

Title:Children of war**Author(s):**[Arthur Brice](#)**Source:**[Scholastic Update](#). 126.12 (Mar. 25, 1994): p25.**Document Type:**Cover story, Interview**Full Text:** COPYRIGHT 1994 Scholastic, Inc.<http://www.scholastic.com>**Full Text:**

Four teenage refugees from Bosnia talk to UPDATE about the hardships of life during wartime, and the experience of escaping to America.

The war in the Balkans has caused grievous suffering for millions of people. Since the war began two years ago, more than 200,000 people have been killed, while another 2 million have been driven from their homes. As in most wars, young people suffered their share, even though they didn't start the war and are too young to fight in it. A recent Harvard study estimates that 30,000 children have been killed. Tens of thousands more have been orphaned. And nearly 25 percent of all the refugees created by the war are between the ages of 10 and 17.

Although all ethnic groups in Bosnia have been affected by the war, the hardest hit have been Muslims. Today, tens of thousands of young Muslim war victims are languishing in refugee camps in Croatia, hoping eventually to make it to safety in another country. Last year, the U.S. admitted 3,000 of these refugees. In late February, UPDATE went to Stone Mountain, Georgia, near Atlanta, to talk to four recently arrived teenage Muslim refugees about their experiences and about life in their new country.

Seventeen-year-old Amela Kamenica and her 15-year-old brother, Emir, were born and raised in Sarajevo. Their father, an economics professor, was kidnapped and killed by Serb forces in 1992. They live with their mother.

Elma Brokovic, 14, is also from Sarajevo, and, with her mother, shares an apartment with the Kamenicas.

Emil Hadzic, 14, was born in Prijedor, Bosnia, and has lived in both Bosnia and Croatia. He lives with his father; his mother remains in Croatia.

All four teenagers arrived in the U.S four months ago, after spending a year in a refugee camp in Croatia. Today, they attend Clarkson High School in Stone Mountain.

What was life like before the war?

Amela: It was great. We could go out at midnight and walk the streets [of Sarajevo] freely, and nothing would ever happen to anybody. We would go skiing every winter and to the seaside every summer. In those days, there weren't any problems. You really could enjoy life.

Emir: Yes, before the war, life was good. My father had a good job and we had lots of money. Every year we would travel to foreign countries. We would go to Russia, Bulgaria, Hungary - all over.

Elma: It seemed like we had no worries. I had lots of friends and we would all go skiing in the mountains. It was safe in Bosnia in those days. Bosnia was a wonderful place to live.

How did the war change your lives?

Emir. After the war started, you could not even go out of your house. I had to crawl through my apartment on my hands and knees or risk getting shot. I slept in the bathtub for days, because that was the only place where you were totally safe from bullets. I learned to live for the moment. I would think to myself, "If I don't get shot today, I'll live tomorrow." You just want to survive this day.

Elma: Everything completely changed. One minute we had everything, then we had nothing.

Emil: To me, the war just meant changing my friends and where I lived. When war broke out in Croatia, I went to Bosnia with my father. When war broke out in Bosnia, I went to Croatia with my

mother. But the war affected my father much more, because he was held for seven months in a concentration camp, and he went a little the crazy.

Amela: Before the war I really enjoyed life. But after I found out about my father's death, everything seemed so useless. I couldn't see any future for myself. I didn't know where I was going. I wasn't the same person anymore.

How did your father die?

Emir: When the war started, the Serb army occupied part of the town we lived in. They came into our homes and said they had established a new government. They told us not to go out, and to leave our doors open so they could come in and search for weapons. That happened in April 1992. In May, my mom, my sister, and I tried to escape from that part of town while our dad stayed [behind at the house]. We were walking on this bridge over the river and [the Serbs] started shooting. So we ran away until we came to relatives who lived in another part of town. There was not much food there, so we decided we had to go to Croatia.

We got two letters from my dad. The [Serbs] had set up concentration camps where people lived in their own apartments but the whole day had to work for the Serbs. Then we got a letter from a lady in Serbia who was our contact with him, and she said he had been killed.

Amela: He was being watched for days before he was killed, and one day he went to work and didn't come back. The truth probably is that he tried to escape because he was beaten so many times. He was supposed to have his 45th birthday in January.

What are your lives like in the U.S.?

Amela: I like it better than being a refugee in Croatia. Here, people don't judge you by your religion. When I say that I'm a Muslim, they don't react like, "Oh, I don't want to be with you, I don't want to be your friend because you're Muslim." Some people here don't

even know where Bosnia is, but they're really nice and try to help. Things are getting better because we can go to school. We couldn't go to school in Croatia because we are Muslims.

But I miss my friends in Sarajevo. They write me, telling me how they don't have anything to eat, and about their troubled lives. Sometimes I wish I'd stayed there, watching the war, rather than being here, safe, but without friends.

How does life here compare to
life in Bosnia?

Emir: It's good now. It's not as good as it was in Bosnia, but better than Croatia. I lived under Communism for 14 years. Nobody I knew practiced religion. And then suddenly they tried to kill me because of religion. Here, I don't have that problem anymore.

Elma: I expected more. Amela: She thought she would have a boyfriend and a good car. (All laugh.)

Emil: She thought she was going to live in Beverly Hills. (Laughter.)
Which were you thinking?

Elma: I was thinking about all of that. (Laughter.)

Emir: Every movie you watched was recorded in L.A. California beaches and girls. (Laughter.)

Amela: That's a fact. All you know about the U.S. is from the movies.

When you think of the future, what
do you think?

Elma: I'm just hoping war will stop and I'll go to Bosnia soon.

Amela: My graduation is next year, so I have to think about college. I want to get my family here, or, if that doesn't happen, send them money because life is really hard there. I'm going back to visit to

see my father's grave. But America is giving us a chance for a better future than we could have in Bosnia.

Abstract:

Four teenagers who escaped from war-torn Bosnia Herzegovina to the US discuss the influences of the war on them. All are Muslims and some lost parents in the war. Their experiences during the war and feelings about the US are discussed.

Source Citation (MLA 7th Edition)

Brice, Arthur. "Children of war." *Scholastic Update* 25 Mar. 1994: 25+. *General OneFile*. Web. 5 Sept. 2013.

Document URL

http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA15183473&v=2.1&u=nysl_ce_onehm&it=r&p=ITOF&sw=w

Gale Document Number: GALE|A15183473