

EX-REFUGEES FROM BOSNIA TAKE CITIZENSHIP OATH ON FLAG DAY; THE HADZISELIMOVICS EMBRACE THEIR NEW LIFE ENTHUSIASTICALLY

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Body

As the Hadziselimovic family stood Wednesday with 69 other immigrants under a huge American **flag** in the Old Courthouse and swore an **oath** of **citizenship** to this country, they saw something that they hadn't envisioned in their former nation - a future.

"In **Bosnia**, you didn't even look into the future," said Dzenana Hadziselimovic, 24, just hours before the ceremony that would officially make her, her mother, Memsija, and her father, Camil, U.S. citizens. "You were thinking, how are you going to live through tomorrow."

It was a ceremony that they had celebrated just a few months before for Dzenana's brother, Muhamed, 22. This **day**, **Flag Day**, it was their turn.

With little more than their clothes and a smuggled family photo album, the **Hadziselimovics** fled from **Bosnia**-Herzegovina to nearby Croatia on a cold, rainy **day** in March 1993. As they said good-bye to their apartment in the northern city of Kotor Varos, Memsija kissed the front door and tearfully wondered to her children if she would ever have her own set of dishes again.

They had already endured months of eating mostly potatoes and rice. That was during the summer and fall of 1992, when Serb troops occupied their city and prohibited them and the other 20 families in their apartment complex from leaving the building for four months.

Dzenana said she got up that morning after the troops rolled in expecting to go to the dentist. Within hours, however, the family realized they weren't going anywhere.

"What you had in the apartment, was what you had to eat," Dzenana, 24, explained. "We made cookies with no eggs."

Several **days** later, they also knew their **lives** as Bosnian citizens held no future. When they left, they were told they could **take** no money, no family papers, and, most agonizing of all, no pictures.

"Mom snuck the pictures," Dzenana said. "She wanted us to have them. If you lose them, you have nothing to show for your past."

After living in Croatia for 16 months, the **Hadziselimovics** immigrated to St. Louis in August 1994 as one of the first Bosnian families to be sponsored by the International Institute. There are now about 20,000 Bosnians in the region.

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The family has come a long way since that first hot day when they set out on foot to buy groceries in south St. Louis, looking for the little nearby food shops they were used to back in Kotor Varos. (Hours later, they came upon the National Supermarket.)

With a celebration cake baking in the oven, Dzenana, Memsija and Camil could hardly control their excitement Wednesday over the prospect of finally gaining full citizenship to a country that had already given them such a bright future.

Here, they knew they would never have to give up their family pictures. Or be harassed by loudspeakers affixed to fire trucks that made daily rounds urging all Bosnians to leave the city. Or forced by troops to sign a paper that said they were voluntarily leaving their homeland.

In the year to come, they look forward to Dzenana's graduation from the University of Missouri at St. Louis and Washington University with an engineering degree and her marriage to Bruno Mruckovski. Memsija and Camil will celebrate their 30th wedding anniversary this fall.

"To me, it's amazing, you can come to the United States and you can have everything you want," said Dzenana, 24. "It's a promised land. If you want to work, you can work. Six years ago we didn't even speak English."

Later that day, after the three shyly recited the oath of citizenship to U.S. District Judge Donald Stohr, Memsija wiped a happy tear from her eye.

"I'm American now," she said. "That's it!"

Graphic

PHOTO Photos by JERRY NAUNHEIM/POST-DISPATCH

(1) Camil Hadziselimovic watches Wednesday as workers install a swimming pool at his home on 38th Street in south St. Louis. The family bought the house when he and his wife were earning \$ 6 an hour in factory jobs, said his wife, Memsija. Camil Hadziselimovic, a carpenter in Bosnia, does the same work here.

(2) Dzenana Hadziselimovic, her mother, Memsija, and father, Camil, take the oath of citizenship Wednesday at the Old Courthouse. The father's flag tie was a gift from his daughter for the occasion. The family's son, Muhamed, became a citizen a few months ago.

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