Woman speaks of rebuilding effort in Bosnia

Bosnia is still struggling with effects of the war, 11 years after it ended. There's corruption, a lack of education, poverty, refugees, land mines and unexploded bombs.

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UWS: A visiting social worker will give two talks about postwar Bosnia.

As a teenager, Tamara Miskovic lived in a basement during the fighting and ethnic cleansing that ravaged Bosnia for more than three years during the 1990s.

Now 26, Miskovic works with a group dedicated to protecting Bosnian youth from physical and behavioral addictions.

Miskovic will talk about her country this week at the University of Wisconsin-Superior.

"I want to share my stories with other people and get ideas from others to improve my country," she said.

"She is just an amazing young woman with such focus and commitment and energy to try to help rebuild her country," said Judy Dwyer, UWS social work professor. "I think she has a message for all of us who have not had the hard life she's had and who came out of it with such incredible spirit and optimism."

The women met five years ago at an international conference in Croatia. Since then, Miskovic has helped the UWS students who visit Bosnia as part of the university's War and Peace in Bosnia class, acting as translator, trainer and organizer.

Dwyer is hosting Miskovic's visit to the Twin Ports.

"She's been wanting to come here, and I wanted to pay her back for all she has done for us," Dwyer said.

During her several weeks here, Miskovic is observing drug prevention and rehabilitation programs in the area and taking part in a training program with the Center for Alcohol and Drug Treatment.

"This is something new in my country -- Bosnia doesn't have education in this," she said.

War interrupted Miskovic's education. From the time she was 12 until 16, Miskovic and her family and others sought shelter from bombs in a Sarajevo basement. Candles provided light, food was rationed, water was carried from an outside hand pump.

She didn't see her grandparents or an aunt for years, although they lived in the same city. Friends and relatives were injured and killed.

Schools were closed with the dangerous conditions. Teachers wrote out lessons on papers that were passed from basement shelter to basement shelter. She learned English by talking to others and by reading the book "English in 100 Lessons."

"It was a very improvised school," Miskovic said.

The war in Bosnia grew out of conflicts occurring within the former Yugoslavia, which also included Croatia and Serbia.

Bosnia is still struggling with effects of the war, 11 years after it ended. There's corruption, a lack of education, poverty, refugees, land mines and unexploded bombs.

"People are still dying," Miskovic said. "We still have divided cities. Is my country adult enough to care for itself 10 years after the war?"

Substance abuse and addictions also trouble Bosnia. Nearly half of Sarajevo's youth regularly smoke. Many do illegal drugs, gamble, consume caffeine or alcohol. Authorities don't enforce the 18-year-old drinking law.

"Now, through our projects, we are trying to do something," Miskovic said.

Bosnia illustrates the difficulties of rebuilding a country after a war, UWS political science professor Khalil Dokhanchi said.

"I think this is a wonderful opportunity for people to learn about postwar Bosnia," he said of Miskovic's presentations.


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