

# Anatomy of a humanitarian trip to Bosnia-Herzegovina

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## Reference data:

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A group of Japanese students from Switzerland traveled to Bosnia on a humanitarian mission to deliver food, clothing, medicine, and school equipment to the Bosnian people. The students learned some basic phrases in the Serbo-Croatian language prior to departure, and of necessity learned numerous English vocabulary as well as the communication skills necessary for the tasks to be performed. The students as a whole expressed that the trips was immensely rewarding. The teacher leading the trip found the writing and oral skills of the students improved immeasurably.

スイスの高等学校の生徒が、人道的支援を行うため、食料や衣服、薬品、学習用品を持ち、ボスニアを訪れた。出発に先駆け、生徒はタスクを遂行するのに必要となるセルビア・クロアチア語を学び、英語の語彙を増やし、コミュニケーションスキルを学んだ。参加学生全員がこの旅について、大変価値のあるものと評価し、引率教員は生徒の書く能力と話す能力が測り知れないほど進歩していることを発見した。

In the Spring of 2000 and 2001, a group of high schools students from Switzerland traveled to Bosnia and Herzegovina (B-H) on a humanitarian mission to deliver food, clothing, medicine and school equipment to Bosnians, including refugees and displaced persons, who are still suffering the effects of a devastating four-year war. The students were from a Japanese high school, and an international high school, both located in the same mountain village of the Swiss Romande. Prior to the war, Bosnia was a modernized, industrialized country with a decent standard of living and solid economic base, however since the war, production has been cut by about 80%, and the unemployment rate is around 45%. Salaries, when they are paid, often consist of a few cans of tuna, or similar items. As there is almost no money, all living essentials are in critically short supply. On my first trip to B-H, in 2000, five years after the end of the war with the Dayton Accord, the situation was critical. Many homes were still only bombed-out relics, people had little food, children were poorly shod or barefoot, and had almost no clothing. Residents at more than one village

or camp said that our visit was the first time they had any humanitarian relief.

### Premises for the trip

The main purpose for the trip to B-H was to provide relief for Bosnians in need of food, clothing, medicine, and school supplies. The organization that provided most of the support for the trip, collecting clothing and food, is a Christian organization, and no doubt had another secondary agenda, and being an ESL teacher, I had my own sub-agenda. Of course, I wanted my students to have an experience that would give them a new perspective on life, and make them realize some things about their own existence, but in addition I wanted them to increase their ability to communicate, in English, in the Serbo-Croatian language, and to communicate more effectively with different spheres of society, adults, from all parts of the globe, children in B-H, to their host families in B-H, to officials, from Bosnia government officials to UNHCR officials. Overall, I believe these two trips I participated in were a huge success in all respects.

### Before departure

#### Communication

Since communication was a major goal of the trip, pairing our Japanese students with students from an international school was the first step – English became the official language of the trip both by fiat and by necessity. In addition, I felt it necessary for the participants, both students and staff, to learn some of the language of our target humanitarian

relief recipients; hence I searched the village for an appropriate language instructor. I found a wonderful young woman, a refugee from B-H, who had a great sense of humor and a knack for connecting with the students. In addition it was very useful to have someone on hand to answer questions about B-H, the history, background, and the present situation. The students proved to be avid learners of the Serbo-Croatian language, and upon arrival, many could communicate with the local people to some degree. The language lessons proved invaluable.

### Responsibility

Although the students' expenses were borne by their families, they worked hard raising money for other additional materials that were donated, such as powdered milk and treats for children. The money was raised by various means such as cake sales, valentine day services, and especially by a large sushi bar, which was set up at the site of the World Snowboard Contest, which was conveniently held in our small Alpine village on a yearly basis. The organizers of the event were contacted and convinced to allow our students to have a sushi sale at the site on the bottom of the slopes. It was very successful, bringing in about US\$1,300 each year. Even though the snowboard contest was hosted in the French-speaking Swiss Romande, English was the main the language of communication between most participants, therefore this event also gave the students the opportunity to communicate in both French and English, in a linguistically rich context. These kind of events increased contact and understanding between the students and the local community, a benefit noted by Hughes and Jenkins (2005).

One especially successful project was students buying small candies in bulk, and making individual packets, carefully wrapped in plastic, and bound with a ribbon, which were later handed out to the children in B-H. Both our students and the children were very pleased with the results. This enabled our students to rapidly begin communication with the children in B-H. Having the students participate actively in this humanitarian trip from the very onset, in organization, language study, fund-raising and the preparation of these “food packages” gave them a strong sense of responsibility and identity with the project. When one of the participating teacher/supervisors (not the writer!) was found pilfering the carefully prepared packets, the degree of outrage felt by the students, real tears and real anger, was not surprising.

## Main work in Bosnia and Herzegovina

### Homestay

Each aspect of the humanitarian trip was designed around two purposes: providing aid to the people in B-H, and enhancing communication with the Bosnian people, and the project was designed carefully around those two aims. Usually the two were intricately interwoven for maximum effect. Almost every home in the town of Ustikolina was totally destroyed by the retreating Bosnian Serbs, who had occupied the town during the length of the war. On previous trips, our umbrella organization had repaired many houses and brought them into decent living condition. It was in these homes that our group was staying with the local families, providing many opportunities for our group and the Bosnians alike to communicate. For example, in the home I stayed in on the second trip, there were also five male students along

with our host mother, father and brother and his wife. Our hosts were very kind and told us many stories of their days during the war. The host mother talked to us and cried very often. One day I asked one of our translators to come home with me – he reported that two of her sons had died in the war, one having had his throat cut in front of his mother. She said she could not get the image out of her mind, and dwelt on his death constantly. Literally every homestay family told similar stories to their guests. Even though some researchers have suggested that effects of short-term homestay visits on language study/cultural communication are negligible (Brauer,2005), the student volunteers and staff alike were deeply affected by the stories that we heard daily. Therefore each evening we held a *snapshot* meeting, an opportunity which allowed all participants to talk of their experiences of the day. This enabled the speakers to unburden themselves of the horrors that they had heard and seen during the day. But not all snapshots were horror stories, often they were snapshots of positive events—perhaps an elementary school student learning *origami*, Japanese paper folding, or a class getting some chalk for the first time in months.

### Aid distribution

In the case of distribution of aid, the head organization arranged for large containers of foodstuffs, medical supplies, clothing, and school supplies to arrive in B-H before our arrival, and it was stored in a large warehouse. The day after our arrival in the small village of Ustikolina, which bordered the infamous town of Foca in the Republic of Serbska, and each morning thereafter, the team of 20 students, 10 adult supervisors, and three Bosnian translators, would head to

the warehouse to prepare for the upcoming day, preparing food packets and boxes of clothing for distribution. After loading the trucks with aid, and driving to the distribution destinations, the actual handing out of food and clothing was also carefully planned for maximum effect and communication. Each food packet was personally delivered to the recipient's "home" by a pair of volunteers, allowing the students and staff time and opportunity to speak to the Bosnians, to listen to their stories, and to see their living conditions. Students often came back from such trips in tears, saddened by the stories, and by the miserable living conditions of the Bosnian people. It was often very difficult for student volunteers to tear themselves away from the homes—after all, the stories they were hearing were of homes destroyed, loved ones killed, lives decimated.

### Children

Children were a main focus of the trip—providing schools supplies, toys, food, or simply playing with them. Communication with children was done on all levels—just being with them, laughing with them, listening to their stories, through our translators. Although one young neighborhood boy of eight, named Benny could speak English with a perfect American accent. He had seen two or three groups a year come to his neighborhood, and had taught himself to speak from that contact, and from watching the locally broadcast Cartoon Network. Our volunteers were amazed at his language ability, further strengthening their determination to improve their English. They admitted that they were literally embarrassed into furthering their English skills.

### Translators

Our three translators, 16, 17, and 18 years old, were invaluable—could speak English quite well, and they had grown up in Gorazde during the war. They traveled with us constantly, even sleeping in our homes occasionally. The student volunteers were relentless in asking them questions about B-H, about their families, their war experiences, and so forth. Communication was facilitated also because the translators were approximately the same age as our student. These young men were also affected deeply by the day's events, as they translated all the terrible stories that were told in the morning by the warehousemen, during the day by the aid recipients, refugees and displaced persons, at the schools or hospitals in the afternoon or during the evenings in our homes. Many times they would be in tears hearing the stories told. Seeing this kind of emotional display made all group members listen carefully, to try to fully understand what they were experiencing. Not to be mercenary, but in truth this kind of motivation was truly the best aid for linguistic growth. When we later returned to normal school life, I asked the students and staff to write about the trip, what they saw, heard and experienced, and their reflections on the experience. The writing that the students produced was rather amazingly more advanced than the writing that they had produced before the trip. The meaningful input with real emotional and cognitive consequences gave the students the impetus to produce writing with real impact. One teacher reading the stories at the JALT Conference was moved to tears. I will include some samples of the student writing here, in order to demonstrate more clearly the effect that the trip had on the students, including their writing skills. Such a

trip, well planned, and well executed, is an excellent way to educate students, in all aspects of learning.

## Samples of student writing about the Bosnia humanitarian trip 2001

### *Brief history of Bosnia and Herzegovina*

In 1992, the war broke out in Bosnia Herzegovina with devastating consequences. Bosnia and Herzegovina was the most ethnically mixed of all the republics of the former Yugoslavia. According to a Yugoslav population survey in 1991, the three main groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina were Muslims (44 per cent), Serbs (31 per cent), and Croats (17 per cent). After the death of Tito, Josip Broz, Slovenia and Croatia declared independence in 1991. Provoked by those countries, Bosnia and Herzegovina declared its independence in March 1992. After that, the government of Serbia, led by President Slobodan Milosevic, vowed to fight on behalf of the Serb minority population within Bosnia and Herzegovina. Since the government of Serbia did not want Bosnia to be an independent country apart from Yugoslavia, they start to inhibit them. Within days, Serbian paramilitary forces moved into the eastern part of the republic and began killing or expelling Muslim and Croat residents. At about the same time, Serb forces from the Yugoslav army took to the hills surrounding the Bosnian capital Sarajevo and began attacking it with artillery. By the end of April 1992, 95 per cent of the Muslim and Croat populations in major towns and cities of eastern Bosnia had been forced from their homes and Sarajevo was under daily bombardment. By mid-July, Serb forces controlled two-thirds of Bosnia and Herzegovina and approximately one million people had fled their homes.

In the early stage of the war, Muslims and Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina fought together against the Bosnian Serbs, but in early 1993, fighting broke out between Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Muslims; another round of “Ethnic Cleansing” begun, this time in central Bosnia. Bosnian Croat forces, backed by Croatia, attempted to create an ethnically pure swathe of territory adjoining Croatia.

Although tensions between them continued, fighting between Bosnian Croat forces and the mainly Muslim Bosnian government forces came to an end in March 1994, with the signing of the Washington Agreement and the creation of a Muslim-Croat Federation. In 1995 August, NATO bombed Serbian territory in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Bosnia and Herzegovina made a truce within the country in 1995 May. Following the peace negotiations started in Dayton, Ohio, U.S.A., Bosnia and Herzegovina signed a peace treaty in Paris.

By the time the war ended in December 1995, over half the 4.4 million people of Bosnia and Herzegovina were displaced. An estimated 1.3 million were internally displaced and some 500,000 were refugees in neighboring countries. In addition, around 700,000 had become refugees in Western Europe, of whom some 345,000 were in the Federal Republic of Germany.

*Mari K.*

There is no other word than astonished that would describe my perceptions upon reaching village. I stood with my mouth slovenly half open, staring at the destroyed houses in which family lived with multitudes of smiles, where only spaces to walk on, essential elements in life, and a roof were missing.

Confusion took over my mind: what was it that kept them smiling, living in a place that doesn't even deserve the name of a shack? It was not long before that I came to realize what made them smile. A loaf of bread, their smiling children, and a sunny day. Nothing more, nothing less.

*Masahiro Y.*

### *Is the situation getting better?*

It was my question while staying in Bosnia for the second time. Last year, everything seemed new to me. Crowds of people pushing each other to get clothes from a truck, destruction that the war left behind still waiting for repair work, and Keep Out signs telling danger of mines, all scenes stayed vivid in my memory. I remember when I was on a van going to Ustikolina from Sarajevo last year, I could not imagine where I was going and what the trip would be like. As it was expected, the first trip to Bosnia turned out to be a kind of a shock and be one of my milestones. Just as last year, on a van taking exactly the same road, my concern was whether the vivid scenes would remain the same or be just memory living in my mind.

There were many things around Gorazde that did not change at all over a year. Sometimes those were what I was expected to see again, sometimes not. I was glad to see children's smiles, tasty Bosnian cuisine, and the famous bridge, being a vestige of the war, once again. When I got to Ustikolina and saw a street where a garbage can had not moved even a centimeter (I'm exaggerating...maybe), I felt like coming back home. On the other hand, the ruin of a huge factory, a black market, and an old woman in tears

were what I did not wish to see again. I was disappointed in, especially, the condition of the factory, and powerlessness of any international organizations that have not succeeded in finding a way to rebuild it. Since the factory used to employ thousands of workers, it did not only kept the income of the workers high enough but also stabilized the whole economy in the area before the war. I heard the same story this year again that unemployment rate is still high and brain drain is happening in the area even now. My old host family was still looking for a job from last year, and the new host family have not received wages from a factory for many months yet. Talking with teenagers, they tell me that wish to get out of town to find a job since there is scarcely any jobs provided for high school graduated students and going to college is impossible for them due to financial reasons.

Then, what was different this year compared to last year? It would be people's hope for the peace in Bosnia. Perhaps, it has been always the same in people's minds since last year, but the difference was the actual actions. There were two big events occurred in Gorazde. First, US and NATO troops started to withdraw from that area little by little according to the International Herald Tribune, and displaced Serbs, who could not come back to the area, have started to return to Gorazde from other parts of Bosnia. The facts gave me an impression that people are now more or less open to take process of keeping the peace. It was the biggest difference that I remember. Also, it was this year that a man at a shop in Sarajevo telling me he considered himself as a Bosnian, neither Serb nor Muslim. Although it was invisible, but I grasped a certain gradual change in people's minds.

Answering to my previous question: Is the situation getting better? My personal answer would be yes. I do not think that I will go to Bosnia again at least until I have a job to do in Bosnia. However, I am sure that I will see a different Bosnia when I get there for a next time.

Lastly, on the trip, I learned and gained a lot more than I expected. I just would like to say special thanks to Lou, whom I met three years ago and gave me a great opportunity. Also, thanks to supervisors and friends who were on the trip. It was only a short period of time but would be a unforgettable moment in my life.

*Naoto S.*

### ***“What I felt when I joined Bosnia trip is very important for me”***

I went to Bosnia on my spring break. I went there with 8 students from KLAS, 7 students from LAS, and 3 teachers. Before I went to Bosnia, I worried about this trip so much, because I heard about land mines, war and so on. When I arrived at my host family’s home, they came to meet me with very big smiles. I was happy, and my worries disappeared from my heart.

What I did in Bosnia is mainly distribution of food to families who have difficulty to live. At first, we put sugar, salt, flour, detergent, oil, and rice into small bags. The first time when we made them, it took such a long time, but we learned how to do it better and faster. I felt even if no one told us how to do it, we could learn by ourselves. It was like a baby learning new things. After we made a lot of packs, we went to the place where people who need food live. When I

distributed them, people said, “Thank you, thank you,” many times. Also they told us many stories of war, every time I heard stories, in the stories, someone died. I was so sad. At first, people tried to smile, so I felt they hold on their feeling, so I had not to cry. But at last, some people, especially old women began to cry, then I could not hold on to my feelings any more. They hugged me, kissed me, and I could get very very big smiles. To get a big smile was my gold of this trip, so I was so happy, I can’t write enough of my feeling on just one page.

After I came back to my host family’s home, I played with the neighborhood children almost everyday. It was so fun. I felt I was the same age as them. I enjoyed very much being with them.

I had a very very very great experience in Bosnia. I hope I can go there again next year. I want to meet people who I met when I distributed and the people who lived and play with us again. It will be a wonderful thing for me.

### ***Our tasks and others***

Do you know about distribution? Before I went to Bosnia, I didn’t know about distribution. When I went to Bosnia I went to old factory, called a warehouse. In there we made a lot of family packs of food and detergent. To make packs was very interesting for me, because I never seen such big food bags. After we made many packs, we visited many places where many poor people live. There are different such of different culture as Serbs and Muslim people. They fought during The war, but now they are both very kind people. At the some place, before I got out of the van, I was reminded

to not walk off from hard ground. It made me scared, but when I got out of the van, people came closer to me. We distributed the food to them; we took family packs to their houses. Their homes were sometime not so bad, but some times they lived in tents, and houses which windows covered by vinyl sheets, walls were cardboard. But the people are very kind and good; sometime when I visited houses they gave me cafe or some sweets. Almost all people gave me a big hug, kisses, and big smiles. I was so happy, I can 't write enough about my feelings. They told me many stories which happened during The war; it was so sad, but I could get a very important experience. Before I went to Bosnia, I never thought about those people, but now I want to think about them. I know now distribution means to make people happy.

*Aya K.*

### **White necklace**

Terrible. I could not imagine another word but this. This was my initial feeling when I first saw the situation in Bosnia.

This was my second time to go to Bosnia. Different from last time, I was looking forward to going rather than worrying what will happen there, and what it would look like. Because I met so many nice and friendly kids and people last time, these things made me feel that way.

However, the situation and what people have been experienced are incompatible with my pleasant reunion with the good old people. It is difficult for you to imagine what Bosnia is like. Since most of you have never seen the sight of a beautiful blue sky and cherry blossoms with destroyed houses with bullet holes, it may sound only like a story.

When I first met that scene, I could not believe my eyes. There was the world, which I only saw on TV or magazine and I thought those things like persecutions and wars were going on in the different world from my life. The moment I saw the houses with bullet holes barely standing, I realized that there was a war here and felt my blood curdling. However, it was difficult to imagine that just six years ago, someone was firing at those houses standing where I was.

As many of you know, we were doing distribution there. During the distribution, I met so many people and heard their stories. So now, I can tell you a little about the horror and contradiction of war from the view of the people who actually experienced the war and also from my perspective.

The war ended six years ago and there was so much construction going on, that at first glance, it can be said that Bosnia is being reconstructed. However, what I notice is that even though the houses are newly built, the hurting people's wound are not healed easily like constructions which cover the exterior walls with white paint or cover in the bullet holes on the wall. Although the surface of the town is getting better, to cure the hearts within the people is not so simple. These facts are easily found out from the people whom I met. Once, a woman cried as she told me the story of war. Once, an old man who lost his wife and child showed me a solitary smile with tears. Seeing me, one lady burst into tears and tightly hugged me saying that she had a daughter of my age. Almost everyone whom I talked to using my poor Bosnian dissolved into tears. Without tears they could not tell the stories of war. Everyone lost someone special. It might have been their partner, parent, child, or friend. The sorrow of losing someone very important for



their lives keeps them feeling the grief. The war finished at last, however, those killed people never come back. To my surprise and with sadness, there are some people who witnessed their own children being murdered. Being next to them and hearing the real terror of war, sometimes I could not stop crying and hugging with them.

Having been moved by these people, I encountered one old lady whom I cannot forget, maybe for my whole life. One day, I distributed food to old lady by chance. As usual I carried food baggage to her house, to be exact into her room. She only has one room where she sleeps, cooks, does everything, and spends her time in a room as her house. She guided me to her room turning her back to me without saying anything. I just followed her with the heavy food bag thinking how could she go up the steep stairs so lightly. After I put the bag inside of her room, we exchanged a few words and then I was about to leave. However, I could not leave. Since I felt that her face was showing that she wants to say something to me, I stayed. With my bad Bosnian, I spoke to her. Although she could not speak well because of her age, she started to talk. According to her story, her only son was killed in front of her which I cannot believe as a thing humans could do. With a sad smile she showed me a picture of her previous house which was large and beautiful. Then she took out the family picture of hers. In the picture everyone was smiling surrounding by a big birthday cake. She was moved to tears. Finally, with trembling hand, she presented the picture of her son who was still young about high school student. At that time her eyes were already full of tears and she kept wiping her tears coming from under glasses. As she talked she faltered and groped for words

and kept crying. Even though I could not fully understand what she said, her sadness entered my heart. I could feel her lament for her son and the war.

Feeling disconsolate with her, what I could only do was to cry together. But, what else I could do and how could I find the word to console her? Finding me crying, she hugged me and together we cried. After she took me to the entrance of the building for parting, I was unable to leave her behind. Then, I stayed and just sat on the concrete with her, looking around. Without any word, we shared our feelings and I stayed as long as I could. When the time of leaving came, I said bye to her. It was then that she gave me one of her white necklaces which were on her neck. She put it on my neck and then waved her hand. Not knowing what to say, I just smiled in return with my tear-covered face. She kept waving at me from the entrance of her building until our van was out of sight.

I remember her when I think about Bosnia, heard about Bosnia, and look her necklace. Her necklace is a little rusty and seems old, so I think she might have spent her life during the war and after the war wearing this necklace. Then I really feel the necklace is a part of her. She gave her important necklace to the girl who only visited her once to give a food bag.

I actually went to Bosnia to solve the question of war even a little bit. However, what I could manage is make myself unable to solve or even understand. The more I know the more I got confused. Meeting both Muslims and Serbs, I could find no difference between the two peoples, who are supposed to be devils to one another. They are both nice, friendly, kind and have been hurt from the war. The only

thing how they are different is what they believe as gods.

In the past, I did not care much about suffering people in the same world, so now I am ashamed of myself. Seeing the real situation, I had to change my mistaken ideas. I was shocked to see houses with bullet holes and people with only one arm or leg. It was no longer just a story on TV happening in the another world but a real fact in front of my eyes. I cannot think that these things are happening in a different world anymore. Through my meeting with people, I learned about hurting people and the fact that there is a something even I can do for them. I will never forget what I saw, experienced and felt.

The white necklace is now on my desk recalling my memory with her and questioning the contradiction of war.

*Mari K.*

### ***What we have acquired through the trip***

When we visited Bosnia, it was early spring. Cherry blossoms were at their peak, and there were some emerald shining rivers and the blue expanse of the sky. The town was so quiet and still that if it were not for destroyed houses and houses with countless marks of bullets, who would believe that there was a bloodcurdling war several years ago? However, sad to say, under those cherry blossoms, on those rivers, under that sky, and in that town, people were killing each other, and a lot of blood was shed.

The thing that I was most shocked and depressed by was the hatred and mistrust between the two races that still lingers on in people's hearts. It was incredibly deep, so that at first, it seemed almost hopeless. Nevertheless, people in

Bosnia tried to tell us the bare truth of themselves such as the memories of the tragic and shameful war, hoping that it will never happen again anywhere in the world. I'm sure that it was not an easy task to face those memories, and some of them must have been too difficult for them even to recall. I was deeply moved by their bravery, and it gave me hope.

During the food distribution, an old lady suddenly came near to me, and gave me a big hug and kisses, repeating "hvala" (thank you in Bosnian). Then, she started crying and said to me that she was so sorry because she had nothing to give me in return for the distribution. However, I think she gave me more than I gave her. Come to think of it, for a long time, I had not been thanked so much by someone for something that I did. When the old lady gave me a hug and kisses, I remember that I felt so satisfied. She made me realize that even I could make people happy. I am not exaggerating, but at that time, I was really glad that I had been born in this world.

After the vacation, among the other students who had got new hairstyles and a bunch of pretty clothes in each of their destinations, only the Bosnia trip members had sunburned faces, unkempt hair, and dirty clothes since we could seldom take a hot shower. We looked quite shabby, but I remember that I had never had such a proud moment until then. That is because I was confident that we had had more wonderful and meaningful and rarer experiences than anyone else. All of the experiences and memories are treasures to me.

*Michiko O.*

### *An old man*

On the trip to Bosnia, we had work to do. We packed food and soap in plastic bags, and distributed it to the people who didn't have work, money, or food. Actually, the work was a pretty fun; every day I got covered with flour while I worked packing, I slept a lot in the van on the way to the distribution sites, and I carried the bags filled with necessities to the people's houses. Most of the people looked happy with what we brought and more than half of the people looked grateful for what we were doing. But, to be honest, I didn't care much about the people's reaction. To me, the process of distribution was merely to carry the bags to the people's houses. That was it, and I was happy with that, honestly.

One day, at one site of distribution, I met an old man living in one of the destroyed apartment buildings. I sat next to him because he waved his hands and I thought that he was beckoning me to sit down. In front of me, he was trying to do something, and it looked to me that he was trying to take something out of his breast pocket. But he was trembling so hard that he couldn't even put his fingers in the pocket. So I helped him, which was what I thought he wanted to do. It was an agenda, a very, very dirty and old one. What was significant of it was that it had a hole in the middle which I thought must have been made by a bullet. I also helped him open the agenda, and one picture came out. It was a picture of a young boy. The old man pointed the picture and squeezed out a voice, "Sin... Sin..." It's not the English word "sin" but it's a Bosnian equivalent of the English word "son." I saw a tear in his eyes, and his whole body was trembling. Fortunately or not, I understood that the old man wanted to tell me the fact that the young boy in

the picture was his son, and he had been killed in the war. He put his right hand on his throat, and moved it left to right pretty quickly. Again and again, he put up his right hand on his throat and did the same. His right hand was a knife, and his throat was his son's throat that was cut left to right by a cruel enemy. As he showed me how his son was killed, he obviously grew more and more miserable, but he didn't stop. He wanted me to know what had happened. Maybe, the fact was so large to him that he couldn't keep it by himself, that he wanted to share that with someone. And it was me. But, what was I supposed to do? I didn't know. So I put my arm on his shoulder and nodded to him that I understood what he wanted to tell me. He stared at me and I stared at him. Then He kissed me on my cheek. His mouth was very dry and cracked, but it wasn't uncomfortable.

As I remember the trip to Bosnia, the old man first comes up in my mind. I wonder why and cannot come up with any particular reason; maybe because I put pity on a miserable old man; maybe because he kissed me; or maybe because he shared his story with me and told it from his heart. Maybe, but that doesn't matter. People meet other people in their lives. Sometimes, they just meet and forget those they met. But sometimes, they meet and remember those they met. And I remember him.

*Kunihiro Y.*

### *It was my second trip to Bosnia*

"Wow! What's this!?" When I arrived at Sarajevo airport, I was so amazed. The airport was no longer what it had used to be, and everything had been completely changed.

There had been two shabby boxes, which had been made of cardboard and they had been used as customhouses. But now! Four magnificent customhouses are there and four beautiful ladies are checking your passports! The airport itself had been changed a lot, too. It has coffee shops, a tax-free shop, and check counters. Yes! Check counters! Last year when we had checked in there, the air hostess had written our flight tickets by herself! There hadn't been any machines to issue tickets! Therefore, you can imagine how I was surprised when I got down to Sarajevo airport.

Such being the case, I thought all things in Bosnia had been improved. However, I was fully wrong. As I went around small villages and visited houses for distribution, I found out that there were still deep wounds in people's hearts and nothing could take them away. People told us what happened during the war: things they had lost such as blood relatives, friends, houses, property, and other things that they had had. Sometimes they condemned us for not knowing how dreadful the war had been. I felt really sorry. I, however, couldn't think what I should do for those people but other than distributing. I tried to communicate with people as many as I could and listen to their stories as many as I could. I thought that was what I could do except to distribute. I heard many stories but I want to pick up one of them and tell it to you.

The old man sitting on the sofa hadn't changed by his looking but he had deep wound in his heart and was almost like a cabbage. I had met him last year, and there had been his wife in the house. She had lost her right eye by a little bomb and there had been a big hole from her right cheek to her right forehead. She also had lost her voice and the only

sound come from her mouth had sounded like rats. I would be a liar if I said I hadn't been scared, but I had felt pity much more than scary. Therefore, this year I was looking forward to seeing her and checking her existence. However, when I arrived at the house, no one answered. The translator, Aya, and I kept going into the house and found the old man sitting alone. He was looking somewhere far away. He seemed that he didn't realize who we were and why we came there. He began to talk.

“My wife died one month ago because of sickness. Since then, I have lived by myself. I lost all my hopes. Every morning, I wake up and wonder “WHY I WAKE UP TODAY?” I cannot find out the meaning of life. Though I wake up every morning, only I can do during the day is sitting here and staring somewhere. Surviving is meaningless and quite exhausting for me. In a few months, I have to leave here because this house will be a Serbian house. I have no idea where I should go. Maybe I will go to the next village in the mountains. So I will never meet you again.”

I was really shocked when I heard these words. I've never met people who lost the meaning of their lives. I couldn't think what I could do. His eyes never turned to others' eyes. I could feel the lassitude from him. We left the home without saying anything....

I learned a lot of things during the stay in Bosnia. I would have never learned these if I hadn't been there. Before I went to Bosnia, I have been thinking that the issue had had no connection with me and sending clothes and foods had been enough for Bosnian people as aid. However, I found that meeting people and listening to them directly was much more important than sending aid. I really wanted to stay in

Bosnia longer and listen to more people. Therefore, I want you to do what I did in Bosnia, sympathize with me, and do what I couldn't manage to do. I'm sure if you go there, you'll get something you've never had, and it will be helpful in many ways in your life.

I hope all of you can go to Bosnia and have a meaningful time there.

*Asako T.*

### ***Another world in the same world***

If you want to see the people who still suffer under the influence of war that you see on TV programs, go to Bosnia because that was what I experienced in Bosnia. For the first time, I stepped into that world that I have only seen on TV. Destroyed, miserable houses with lots of marks of bullets, unkempt people in tattered clothes, still remaining hatred between people, for a happy girl like me who has never experienced a real war in my life, they were quite shocking things to see, or even they were too shocking so that I did not feel any strong surprise, in fact. Therefore, personally this trip was quite an impressive and meaningful trip and so it would be for you, I'm sure.

Before I went to Bosnia, I was thinking of going on this rare tour since we cannot go to Bosnia easily because of the safety or inconvenience. However, once I got to the airport and began to look around outside from the van, I doubted my eyes. Totally destroyed apartments or half destroyed houses were standing under the blue sky. The veranda had lots of laundry hanging under the bright sun. All was peaceful. The strangeness that I felt at that time was the imbalances. That

first scene was completely unbalanced from my common sense because I had never seen such scenes directly with my own eyes. I hear the old lady, who hugged me strongly and wept, say that no one had ever come to help her for six years, since the war ended. She told me that.

I had seen many documentary TV programs before, but what I saw and heard in Bosnia was nothing like those shows. This was real. For the first time, I felt the fact that Bosnia had a war as real. For the first time, I realized that there is a world on the same earth which is still suffering from war. I had said before that there were people who were suffering right now, but that was nothing. I felt really ashamed at how I thought I knew the situation even though I didn't understand it at all.

However, even under harsh conditions, people are lively and children were full of energy. They were also real. Looking at those people, I felt that I was with them. They were not people that I can only see on TV, but real people that I can communicate with. Even though I cannot do many things for them, at least I could know that there were people who are living like that on the same earth. That's little but clearly the difference for me and for them, and I think it is the most important thing that I learned in Bosnia.

To sum up, if you get interested in my story or any points that I have said, go to Bosnia. If you want to see the real world that you may see on TV and make a difference in yourself, go to Bosnia. Probably you will get shocked, but that is the important thing. Realizing that there is a world like that exists in the same world is essential. Not only being an observer, but to feel the problem is real and to stay with the people, this is the point.

*Shiho F.*

## Conclusion

It is good to keep in mind that all these writers are Japanese high school students. Although the teacher assisted with some minor editing, for the most part the writing is the original students' writing. It is abundantly clear, even to a casual reader, that each student writer was strongly affected by this experience in Bosnia, and that the writing skills exhibited are quite advanced for high school ESL students. It should also be kept in mind that the teachers involved in this project all felt the students' oral skills improved as equally as did their written skills. And in conclusion, it became clear to the teachers that a clear and strong motivation to learn the language is key in language acquisition.

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