

## Student Reflections

See also: "[Because I Was There](#)" by Andrew Holcom

***The following are student reflections on their experiences traveling to Bosnia & Herzegovina with Dr. Young.***

### Jessica O'Neil:

"I have been told by a few people that it was most likely the 'need to experience horror and suffering' that led me to study human rights violations and travel to Bosnia. I've never once had anything truly horrific happen to me or experienced what I would describe as true suffering...which was one of the reasons why I felt so very useless at an international gathering of people who had experienced suffering or had made a life's work out of studying it and attempting to prevent it. However, the more random people I end up telling about my experiences: friends, family, the people I meet... the more I feel that sharing the experience and the knowledge, not just raining doom and sadness upon those around me, was really as important as [what] some of the speakers tried to impress upon us. The suffering and the ones trying to hide it cannot be the only ones who know what's going on in those regions of the world... it cannot simply remain in the realm of academia. I've had many people ask me what on earth I'm going to 'do' with an anthropology degree, with a focus on human rights issues and war... I think I'm going to live my life, which I think has been greatly enriched by both aspects...and the friends that I have now because of it. You are all such wonderful people and I wouldn't trade this past summer's trip for any other experience."



**Jessica O'Neil**

Photo credit: Natalie Cooper

### Amy Linder:

"...What led me to spend my college career submerged in the horror? After all—the twisted bodies at the bottom of a mass grave, the victims of a mass rape campaign, the women who miscarried in a maquiladora bathroom because they were not allowed to stop work—these are lives that have seen so much horror that my interest may bring a hope, but not any kind of hope that they actually expect to be fulfilled. At the same time this horror can fill me up and replace my own. After all, your own personal fear of loss is nothing after reading testimony of women who can barely speak because their vocal cords have been eroded by men pissing in their mouths repeatedly."



**A mass grave being recovered in Srebrenica.**

Photo Credit: Andrew Holcom

## Dani Dolan:

"I first learned about what had happened in the former Yugoslavia when I was taking Kathy's Religion and Culture class. She made a reference to it in a lecture and I remember thinking, "What the hell is she talking about?" I contemplated asking in class for fear of looking stupid, but I decided to [ask about it] anyway. She told me briefly about the genocide and the war. I always knew there was a war but never knew a genocide had occurred. At that point in my life I thought the only genocide happened in the '40s because of Hitler, not in the '90s [because of] Milosovich. Apparently many other people in the class thought the same way I did. In 1995, I was only twelve years old. In class, I figured this was why I had no clue about what had happened. However, when I got home that day I called my mother and told her about what I had learned, she had no idea either. I figured that she should have known about this since she would have been an adult and more likely to pay attention. She told me that she knew of the war and little things surrounding it but knew nothing of genocide [occurring there].

This caused me to become infuriated at the fact that something of this magnitude could happen and that few people knew about it. This is what started getting me interested in issues of war and human rights violations. I started looking into other genocides and discovered Rwanda, Darfur, and Timor. All I know about the latter two is that genocide is [occurring there] and some other overarching facts about what's happened. However, Srebrenica really hit home with me, maybe because of what happened to the women.

When Kathy mentioned she was going to a conference and invited some of us to go with her I knew that I could not pass this up. We did everything we could to raise money (e.g., garage sales, bake sales, canvassing for donations). This was not enough for all of our expenses. Luckily, we all had parents that were very supportive and the Anthropology Department donated \$1,000 to our funds!

Moving forward to finally arriving in Sarajevo I remember being totally amazed. The conference put us up in a hotel for the time we were there. On the way there from the airport, the taxi driver gave us a small trip around the area where we were staying. I remember looking at the library that was on the verge of collapsing and thinking, "How could anyone attack a library? What is the point?" After seeing such destruction we arrived at our hotel. I didn't know what to expect after seeing how shell shocked the

city still was. But the hotel was wonderful and nicer than any other hotel I had ever stayed at. When we checked in I went out on the balcony to see the view and was totally amazed, "This is better than Vegas!" We were in the Turkish area where there was a lot of shopping and food. It was a good thing we were in this area because it really allowed us to get a sense of Bosnia and not just the conference. The conference started that Monday (two days after we arrived). The first day we went to Srebrenica and participated in the mass funeral and the opening of the conference. I was so nervous the entire time—that I would do something wrong—but luckily I never did. Since we were at a funeral all of the women had to wear head scarves. I never realized how hard it is to keep something like that on your head. To this day when someone starts making fun of women who wear head scarves I tell them to try and wear one for a few hours and not have it fall off or unravel.



***Dr. Young and her female students wearing scarves for the mass funeral they attended in Sarajevo.***

*Photo Credit: Andrew Holcom*

Going to Srebrenica was an experience that I will never forget. It was the weirdest feeling to be standing in the same place that such atrocities occurred. After going to such a place I decided that I was going to try and meet as many people as possible and get their thoughts on life. I met some of the most wonderful people. Most of them were my age and we talked about music and other things that people our age would talk about. However, they also told me the horrific ordeals that they and their families had to go through. In hearing these things I would start to get upset but I didn't because I knew I had no claim to be upset.

In learning about Srebrenica, I had always seen Hasan in the films and read about him in books. I was completely amazed to see him in person. It was then that every single piece of information I had been given was realized. I went up to him to tell him how much I admired him for telling his story. He told me that I should admire his brother for what he had done. When they were separated, Hasan's brother said "you know what? Fuck 'em. Don't fight for me

anymore. If I'm going to die, then so be it." That was one of the last things his brother said to him. When talking to the people my age and hearing their stories I started thinking back to the excuse of "I was only twelve, how would I know what was going on?" I started to realize they were twelve too. And they knew and experienced everything. It was at this point that I made a promise to myself to know everything there is about genocide and the people that it affects. This is why I decided to focus on these issues in Grad school. Although my thesis pertains to WWII I am still researching other areas. In doing so, I can tell other people and get them interested in what is going on. If we as a society want to know about it, then the news will give it to us. Then maybe we will never be in the dark about what is going on in the world."



***Hasan, meeting with Dr. Young and her students  
at the Genocide Conference, in Sarajevo, 2005***

*Photo Credit: Andrew Holcom*