

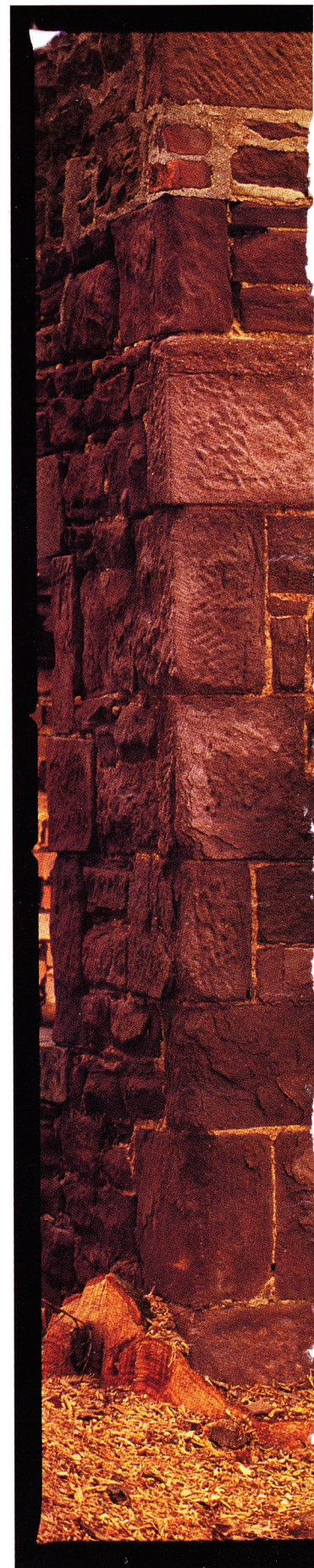
BOSNIA SETTLES INTO AN UNEASY PEACE, AND A GENERATION OF YOUNG ADULTS, SCARRED BY WAR AND CHEATED OF EDUCATION, EMERGES. HERE, THE FUTURE MUST BE BUILT

ONE LIFE ATA TIME

by Bill Glovin

Zlatan Fazlic was 15 and about to enter his second year of high school when war broke out in the former Yugoslavia, largely shutting down Bosnia's education system. The teenager knew that schools in Croatia accepted Bosnian students, but to get to the border from his besieged village, he would have to cross minefields and territory filled with enemy soldiers. Instead, he and a friend took a circuitous route: Traveling south to Belgrade, the capital of Serb-occupied lands, they crossed the border into Hungary, made their way through central Europe, and entered Croatia from the north.

BESIDES THEIR STUDIES AT RUTGERS AND THEIR ROOTS IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, ZLATAN FAZLIC (LEFT), ALEN PAVLOVIC, AND IRMA CAUSEVIC SHARE OTHER TRAITS: THE DETERMINATION TO BUILD BETTER LIVES OUTSIDE THEIR WAR-RAVAGED COUNTRY AND A PROFOUND SADNESS THAT THEY MAY NEVER GO HOME AGAIN.





"It was a miracle that they avoided capture and survived," says Peter Kahn. But although Fazlic made it safely to Croatia, his odyssey to complete his education was far from over. A year later, Croatia began expelling Bosnian students from their schools, and Fazlic accepted a scholarship to a school in Turkey. Despite not speaking a word of the language, he managed to pass all his courses. The next school year found him in Denver, Colorado, where he graduated in the top 20 percent of his class.

Having completed four years of high school in four different countries, Fazlic is now a first-year student at Cook College. He was brought to Rutgers by Kahn, an associate professor of biochemistry and microbiology at Cook and the local coordinator for the Bosnian Student Project, a volunteer relief effort that places students whose education has been disrupted by the war in high schools and colleges throughout the United States. The project is sponsored by The Fellowship of Reconciliation in Nyack, New York, an 80-year-old interfaith organization committed to nonviolence. Working hand-in-hand with World University Service, an Austrian student-aid organization, the project coordinates volunteers like Kahn who obtain scholarships for Bosnian students, raise necessary related funds, and find host families.

"In the areas the Serbs overran, they murdered or expelled people with education because they feared that the educated would become the political opposition," says Kahn. "In Bosnia, almost all the primary and secondary teachers and university professors are gone. School buildings were blown up or converted to warehouses or offices. Even if all the foreign aid that has been promised were delivered, it would still take a decade to rebuild the educational system. What do you do with a whole generation of kids whose education has been terminated? Who will have the skills to rebuild the country?"

These questions were first posed to Kahn by project director Doug Hostetter in August 1995. Hostetter, who has been friends with Kahn since their days as Vietnam War protesters, had founded the Bosnian Student Project the previous year. Over dinner in Manhattan, Hostetter told Kahn that although there were four Bosnian students in colleges in New Jersey, there were none at Rutgers.

Kahn immediately took the news to campus and was encouraged by the warm reception he received from Rutgers administrators. An academic four-year scholarship—worth \$10,000 to an out-of-state student per year—was offered to 18-year-old Irma Causevic. The scholarship helped inspire Kahn to raise \$1,000 for her airfare and \$6,500 for room, board, and student fees. He also volunteered his home to Causevic when school is not in session and he personally provides her books, clothes, spending money, and routine medical care. Says the 56-year-old professor, "My daughters are in their 20s and out of the house, so now it's as if my wife, Jennifer, and I have a new daughter."

THE BOOK OF JEWISH LAW SAYS: 'HE WHO SAVES ONE LIFE, IT IS AS IF HE HAD SAVED THE WORLD.' I DON'T BUY THE ARGUMENT THAT WHAT I'M CONTRIBUTING IS AN INSIGNIFICANT DROP IN THE BUCKET. THAT'S AN EXCUSE FOR DOING NOTHING."

~Peter Kahn, at right

His "new daughter's" route to Cook College was filled with as many pitfalls as that of her Bosnian classmate, Fazlic. When Causevic came to New Brunswick in September 1995, she had not seen her father in four years or her mother and younger sister in three years. She still recalls the terror of being stopped and held by Serbian gunmen as she, her mother, and her sister fled Sarajevo in a convoy of cars filled with women and children. After three days' captivity, the Red Cross intervened, and they were freed. To attend school in Zagreb, Croatia, Causevic was forced to separate from her family. Her high school years were spent worrying about her family and friends and cleaning houses to make ends meet.

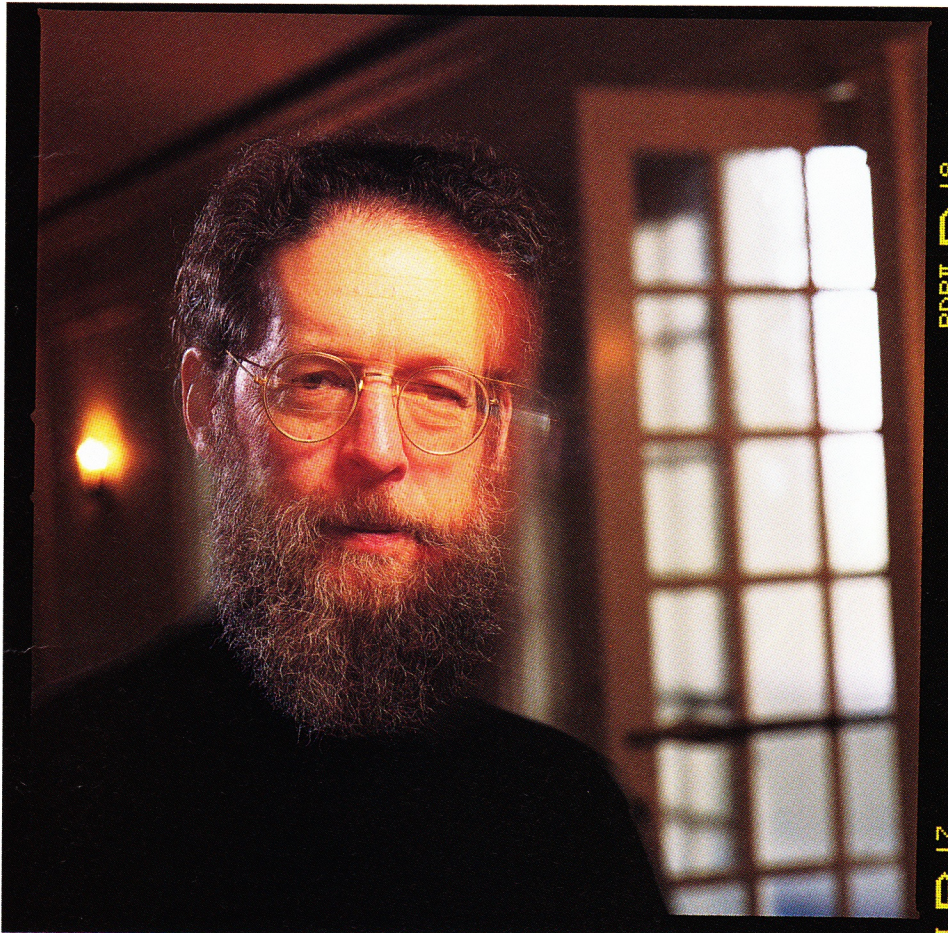
Ill with a severe cold, Causevic arrived at Cook College a week after school began. Despite a heavy class load that included biology, chemistry, and calculus, she made

the dean's list that fall. For the spring semester, she added German and completed the year with a 3.9 GPA. Her work was so good that the math department hired her as a mentor to this year's calculus students. Her goal, says the sophomore, is to attend medical school, then return to her homeland to see if she could commit to living there again.

"We expect a handful of students to remain here after they receive their education, but the majority will return to Bosnia and make important contributions as teachers, scientists, artists, and businessmen," says Kahn. "They are determined and driven to succeed. Despite the fact that all have varying degrees of posttraumatic stress

in the United States, the war is far from over for this family: Alen's uncle, who was negotiating a business deal with the United States, was murdered in Bosnia this past June by a car bomb; another uncle was killed three years ago.

"It's a huge adjustment for these students," says Kahn. "In the first few months, everything is so new that they just concentrate on functioning. After about five months, the enormity of their situation, all the uncertainty and pain of the past, surfaces. We talk, and I try to provide some degree of affection and acceptance, a sympathetic ear, some perspective and experience. Sometimes they make use of it, but I'm not always able to get through."



Kahn's next challenge is to bring a fourth Bosnian student to Rutgers. The urgency in his voice as he relates Sanela Pecenkovic's story is unmistakable. While her village was never taken by the Serbs, it was surrounded and cut off from food and supplies. "Sanela's high school was one of the few in Bosnia that remained open, although classes were often held outdoors in the hills because of shelling and sniper attacks. She graduated at the top of her class in 1994 and has worked tirelessly for Doctors Without Borders in Bosnia. Rutgers and the Douglass Alumni Association have each committed a half scholarship for her," he relates with pride.

His dedication to the plight of these students, Kahn says, has turned him into a "shameless fund-raiser" and

disorder as a result of the war, there hasn't been a single student out of the 150 placed throughout the United States who has failed academically."

Causevic's success and Kahn's persistence convinced Rutgers, Cook, and Douglass administrators to offer partial scholarships to two other project students. Fazlic received his scholarship from Rutgers, Cook, and private donors; and Alen Pavlovic, who has lived in New Jersey with his family for more than a year, was able to receive financial aid from the College of Engineering. Because Pavlovic's father, provost of the University of Mostar in Herzegovina, relocated the family to Germany after receiving death threats, Pavlovic transferred from Mostar to a college in Germany. But just as the first semester's final exams began, the Germans started expelling Bosnian refugees. Although the Pavlovics were able to find asylum

threatens his participation in a research project this summer in Paris. Currently, he is trying to raise the other half of Pecenkovic's scholarship as well as the money for Causevic's and Fazlic's twice-yearly term bills. Kahn has decided that if he does not raise the money by the time he needs to leave for Paris in mid-May, he will turn down the visiting professorship and continue his fund-raising efforts. Says Kahn: "I can't abandon these kids."

This son of an Orthodox rabbi is often asked why he now sacrifices almost all of his free time to ensuring an education for a handful of kids from halfway around the world. He finds his answer, he says, "in the book of Jewish law: 'He who saves one life, it is as if he had saved the world.' I don't buy the argument that what I'm contributing is an insignificant drop in the bucket. That's an excuse for doing nothing." □