

SHOOTING FALLOUT:

BOSNIAN EMIGRES: KILLING OF COMMUNITY MEMBER BY SAN JOSE OFFICER SPOTLIGHTS MYRIAD PROBLEMS FACING IMMIGRANTS TO SILICON VALLEY

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Body

Inside the cozy Adriatic Cafe on Bascom Avenue, a feeling of the old is replicated.

Croatian chocolate shares shelf space with coffee, newspapers and movies from various Balkan republics. A grand painting of Sveti Stefan, an exclusive resort on the coast of Serbia and Montenegro, hangs next to -- but doesn't overshadow -- a T-shirt bearing the ethnic **Bosnian** flag.

"This cafe represents old Yugoslavia, not divided by religion or ethnicity," says Steve Smith, a former Scotts **Valley** police **officer** who spent a year keeping peace with an international police force in southeast Bosnia-Herzegovina, scene of some of the worst atrocities committed during the Balkan wars.

Smith finishes his potent Turkish coffee and heads out to the enclosed patio, where five **Bosnian** refugees sit round a table. Smith asks if he may join the group. The middle-aged men trade skeptical glances until Smith explains that he's been where they've been, seen what they've seen.

"Ljubinje? Stolac and Berkovici?" the former police **officer** says, rattling off cities, landmarks and experiences until their eyes smile in recognition. When Smith says "I know Dretelj," the Croatian-run concentration camp where the men were condemned during the war, the dreaded memory brings to mind Zaim Bojcic, their friend and camp survivor who was **killed** Sunday at a Starbucks in **San Jose** after he fought with a **San Jose** police **officer**.

"He was a good guy," 40-year-old Ilijaz Penava said of Bojcic, his high school friend.

As those affected mourn Bojcic's death, a **spotlight** has turned on Santa Clara County's **Bosnian** refugee **community**, a relatively small population that immigrated here fleeing "ethnic cleansing" and warfare in the former Yugoslavia.

When the Balkan conflict ended in 1995, more than a quarter-million people had been **killed**. Those refugees who resettled in the Bay Area have spent the last decade or so trying to build new lives despite **myriad** obstacles.

Like **immigrant** groups before them, **Bosnian** refugees have had to navigate a complex web of social, legal and governmental systems to make it here. And for many, finding and keeping jobs, learning English and dealing with the trauma of war are challenges that persist today.

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"This is a community under stress," said Sonja Cvitanich, deputy director of the Eastern European Service Agency, which was formed in response to the wave of Bosnians that began immigrating to the Bay Area in 1992 and 1993.

"The challenge for this community is that because of the kind of war that it was, it has divided the people," Cvitanich said. "The war itself divided people so it's a challenge to educate, to bring them together here as a community."

Cvitanich estimates there are as many as 10,000 Bosnians living in Santa Clara County, although a recent second migration to Sacramento and other less expensive areas has made it difficult to keep track of everyone.

The death of one of their own could change that.

Today, hundreds are expected to gather at the Starbucks on Winchester Boulevard where police say officer Donald Guess shot Bojcic after he attacked the police officer who had asked the immigrant to leave the premises. Witnesses say Bojcic and friends had been smoking at an outside patio area when the store's manager complained. Guess, who had gone there on a break, was asked to intervene.

To local Bosnians, for which drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes together is a national pastime, Bojcic's death is senseless.

A day after his killing, during a vigil at Starbucks, even non-smoking Bosnians lit one up in defiance.

"We need to go and talk to police," said Ramajana Hidic-Demirovic, 29, of Saratoga. "It seems to me that San Jose Police Department simply doesn't understand this is a multicultural and multiethnic community, and they have to take this into account when they are dealing with people."

But then the young mother acknowledges that her own community has a lot of work to do. While some have found decent jobs, started families and bought homes here, too many languish in tenuous, low-income situations. An untold number have post-traumatic stress.

"It's something that the community in general simply failed to deal with," she said. "And it's not that we didn't think about it or anything. It's that we were a brand-new community trying really hard to establish ourselves, busy with our own lives and simply ignored all these very important emotional and psychological things.

"I think now is the time for us to start working on that. I think we failed to communicate with the county and San Jose Police Department, maybe, in explaining these issues."

The 40-year-old Bojcic, who came to the United States 10 years ago, rarely spoke about the war in the early 1990s that killed his father and landed him in the Dretelj camp for six months. But lately, friends say, he showed signs of being deeply troubled.

"He was very scared of police," Penava, his childhood friend, said. And in his own quiet way, Penava suffers, too.

Recently he went to see a doctor for chest pain, only to be told it was anxiety resulting from his wartime experience. Instead of taking medication, Penava said he chooses to deal with his problems the traditional way at home, with his loved ones and outside, with friends he trusts over Turkish coffee and cigarettes.

Notes

A community forum to discuss the Bojcic case will be held Oct. 14 by the independent police auditor. The forum will take place from 6 to 8 p.m. at 70 W. Hedding St. in San Jose.

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Graphic

Photos (3);

PHOTO: KAREN T. BORCHERS -- MERCURY NEWS

Boris Pavcec from Croatia sips coffee and shares tales of his homeland during a Friday visit to the Adriatic Cafe. The cafe has become a gathering spot for emigres from Balkan countries.

PHOTO: KAREN T. BORCHERS -- MERCURY NEWS

Semso Gurda from Bosnia, left, and Boris Pavcec from Croatia are among those who gather at the Adriatic Cafe in Campbell to drink coffee and smoke.

PHOTO: KAREN T. BORCHERS -- MERCURY NEWS

Strong coffee and food from their homeland are some of the attractions that bring natives of the Balkans to the Adriatic Cafe.

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