

GINO d'ARTALI  
dichter

Sarajevo mon amour.

I had never been to Bosnia Herzegowina or Sarajevo. I only knew about it by horrible newsreels, the serbs mass killing Bosnians (Muslims) and it killed my heart and soul. So I went to Sarajevo when the war was still going on, and I didn't know how to find my way around, nor had a streetplan nor people I knew.

But I trusted on my instinct (which one definitely has to have amidst a war).

The first thing I did was that I visited the art academy which was still functioning despite the daily mortar and artillery attacks and the snipers.

I went inside and talked to people and made friends. Good friends, comrades. I understood what they were going through, and they understood and accepted me full heartedly.

During the times I was there (1994-'95), we became very close.

We drank, shared and faced the dangers together, and like real brothers protected each other.

And danger there was:

I walked long kilometres throughout the city and its outskirt suburbs, not caring a bit about the dangers. I was not afraid, never!

One day I stumbled upon a serb army patrol. Fully armed and threatening.

I stepped up to them and looked them straight in the eyes and said: "I'm an artist. Now you have a choice: shoot me and leave my body behind after which the UNFOR will find and identify and send it to the country I live or let me go". They let me go and walked away.

Another situation: I was walking the outskirts again and suddenly the UNFOR was there and shouted: "DON'T MOVE! You are in the middle of a mine field". They guided me out but I was never afraid. I'm not afraid to die to this very day, years later.

Snipers: yeah, when you are in a warzone you need sharp eyes and be very alert. Snipers don't always have a clear hit.

I was aware always where I was, street, neighbourhood ...

Last thing I want to share: Kurt, one of my 5 comrades, was a soldier too, defending Sarajevo.

The last day I spent in Sarajevo I said goodbye to all of them and walk towards the bus station.

Then, before boarding, Kurt ran towards me and said: "I lost a comrade during battle. He was about to leave but got shot after he was walking away. The same way you are walking away now.". And he embraced me.

I will never forget this embrace nor Sarajevo. Ins'Allah I will go there again and meet my comrades.