Bosnia: May 1997

Bosnia. The very name is a metaphor. First in my consciousness was Biafra. In that place, I remembered people starved to death.

When I joined World Vision in the late 1970s, one country name had come to typify emergency disaster relief above all: Bangladesh. Another, Cambodia, had risen above merely describing a place to become a metaphor for a cancerous political system that devoured its own people.

Through the Eighties, the word Ethiopia supplanted Bangladesh. There, more strongly than before, it was clear to me that diabolic politics and natural disasters were jointly responsible for major loss of life.

Then, in the Nineties, two national names emerged to jostle for leadership in this grim league. Rwanda now typified Africa's worst, but for the first time in fifty years, a European name became a metaphor for a man-made political disaster. Bosnia.

After journeys to so many places, I was to make my first visit to Bosnia. I knew to have few expectations. I knew it would not be like other places I had visited. I was right.

They issued a visa at the Sarajevo airport, escorting me past the other waiting passengers while I tried to wear an expression that convinced them I was not being taken off to prison.

Sarajevo is conscious in pre-war memory because of the Winter Olympics. In fact, for someone from a Summer Olympics country like Australia, it is something of a surprise that I even recall that. There is, of course, the small matter of the start of the First World War, but this just seems like so much ancient history. The Winter Olympics happened in my lifetime. Somehow, this makes a difference.

So, my image of Sarajevo is of a city in a valley, ringed by mountains. This much is accurate. But it is manifestly inadequate. No one can hope to understand Bosnia without more history. It is an all-too-common tragedy of Europe that history is the best guide to the present and future. A history that subjugated people under Turks, Austro-Hungarians, Fascists and Communists. A history that destroyed the first flowers of a blossoming culture centuries before the more familiar Renaissance. A history that routinely replaced one oppression with a new one in which only the labels changed. This history has scarred Bosnia and its neighbours in the Balkans. It will continue to do so until it becomes possible to rise above history.

Sarajevo Holiday Inn

For me, Bosnia's lesson is the lesson of many other places. The world needs to find a new way of coping with differences. The old ways of exclusion, opposition and imposition don't work. Building walls and separating people behind them did not work in the Middle Ages, and they don't work today. They seem attractive, but all of history tells us otherwise. We must find a new world of inclusion and celebration (not mere tolerance).

That's why I work for World Vision. We believe in such a world. Two thousand years ago, a man who was also God, Jesus, described it. We can choose to live in such a world today. Or we can choose not to.

But enough preaching. To the experience of Bosnia...

The scars of the conflict, in which Serbian troops sat up in those mountains of my memory and for years lobbed shells, grenades and sniper fire into the city, are everywhere. Indeed, as the plane completed its final approach, we winged past hundreds of roofless, windowless houses. Decapitated. Eyes gouged into blindness.

Bill Warnock and his Bosnian colleague, Djemka, were there to meet me. Bill was into his third month in Bosnia after nine years of outstanding leadership of World Vision's work in Jerusalem, Gaza and the West Bank.

“You're a little late,” Bill observed, and I explained the combination of the plane's late departure and the need for a visa. “But it's OK”, he added with a shrug and a giggle. Djemka joined the private joke, and Bill explained that he was picking up this Bosnian habit from Djemka. The world is a mess, but it's OK. It sounded like survival skills to me.

The drive into town revealed more of the destruction, a scene that would become depressingly familiar over the next few days as we drove first to Tuzla, then to Banja Luka and beyond. Every building seemed to have sustained some damage. There were a few pockmarks in the external

plaster on a few lucky ones. On others, gaping holes with bits of masonry and internal wiring hanging out. Body parts. Intestines.

“It's so much improved compared to a year ago,” Djemka said. Really?

We dropped Djemka near the World Vision office and drove to Tuzla, which took slightly more than two hours. On the way, we saw the combined signs of past destruction and present rebuilding. Many homes had plastic sheeting over the windows. Often, family groups sat on verandas in the pleasant afternoon sun. Children played in groups around many houses.

But there were also other places. Places in which a dozen houses remained in various stages of destruction and were completely vacant, and the grounds around mined.

It is necessary to understand at least that Bosnia was, at this time, a fragile grouping of Serbs, Croats and Muslims. Not united in any real sense, it operated as two countries. The Federation of Muslims and Croats, which included Sarajevo and Tuzla, and Republika Srpska of Serbs in which was Banja Luka. When the Dayton Accords drew the boundaries, the intention was, among other things, for people to return to their own homes. But geography was not neatly lined up with demography. Before, groups of Serbs lived deep within the Federation and vice versa. Major towns had dozens of mosques, a score of Catholic churches, and more Orthodox churches.

The result was mass migration. Refugees. Although in the dehumanising technical language of realpolitik, no one is officially a refugee until they cross a border. So, most of these people are technically Internally Displaced People. The impression is that it is worse to be a refugee than to be an IDP. It was the same in Bosnia.

As we drove towards Tuzla, we reached a point where the border of Republika Srpska crossed the road. Here, we met SFOR, the latest iteration of the UN peacekeeping force. The checkpoint, designed to keep these united groups apart, was manned by Danes. One soldier, cherry-red from too much sun, chatted with us while cars came from the other direction.

“World Vision?” he asked, “what do you do?”

“See all those reconstructed houses up there?” Bill said, pointing to the low hill behind the soldier. We rebuilt them, and that school.”

“Great!”

“What will happen if you guys leave?” Bill asked him. From Bill's previous experience, I know that he already knew the answer. The question was rhetorical, for my benefit.

“I hate to think. But I think the place will fall apart in a week.” It was clear that he had been thinking despite hating it.

The World Vision office in Tuzla was a three-story building with turn-of-the-century architecture, oddly placed at the bottom of a hill and surrounded by comparative emptiness. An import-export company occupied most of it, but it also hosted World Vision, Save the Children and another childcare agency.

Judy-Leigh Moore was there to welcome us. A few years back, Judy-Leigh had been my personal assistant in Australia. She had been good enough at that, but now it was clear that her real calling was in places like this. After stints in Cambodia (see *Journeys To Justice*) and Rwanda, she had found her way to being our Tuzla manager, responsible for a six-million-dollar budget and a score of staff. Later, she wrote a terrific book about her life at the sharp end, *Where’s Granny Been?* Google it.

It was, by now, early evening, but before dinner, Judy-Leigh wanted to show us one project. In the nearby suburb of Simon Han, in a school completely restored by World Vision engineers,

they were holding an adult education class. Perhaps adult is a little broad because the class included a few teenagers who had missed schooling during the conflict and now felt uncomfortable picking up third grade with children five years their junior.

We met with the principal for a few minutes. The formal routine of welcoming, drinking coffee, and chatting is common in most countries, although it is a lost cultural art in most of Western Europe and America. On these kinds of visits, it is too easy to find oneself doing nothing else but drinking coffee. It can be interesting, even stimulating sleeplessness, but one also likes to see what is happening.

So, after a few minutes, during which the principal enthusiastically and proudly spoke about all that had been achieved since the school got going again, we visited a class. It comprised women and one teenage boy. They, too, disapproved of the lack of the opportunity to drink coffee and chat. The evidence of empty cups remained to show that this was the proper manner for starting an adult class in this country.

Four lessons earlier, one woman had begun to learn to write. Now she could sign her name. How proud she was to be able to sign for her pay cheque from the military base where she was a part-time cleaner.

"Better still, I can now read the names on the cigarette packets," she explained enthusiastically. "I used to be able to recognise only this one brand from the design and colour on the package. Now, if they do not have it, I can read the other packs and ask for another one by name!" As a non-smoker, I had mixed feelings about this achievement!

One woman said her children were enthusiastic about their mother going to school. "Now they ask me whether I have done my homework too!"

Dinner was a pleasant affair in the open air under a vine-covered veranda. The service was unhurried, and the food was fried and a little greasy.

Before retiring, I tried the local hooch, Sljivovica. One sip was plenty. It tasted like firewater! I hoped we would not be invited to too many celebrations.

The next day, we visited a series of schools in various states of repair after a quick visit to the Tuzla office. There, the staff gathered for devotions. But it was an ecumenical group, hired for their technical competence and the discerned quality of their hearts. Beyond ecumenical. There were Muslims, Croat Catholics and one Serb. A Western-style Bible study seemed out of place, so I talked about the amazing variety of people within World Vision.

*"Tall and short—with Bill's lanky frame sprawled on a chair beside petite Judy-Leigh. All different kinds of people. Some could speak many languages, and some could speak only one. Americans! (*Everyone laughed at finding at least one thing the citizens of the Great Nation lacked.*) In the Australian office, people called the service technician when the photocopier broke down. Others laid hands on it and prayed for a miracle. Remarkably, both methods were equally effective."*

The moral I hoped was not too subtly disguised was that World Vision is an inclusive organisation. I retold the story from Dr Stan Mooneyham's book, *Dancing on the Strait and Narrow*. Stan had found himself, as President of World Vision International, asked to chair a meeting of Latin American Christian leaders. They represented the breadth of the church at that time, and they didn't get along. Indeed, for some, it was the first time they had been in a meeting with others whom they publicly despised. For the first day, they did nothing but argue and accuse. Some of the remarks cut deep and painfully. Stan was bemused. How could he chair such a meeting?

Overnight, he had an idea. When the meeting began, he went to the whiteboard and drew a group of dots. Around each dot, he drew a tight circle.

“This was us yesterday,” said Stan, “and here is how I would like us to think about ourselves today.” And he drew a large circle that surrounded every one of those dots.

“I choose to draw a circle around us all. In this circle, no one has to be the same as anyone else. You are free to be who you are. But you all have one thing in common, and that is that you are in my circle. If you leave the circle, I shall draw it bigger.”

The meeting proceeded better thereafter. There was a Bible verse to support all this (a few, actually). I had John 17:22 in mind—*The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one.* But it didn't seem necessary to use a proof text.

We climbed into two cars. My driver, companion and guide, Miron, led me to a Ssangyong, a middle-sized four-wheel drive car from Korea. We drove and talked.

“When the Americans came,” Miron said, “the war stopped immediately.” Other forces had been before, but they had not exerted their presence as seriously upon the conflict as the Americans.

“And when they go?”

“It will start immediately again.” Here was the home-grown historical perspective that often seems missing from international media coverage of the Bosnian conflict. Perhaps too many journalists know too much about angles and stories and too little about history. Serbian aggression was not created *ex nihilo* in the 1990s.

He also talked about coming to work for World Vision. “The most confusing thing was the name.”

“World Vision?”

“No. This NGO business. I never knew what a **non-government** organisation was before. In Tito's time, there could be no such thing as non-government.

Conversations tend to get more personal as time and topography pass a motor vehicle. The conversation turned to his family.

“...and I have a brother in Ireland.”

“Ireland? How did he end up there?”

“He was among the people in the city square when they shelled it. They knew that young people would be there. It was on 25th May. Tito's birthday. Many young people were in the square having a drink and enjoying life. The grenade came down, and many died. My brother lost his legs. Then he had the chance to go to Ireland. He has a good job now. In computers.”

Here was another matter-of-fact story about the most horrific events told with distancing skills that could be confused for glibness. One wanted to cry out for the injustice. And cheer for his new life in Ireland. But I said nothing.

“Once, I went to the building supplies place as usual to pick up some things. Just when I arrived, someone told me the Serb army had arrived on the other side. Ten minutes sooner, I would have been in the middle of it. I turned around and went home.” It sounded like he had missed a bus or got to the cinema to find the last seat sold. Instead, he had narrowly missed death.

I mentioned that the women at the school the night before had complained because we did not have coffee with them.

“Ah, coffee is very important here. Especially for women. They have Welcome coffee, Talking coffee and Going Out coffee.”

“I guess it is strong coffee in small cups,” I speculated.

“Of course.”

“What do you call it?”

“It's just coffee. Bosnian coffee.”

This was once-bitten-twice-shy self-defence on my part. We ordered coffee two months after a wonderful meal in a restaurant in the Greek part of Cyprus. When it came, I carelessly commented, “Oh good. It's Turkish!” Cyprus is, of course, divided between Greeks and Turks. Indeed, at the time, the Turks were regularly lobbing mortar bombs over onto the Greek side. My companions hastily assured me that it was called *Cypriot Coffee*. Innocence Abroad can be a dangerous thing.

Miron was proud of the work he had done rebuilding the schools. He enthusiastically spoke about the way they had chosen the colours to paint the walls and how they had carefully scheduled the work in one school, swapping classes for workmen so that the school work continued with the reconstruction.

Miron's English was pretty good, but, like my German, he only had one way to say most things. Thus, he would tell me that something was *really good*. Soon, he would see something that was better and emphasise that it was *Really Good*. By lunchtime, we were visiting the school where he was most proud. This one was *REALLY GOOD*.

We bumped our way over a large hill to our last school of the morning to join the team working with children to identify post-trauma disorders. In one classroom, a group of 8-year-olds were engaged in two exercises. One group sat tightly around a table; shoulders pressed together. Each was given, in turn, a small piece of paper on which was written an emotion. They looked secretly at their slip and mimed the emotion while the rest of the group tried to guess. We watched as a girl tried to mime hate. I was pleased she could not do much better than anger.

Around the room, two to a desk, children traced their hands. They were making a string of hands to symbolise togetherness and unity.

Next door, led by one of Judy-Leigh's team members, a dynamic actor (and also, incidentally and invisibly, a Serb in this Croat-Muslim neighbourhood), the children were playing a game. In pairs, they were given a balloon, which they had to hold between their bodies without using their hands. If the balloon fell to the ground, they were out. Meanwhile, they were instructed to dance to the music. Quickly, pairs fell by the way until four or five pairs remained. After five minutes or so, there were two pairs. An older pair of girls and a younger pair of boys, short for their ten years. The girls were nonchalant; the boys were determined. The fierceness in their eyes and the rigour in their bodies spoke of striving to win. For more than ten minutes, they circulated. I was sure the leader would call it a draw, but he let them play it out. Finally, the girls got their balloon too far around one girl's shoulders, and it popped out. The boys whooped and yelled as if they had won an Olympic Gold. We were all caught up in the celebration, cheering and yelling our applause.

When order was restored, the leader invited the groups to assume the roles of animals. Many chose to be monkeys, others lions, and some

chickens. Two decided to be kangaroos in honour of one of the visitors. The children played in character for a while, chickens pecking the ground, lions stalking, and kangaroos hopping.

Suddenly, at the command of the leader, the children were asked to pretend that a grenade had exploded in the middle of them. All the lions were killed. The lion children submissively became prone. “What will the other animals do?” asked the leader.

The children began to act out the drama. They fretted over the dead and injured. Then, someone tried to pick up a body, and others began to help. Then, with macabre fun, they stacked the bodies, one on top of another (nearly crushing the poor little lion at the bottom).

“We let them be animals,” explained the leader off-stage, “because it is not themselves expressing the emotions. They can express themselves more fully through another character.”

I exchanged my seat in the Ssangyong for one in the larger Toyota Land Cruiser and proceeded back on the same road in greater comfort than expected. We were heading for Banja Luka in the Republika Srpska, the Serbian part of Bosnia. En route, we stopped within sight of the Zone of Separation between the two united areas to have lunch at Lola's restaurant. It recalled to mind a song, the only fragment of which was that “she wore dresses down to there.” Lola herself was not in evidence.

The drive to Banja Luka took us past many more ruined villages. As the war ebbed and flowed, these places were occupied first by one side, then the other. When the conquerors came, they pushed the people out before them. When they left, they gutted the buildings, tearing radiators free of the walls, ripping electric wiring out of the plaster, and knocking out the window frames. In other places, they would heavily mine the whole area to prevent the enemy from occupying houses. Sometimes, this rebounded on themselves as victories led them back to areas now rendered uninhabitable by their own hands.

Beverly was in charge in Banja Luka. She had been in this part of Bosnia only a few weeks after a much longer stint on the Croat-Muslim side. She found herself fully immersed in the contradictions and injustices of the border crossing.

“There seems no sense of guilt or shame over here. People saw things going on. And they stood by. You would think they feel guilty. But would you? Perhaps people feel powerless. And that limits their sense of personal guilt. It wasn't them who did it, even if deep down they approved.”

We went to a fantastic restaurant in the ruins of an Ottoman castle. With us was Father Karlo, a local Catholic priest. I quickly discovered his acidly dry sense of humour. On the way into the castle ruins, we passed by a set of a dozen sculptures. Each one was a bust of someone local and famous, set on its own pedestal. A few of the busts had been smashed.

“These are the patriots,” Beverly explained. “The headless ones were Croats. That's right isn't it, Father?”

“Who can say how this happened?” he asks with a hint of a smile, “A little breeze. A beautiful day can do it.”

The conversation over dinner mostly centred around this dilemma of guilt and shame, the need for a sense of history, and the need for justice to make way for catharsis and healing.

It seemed clear that things looked very different from Belgrade than they did from Boston. Justice for Milosevic might look like martyrdom to others. So, the conversation ebbed and flowed with the intellectual vigour of concerned but distant observers.

“Serbs see it as a just war. Why should they feel guilty? Did Americans feel personally guilty for what America did in Vietnam? Do Australians feel personally guilty about what happened to Australian Aboriginal children taken by force from their parents? Why should Serbs feel guilty because someone else throws a grenade or blows up a church?”

“But they were living here? They saw it the next morning?”

“And we only saw it on TV.”

There was no answer to this discussion. The strands of hate and injustice are anchored deep in history. Hundreds of years of perceived injustice at the hands of Turks, Austro-Hungarians, and that half-Croat half-Slovene, Tito, conspire to make the answers complicated, if not incomprehensible. The blind hope that we would be different. But would we? Personally, I had my doubts.

Churches in Banja Luka became targets during the later part of the war. These churches were not Orthodox but Catholic churches, symbolising Croatian culture and life.

Father Karlo was our host the next morning on a tour of ruined Catholic Churches that began at the Banja Luka Cathedral. An attractive modern church building, the cathedral remained unfinished inside. The roof steepled up, and at each end of the building were genuine artistry stained-glass windows. Sunlight shafted down through a half dozen holes in the stained glass.

“Ecumenical shots,” observed Father Karlo audaciously. I laughed gladly and loudly, retelling the joke throughout the day to Father Karlo's obvious delight.

We had a brief discussion with a visiting agricultural consultant before going to see Father Karlo. Eighty percent of the cattle were lost during the war. Now, IFAD proposed a livestock distribution for Bosnia. But Bosnia needed to agree on where the cattle would go. The Federation and the Republic argued and argued about the appropriate ratios. Finally, IFAD walked out, and the livestock went elsewhere. This was unity after the war. There was a long way to go.

If anything symbolised the challenge, the ruined churches of Banja Luka did it for me. In the cathedral, like the stations of the cross, there is a series of photographs of a score of destroyed churches. In most cases, there is a before-and-after picture. Before is a church building of character, charm or obvious beauty. After is rubble.

Before we crossed from one side of the church to resume our pilgrimage to the remaining ruined symbols, we stopped by an odd crucifix. It was odd because it was set down low on the floor so that the head of the Christ figure was below eye height. Usually, such crucifixes are set higher so that one looks up to them as if in veneration towards heaven. Whether this odd location was intentional or not, I don't know. Its significance only became apparent on reflection.

The crucifix of plain painted wood was missing arms. And apart from the customary bleeding spear wound in Christ's side, this one was scarred with bullet wounds. These did not bleed. I was pained at the sacrilege. I should have fallen to my knees right then to enter the despair of the heart of God when he sees such things. I felt the despair in my own heart.

“Why would they do this? What's the point?” I asked Father Karlo rhetorically.

He had an answer for me. “They know it means something to others.”

Bill, Judy-Leigh, Beverly and I climbed into the Toyota with Father Karlo to visit three ruined buildings. The first remained standing. From a distance, it looked like a postcard picture of a country church. High on a hill, surrounded by farms, the churchyard was bordered by low trees. The steeple commanded the neighbouring trees and lanes, a symbol of God's Lordship.

Up close, God had been driven out. For a time, the church had been used as a barn. A priest's clothes lay in a corner as rags. The door to the church was smashed. The interior was empty. Huge frescoes on the front walls remained in reasonable shape.

The next two churches were completely ruined. They were mere rubble piles of bricks and mortar, splinters of wood, clumps of masonry, burned hymn books, and chips of marble. Beside each stood a fire-bombed parish house.

"Who did this?" I asked.

Father Karlo had asked, too. "We were told it was uncontrolled uniformed paramilitary."

I let the significance of that phrase *uncontrolled uniformed para-military* roll around in my head for a while. The Army did it. Or someone close to the Army. But no one claimed responsibility. State terrorism.

"We know they were not random acts because the pattern each time was the same. They came at night. They came to the Parish house, knocked on the door and told the people to go and lie in the fields. Then, they found the church records in the parish house and set them alight. Usually, the whole house was burned down. Then they placed bombs in the church and demolished it."

Some parts of these churches showed remarkable tenacity. More than one cross remained defiant in the face of thousands of kilograms of explosives.

In the second parish house, the walls were covered in graffiti of hate and pornography. Some of it, according to the Father, was fresh.

Finally, Father Karlo took us to an untouched Trappist Monastery. It was a place of peace and beauty, and one could not help wondering why anyone would want to destroy it.

After a pleasant lunch at the Cathedral House, we were on our way back to Sarajevo. The drive took us through a fantastic steep-sided gorge with a fast-flowing river on our left. Two 3-series BMWs skated past us as we went, one of them a desirable M-series. It was a driver's road, smooth and curved, and they were having fun.

We came near the Zone of Separation, and someone told the Bosnian version of the joke: Why did the chicken cross the road? Answer: You can't cross the road.

It took a couple of hours to drive to Sarajevo. I stayed with Bill at his flat near the river and not far from the centre of town. Like most places in this part of the world, the house looked a lot better inside than out. This place had hot water and a phone he shared with his landlady and was light-years better than the apartment from hell he had stayed in when he first arrived. I agreed. It wasn't heaven, but it was comfortable. I went to sleep surrounded by photos of geysers—Bill's hobby is geyser spotting.

Sarajevo was on my agenda the next morning. First, I addressed the Sarajevo staff with a re-run of the big circle talk. Then a colleague took me on a guided tour of the city. A drive along Sniper's Alley, past the shells of buildings, up onto the hills from whence the shelling came, and stops at two kindergartens faithfully restored by World Vision. They were full of bright-faced and noisy pre-schoolers. A more normal place one could not imagine.

After a quick lunch, Bill's deputy Chalon drove me up to Zeneca. This is where World Vision had begun our recent work before it was safe to go to Sarajevo. Zeneca remained the base for a major reconstruction program, a small sample I would see.

Paolo (an Italian), Semira, and Nermin joined Chalon and me to drive up to Maglaj (pronounced Mahg-lai rhymes with Thai). Paolo, voluble and Latin, was the life of the party as he drove with easy familiarity. That night, we were to farewell Paolo, sending him off with everyone's best wishes for a new job in Malawi. A large part of his decision was that his family, now living in Liverpool, UK, could at least be with him in Africa.

Semira explained to me what World Vision means by reconstruction.

"We have restored 400 houses. For each house, we are given DM8,000. It is not enough to rebuild a complete house, although sometimes the homes are not too badly damaged. But we can put the rooves back—the biggest job—and make at least two rooms habitable. Sometimes, we can do one home for less than DM8,000, so we can do more on another one."

"Whose houses are we repairing?"

"Well, we can only repair the houses of people who can demonstrate that they are the owners. Unfortunately, there are people even worse off—displaced. Maybe they own a house on the other side. They are supposed to go back there, but something will have to be done for them soon." Later, I heard that in places, houses were being confiscated and handed over to displaced people. Whether this is a good thing depends on where you sit.

They talked about the trauma and tension of living through a war. One story brought the message home like an arrow to the heart.

"One man was always angry. He complained we were not doing enough for his home. Everything we did was wrong. I was fed up with him," Semira recounted. "What's wrong with this man? I asked one of the local people. They told me he had gone to the front lines to find the body of his teenage son. He had put him in a body bag and carried him back home himself. After that, we decided to put in a special effort. It was a small way of relieving his pain."

It is amazing that something remained standing after the war. Three thousand shells and grenades every day rained down on this little village of a few hundred homes. Every day, for three years, from July 1992 until September 1995. Even in January 1996, there were still snipers in nearby hills. The legacy of this bombardment, during which many people continued to live in their homes, and some died for their courage or foolhardiness, is a village of ruined houses and 30,000 unexploded shells waiting in fields and forests for future victims.

We drove past the rebuilt houses as Semira and Paolo pointed out their homes with appealing affection.

"Oh, I like what we did with that one," Paolo would say about a place where they had managed to recover a third of the roof tiles.

"No." said Semira "this is my favourite. We changed that second storey and made it better than the original!"

A few times, we stopped and went inside the homes of people Paolo and Semira knew. They proudly showed us not merely what World Vision had done but how much more they had added themselves in paint, finishing touches and personal sweat. On each house was a metal plaque crediting USAID and World Vision International.

The external legacy was harder to see and more difficult to do something about. Every other day, there is a report of someone killed by accidentally standing on a mine or an unexploded shell.

"People can instantly tell you the names of others they know, killed by land mines," said Semira. "Everybody knows someone. I do."

As we approached the village's edge, Paolo announced that we were getting near the Zone of Separation and should turn back.

Sitting in the back, Chalon said with an obvious edge to her voice, “You can't turn here. There are mines!”

With Italian enthusiasm, Paolo waved his hands at the narrow road and the empty fields. “Well, I have to turn around somewhere.”

“Not here,” Chalon said firmly, and Paolo drove on with the resigned look of a reluctantly beaten man. Soon, he found a driveway into which he edged the four-wheel drive and accomplished a seven-point turn without anything exploding.

World Vision also restored a school here in Maglaj. We met the principal, who, among other things, informed us that his children had won the regional computing contest despite the fact that the school had no computers!

By now, the evening was approaching, and we headed back to Zeneca. We dined at a restaurant by a drain. This was more positively atmospheric than it sounds, as the drain was a stream over which stood a vine-decorated bridge. We drank aperitifs in the cool evening sun and then formed up to a long table with all the local staff to wish Paolo a bon voyage.

Late at night, we drove back to Sarajevo and were entertained by the cassette clarinet of Pete Fountain.

There was no hot water in Sarajevo before 7 am. This was not because the hot water heater in Bill's apartment didn't work. It was because the water was turned off in the early evening and didn't come back on until around six in the morning.

As I rose early and splashed cold water on my face to prepare for my flight home to Vienna, I recalled the most awful joke I had heard while visiting here—a joke so awful I could only politely cough upon hearing it. After even a week in Bosnia, I had come to understand enough to discern the tragedy under the humour.

The “Joke”

Since Bosnia could not pay its bills earlier this year, Russia switched off the gas pipeline that supplied gas to Sarajevo. The joke went like this:

What's the difference between Auschwitz and Sarajevo?

At least Auschwitz had gas.

Too soon.