him that serenity I always wanted but never knew how to find. I used to be disobedient and would always find the way to skip chores or did them only because I had to.

No matter what season, we would always have something fun to do, but I loved winter and summer the most. The other two seasons were mostly for work, preparing for the winter or cleaning the fields before the planting season. In the summer I would swim mostly but in the winter we would use days and nights for fun. We had a lot of snow so the day was short for all the activities outside. At night, we would pretend to sleep and then sneak through the window.



My youngest sister, Almasa, would always cry because she wanted to come with us too. None of us would want to bring her along because she was too little but Abdullah couldn't leave her.

All that time was not without difficulties but it was the happiest time of our lives.

And then, everything started to change. Older people in the village knew that we were on the brink of war and that it will not end well for us since we didn't have any army or weapons to defend ourselves. I was 13 at the time and my childhood was never the same after 1992. When I remember those days now...It was terrifying. We were shelled daily from the mountains of Serbia because we were an easy target. So many people from the villages in our area were killed. All civilians, men, women, children...they didn't care. We were hiding in our basements during the day, and during the night we couldn't turn on the lights because they could see the location of the houses.

However, people tried to live normal lives as much as it was possible. We still went to school realizing the danger. On September 18th 1992 a shell from Serbian mountain Tara killed 19 civilians. They precisely targeted the local school killing 19 people among which there were 4 children, killed while sitting in their classroom. After that we didn't go to school.

21st of March 1993 I will remember as the day we had to leave our home. We went to Srebrenica, which was 22 km away. Conditions in which people were living in Srebrenica were horrible... There wasn't electricity or running water. Most of the days we had nothing to eat. There were so many people in the town, most of them living literally in the streets during these years. However, we felt safe but that feeling didn't last long. Even though Srebrenica was proclaimed a UN safe zone, and any military action was not allowed, people had been killed on a daily basis.

After years spent in unbearable conditions, when you think that the end is near, something even more terrible happens. Serb soldiers entered Srebrenica on July 11th 1995. People in fear for their lives started running towards Potocari, the headquarters of the UN Dutch base in hope that they would be protected there. However, that was not the case.

Thousands of people stayed there for two days and two nights. I wish I could forget the screams of men and women being taken away during the night. During the day, everyone was waiting for something to happen. Some of the people managed to enter the battery factory in hope the Dutch troops would protect them. Among them were my eldest sister Fatima and Abdullah. The rest of us stayed outside the factory, by the walls.



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During those two days I used to wonder in the crowd of people along with my youngest sister Almasa. I was reckless in doing so because two times I got almost taken away and killed. I saw a couple of beheaded bodies in those two days and those are the images that I'll have forever in my mind.

After those two days, buses were sent to take us to the 'free territory'. The hardest thing I never managed to cope with, was finding out my brother was taken away while getting on a bus and killed. He was 18 years old. 30 % of his remains were found in 2008 in a secondary mass grave close to Zvornik, 40 km from Srebrenica.

As a family we decided not to wait for more remains to be found and we buried him in Potocari Memorial the same year. The rest of his remains were never found. What hurts the most is that I never had the chance to say goodbye to him. I never had the chance to tell him how great a brother and person he was. You think you'll have your entire life for that and then you realize it can all vanish in just one day.

One day and date that marked my life forever. As the consequence of those days in Potocari I have PTSD and I am afraid I will never fully recover. Those wounds will never heal as long as I live. It is still beyond my comprehension that one man can do to another what their soldiers did to us. They wanted to erase us completely as if one nation never existed in this part of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

However, I could never wish them or anyone else the same fate we had in the past war. Even though most of them are denying what happened in Srebrenica in 1995, I still don't want revenge or hate to prevail. What I consider important is that we should all talk about what happened, share our testimonies whenever we can, write about it, use every means we have today to share and spread the truth.

It should be our obligation and something of utmost importance. Most of us might think that we will never forget and that is enough, but for the generations that will grow and come, we must speak up, talk because there are so many that make false statements and deny the genocide ever happened. Future generations must know who speaks the truth and who are the liars and deniers. It is important so that new generations learn what they must never do to each other. We must never be silent on this matter even though it hurts to speak about it and brings those memories back to life.



I wish all of those who survived would share testimonies and make their contribution to the truth about the genocide. As for myself, I know I will never forget, never HATE but cannot forgive! My only revenge to those who killed my brother and hurt my family in every sense a human can hurt another human , is that I came back to live in my village (abandoned and empty but still the most beautiful), and I intend to stay here, on the land of my ancestors.

Sincerely,

Salih Salihović
Srebrenica