

## **SUMMER CAMP ZIVOGOŠĆE 1998**

### **Drazenko:**

Although 2,5 years have gone by since war, the consequences of war happenings are still present. The children are, as the most endangered category in war, after the war under pressure of hard growing up. A big percentage of children with signs of after-traumatic stress syndrome, because of bad conditions of living and unsatisfactory professional work on the trauma, have no possibility to establish or to accomplish the process of exceeding the traumatic experience's consequences, in a way, which would have given them a chance to grow up as healthy, normal persons. That's why the effort of organizing the summer camp with different kinds of social and creative activities is very important. This gives to children without one or both parents, an opportunity to see the difference between life in their refugee settlements full of sorrow, misery and despair and life on the seaside, organized in clean, healthy conditions with regular meals and the possibility of maintaining hygiene.

The summer camp **Zivogošće '98** has started with the expected problems. Considering that a big number of children still live in almost inhuman hygienic conditions, and that children have traveled in buses on very warm weather, it happened that children transmitted lice from one to another. Fortunately, the guides reacted calmly, and that problem was solved in a couple of days. To be sure, the treatment was repeated before their return, and we can say that the children came home clean.

Activities, which we were accomplished twice a day in a time when the sun was most dangerous, were organized in a way to satisfy the different interests of the children. There was a group of children from Slovakia near our camp. Probably because of their guides, the contact between children was very weak. When I saw that they play soccer too, I had the idea they should play the game together. After few days we had a soccer meet, which looked like an international game. For some of the very quiet and withdrawn boys, the game was very positive and suddenly they became popular.

I returned home happy, because we have made possible 13 happy days for these children, where they had the opportunity to learn to swim, to taste the salty sea water for the first time, to make new friendships and to forget the hard conditions of living in exile. I want to thank all the noble people, who have made possible the organizing of this camp. I have the hope that we will make a similar camp next year, because there are so many unhappy children in Bosnia. We have showed this year that we are tolerant, ready for friendships and ready to meet other nations, languages and customs.

### **Ljubica:**

The summer camp **"Zivogošće '98"** has passed and today is the last day. Everything started with travel, which our children are not used to. Thanks to the good structure of time organisation in the camp and very good food and care through all the guides, the children recovered fast. I could write many things, but I will describe only few experiences...

All children were often talking about the meals in the restaurant. They liked them very much and children didn't hide it. One girl was very loud when she said: "I usually don't have breakfast, and here the breakfast is the best and I'm looking forward that night passes by, so that I can go to breakfast. I will always remember these breakfasts in full halls and waiters, who serve and ask do I want tea, white coffee or cocoa?"

"How nice it's here, but I want to cry when I remember the return to Rosulje. Here I have a bathroom. I have almost forgotten how it looks like to have a bathroom with hot water, as I had it in my house before the war and exile. We live in Rosulje, far away from a village in a half-destroyed house with plastic in the windows... I could cry only when I think of it. Thanks to everyone, who has paid for this summer camp for me. I saw the sea for the first time...". On the last evening in Zivogošće I walked up to the table where the girl from Rosulje was sitting. She asked me shortly: "Is this the

end?" Without thinking I said: "Yes". Then I heard the answer, which still booms in my ears, like all the shells of the damnable war. "When we go out from this bus, we are again only refugees". There was no answer on my lips. It was too hard a question, even for me, grown up and an old person.

"Was it nice here?" - "Yes, it was very nice, like the most beautiful dream. But I would like to dream this dream again and I would like that many children without a father dream such beautiful dream. If I could only know what to do, I would make many children dream similar dreams."

Every day we taught the children to swim. It was especially hard in my group with one girl, who couldn't relax in the water. Her small child body was always clenched. Her mother told me what this girl lived through. One day, when she went to school during the war, her mother as always followed her to between doors, she passed ten meters away from a house and intensive sniper fire started. The girl fell to the ground with a scream. She was screaming and saying: "I'm wounded, I'm wounded, mommy!". The mother crawled for one hour from the house to her child, also under sniper fire. That was the time she needed to come to her child, who screamed and bullets were falling around them. "When I came to her, I took her in my arms and brought her into the house. Sniper bullets were still falling around us. She was still screaming – I'm wounded, I'm wounded... I have examined her whole body. There was no wound from a bullet. I'm sure that I have to thank the mist, which helped my little girl, so that the bullets didn't find her. But that wasn't anymore THAT SAME girl. Only the whites of her eyes could be seen. Her face was distorted. I got scared. I thought that my little girl would die. I needed a doctor, but I wasn't able to carry her by myself. My husband was on the front line and I just wanted to save my girl. She didn't sleep. She was jumping up in the night screaming: I'm wounded! She urinated for a long time in bed. She didn't dare to stand up alone. She liked most to be alone. She isolated herself and was absorbed in her own thoughts."

That's past now, but that girl is still upset very often. She is afraid of the water. She has managed the technique of swimming, but she still can't swim alone in deeper water. "You will soon swim like a fish", I encouraged her.

In her name and in the name of all children, who survived war I thank the good people, who gave those children a possibility, opened the door of friendship. And children will talk. They will talk to other children and everybody will know that somewhere in the world good people exist, who want to help them and make it possible for them to spend one great summer in Zivogošće.

### **Namik:**

I have been working with war traumatised children for two years. I watched how working with them brings positive results. I have worked with them 5 months in their schools and at the end I decided to go with them to the seaside. Of course, thanks to your organisation.

The group assembled was made up of 8 boys and 6 girls. Two girls, Šehzada and Mejra are without parents. The first one lives with an 18 years old brother, and the other one with her grandma in a damaged house, which still has plastic coverings instead of windows. The other four girls live under similar conditions with their mothers. They have even forgotten how it looks like to have a father.

Adis has lost his father, 2 brothers and 2 sisters. He lives in Rosulje and plays with his friends Elmedin, Midhat and Sabit, who also have no fathers. Unfortunately, they have already come under the bad influence of the street. Now they are totally confused. They saw and experienced something new, which they haven't even dreamt of. Something was added to their dreams... the sea.

I would like that I could have shared with you the pleasure when I saw the first contact of children with sea, when they tasted salt water, when they discovered how easy it is to swim in the sea. For five months I watched their sad faces and barely succeeded to teach them that there is a smile in life, too. You have made the right move, the move that was missing. You are those, who made possible for 12 days smiles on their faces. In name of those children I deeply thank you.

There were also Mirza, Sead, Muharem and Adin in the group. Mirza has damaged hearing and still has a problem with speech. I was afraid that the children would tease him because of his defects. I asked from his friends in group to protect each other and they did it. Everyone liked him. I think he has never felt so much love. Probably because of that he cried so much on parting and said it was the most beautiful experience in his life.

Mejra and Sejo have learned to swim, but also they started to talk. After five months of work with them, on the seaside they finally started to talk to other children and me. Thanks to you they have seen that there is still a sense of life after this war in Bosnia.

Really I don't have any word to express their and my satisfaction for that which you have done for the children. I'm happy that somewhere in Germany and the US good people still live. I hope you will help to children from Bosnia in the future, too.

Its the second to last night at the children's camp. The voices of happy children fill the air – one group is singing, others are laughing and playing. I remember the boy sitting opposite me at dinner sparkling with delight when the special camp ending desert is wheeled into the dining room. It gives me such pleasure to work on a project that focuses on making children happy.

Especially these children...because their bubbling, outgoing happy spirits cover over such sad stories. They are almost all refugees. Some still say that they are from the towns they had to leave rather than say they are from Tuzla. They often explain that they are living in someone else's house, and some express anxiety about the inevitable move to where...

It might not seem like a lot to give these children twelve days of enjoyment at the seaside but I think it is a special gift to give them this time of normality and fun. The thin, malnourished children are able to eat as much as they like from a well planned menu. Lonely, isolated children, often living with elderly grandparents, suddenly have a lot of good friends and many children acquire new skills and more self confidence.

The camps are well planned and well supervised. I'm impressed that the organisers prime concern is making sure that the children's enjoyment comes first. I am so impressed by this project that I wish it could be duplicated in the many different countries where refugee children languish.

Thank you for contributing toward the costs of the children attending this camp. I'm a New Zealander and usually do humanitarian work and teach English in Sarajevo. I feel very privileged to be able to help on this project as I have nothing but great admiration for its goals and achievements. Its just pure magic to see stressed and over- burdened children released from their difficult lives and given, for a short time, what I consider the birth right of all children – some time to enjoy fun and friendship and a chance to learn new skills in a positive and encouraging atmosphere.

The only hard part of being here is translating the children's letters and realising what terrible lives thy have. So many of he children are orphans and some have been abandoned by their parents. Almost all are refugees and its very disturbing to find that so many of them worry about their future, especially about where they will live when the houses they are presently occupying will be reclaimed. These are the constant worries of my adult refugee friends but its tragic that the children also feel this pressure.

Unfortunately the situation in Bosnia is very complicated and I fear the country will face severe difficulties and problems for some years to come. Help from people like you ...for vulnerable, innocent children... is greatly needed!

Thank you so much.

Stephanie Perrott