

Hope for **K O S O V O**

Story and Photographs by Tom Price CCMM

Rising from the rubble, Kosovo opens to the Gospel



4-year-old Ermira Biyupi (right) and her 10-year-old sister, Miranola, spent the early spring of 1999 with their parents hiding in the mountains from Serbian attacks. Their younger brother died from pneumonia brought on by the severe weather conditions encountered there.

“You would not believe how Jesus has changed my life,” said Brad Warren, field director of Eastern European Outreach (EEO) and missionary from CC Bible Fellowship in Temecula, California. He shared his faith with a group of young men in their early 20’s who had come to the sports camp in a Kosovar village. He had been instructing them in soccer and American football, but today was a time for sharing his heart.

“You have an opportunity now to witness the power that Christ can have in your lives, something that you never had before or during the war.”

A young Kosovar man stood up, eager to demonstrate his newfound Muslim militancy. He was grateful for the American’s military might in defeating the Serbians but questioned

why they had to share their Christian faith. The mayor and acknowledged town leader abruptly cut him off.

“Americans risked their lives in the skies as their jets bombed the Serbs back across the border,” said the mayor. “Now the Americans have come here to help our children laugh and forget about the horrors of the war they experienced. They are telling you what brings them all this way to do these good things to help.”

The mayor continued, realizing he had the attention of the men.

“For the first time in your life, there are no Serb policemen or militia to tell you what you can or cannot do. You are truly free. Freedom means that you have the privilege to choose what you believe. The option is yours to be either Muslim or Christian. Only you can make that decision. Don’t let anyone make

that choice for you. Too many people who did not have that freedom died in our country.”



Top: Thousands of mines were planted by the Serbian army and remain a constant threat to all civilians. Above: KFOR, NATO’s peacekeeping force in Kosovo, maintains a good relationship with the children.

Outreach to Kosovo

The Kosovar children crowded in toward Lycia Harvey. The youngsters wanted to be close as she sang their favorite song in Albanian. A year earlier, they had been refugees, fleeing across the border into Macedonia or nearby mountains during the late spring snows...fleeing into unspeakable living conditions...trying to escape what has become known in Europe's Baltic States as ethnic cleansing.

Randy Harvey, Lycia's husband of 20 years and retired U.S. Marine, struggled to adjust the motor-powered sound system. Their two teenage daughters led the kids in the hand motions that told of Jesus washing away their tears. In a month's time, the Harveys would return to this village to begin the first Calvary Chapel in Kosovo. It had only been two months since Lycia and Randy graduated from Calvary Chapel Bible College in Murrieta Hot Springs. Their goal was to gain Bible training and set out for the mission field. The Harvey children, Rachel, 18, Chelsea, 15, and Calvin, 13, would accompany them.

Mark Yocom, a Calvary Chapel missionary, had already been ministering for a year in war-ravaged Kosovo. After graduating from the Bible College



Above: "What about my daughter?" a Kosovar father asks the team from Eastern European Outreach (EEO). The young woman had witnessed the brutal beating and murder of her older sister by Serbian militia. She has been mentally incapacitated since the ordeal.

Below: Elmi Mugolli stares into the burnt remains of his home. His wife and five of his children died in the well-documented massacre in a nearby schoolhouse. Fifty-three people lost their lives. One daughter managed to escape despite having a bullet wound in her leg and found her father in the mountains where he was training to fight with the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA).



Left: EEO director, Jeff Thompson (center), CC Murrieta, CA, negotiates transportation across the Kosovo/Macedonian border.



Because of the instability in this area, there are disagreements over boundaries and names in the region know as Kosovo.

in Millstatt, he had spent several years in Albania where he became fluent in the language. As the war in Kosove ended, Mark felt led to minister there. He had helped those most in need. Later, he began Bible studies. His year of experience in Kosovo would be a great asset as the Harveys planted the church in a nearby town.

Eastern European Outreach (EEO) had brought the Harvey family to Kosovo along with an outreach team. Jeff Thompson, founder and director of EEO, is also missions pastor of CC Murrieta. The group began smuggling Bibles during the height of the Cold War and continues to minister to the needs of the former communist countries. They recruit short-term mission teams from Calvary Chapels or other evangelical churches. Until the Kosovo conflict, the children of Chernobyl had been their main focus. Experiencing God's guidance, Jeff felt led to assist Kosovar refugees by sponsoring children in needy families or assisting mine victims.

Jeff's 18-year-old daughter, Lindsey, accompanied them as they visited families that EEO sponsored, people seemingly bypassed by the major humanitarian aid groups directed by the United Nations. Accustomed to accompanying her dad since a little girl, she was nevertheless horrified at what she would see and hear. They visited a family still living in a tent. A young woman, her face tightly drawn and teeth



Isuf Begaj (left) and Jeff Thompson share a laugh. Jeff had helped Isuf's family when they were refugees in Albania during the fighting. Isuf and his two brothers remained in the mountains helping with the war effort. Isuf, grateful for the help, has opened his home to EEO. He also assists in finding disadvantaged victims of the war.

rotted from decay, approached the Americans. She shook hands then never looked up again. "I was shocked that the girl was my age," said Lindsey. "She must have witnessed something horrendous for it to have affected her like that." The girl's father said she had been bright and talkative. Witnessing her older sister's brutal beating



Left: Children were constantly drawn to Lindsey Thompson, daughter of EEO founder, Jeff Thompson, in spite of the language barrier.

Above: Jeff Thompson's wife, Paula, is easily able to converse in German with several of the girls.



Brad Warren, CC Bible Fellowship in Temecula, CA, interacts with children at the sports camp supported by EEO. Brad directs the EEO child sponsorship program. Above, Brad sprays the children with water on a hot day.

and murder during the war devastated her. She became totally withdrawn and unwilling to take care of herself. Jeff gave her father the names of different agencies that might be able to help. He prayed with the family and gave them 100 German marks. "This money comes from God and His people in the United States who want to help, not from us," Jeff is quick to point out. Different groups and organizations in America donate money to support people assisted by EEO. They also offered assistance to Elmi Mugolli who lives on the same road. He showed the Americans his burned-out home. "My family was herded into the school," said Elmi. "The soldiers opened fire on them. My wife, three sons, and two daughters died. When the Serbs went to find fuel to burn the bodies, my one surviving daughter pulled herself from underneath the bodies and jumped out the window. She had a bullet go through her leg, but she managed to find me in the mountains. We were convinced the Serbs would kill the men since we were training for the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). None of us ever imagined they would slaughter innocent women and children," the man said somberly.

Local authorities agree that 53 people were executed in that school in Poklek. Only one person escaped. "It's hard to comprehend the totality of what you are seeing," Lindsey quietly stated. "You cannot witness something like this and not have it change you. When I go back to America, I feel like I am caught between two worlds. People can't understand what you have experienced, but you don't seem to fit back into the world you left behind."

On the trip, Lindsey felt the Lord was speaking to her about her future. She opted against the local college she had planned to attend this fall and shifted her focus to the Bible College in Austria. After returning home, an unexpected cancellation at the College created a vacancy that she filled. The trip to Kosovo convinced her to go into the

Brad helps a Kosovar girl catch a football for the first time.



mission field.

EEO's long-term vision in Kosovo is to establish missionaries here so relationships can be built and Calvary Chapel type fellowships can be started. It is not called church planting since this is offensive to Muslims. Randy and Lycia will begin Bible studies in the villages where Kosovar children are sponsored through the EEO Kosovo Kids child sponsorship program. Due to the destruction, Jeff negotiated with the local Kosovar and U.N. officials where EEO has its headquarters, offering to help them build a community sports center. In return, they have recently agreed to give EEO all the land they need to build a complex to minister to the needy families of Kosovo, as well as a place where the first Calvary Chapel of Kosovo will be started by Randy and Lycia.



Joel Thompson and Josh Broggi try to get the children to stop pushing to the front.

Orphans and Widows in Their Trouble

"...to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world."
James 1:27

Jeff Thompson and Brad Warren had left Prizren in search of the Begaj family as they first entered Kosovo two weeks after the war ended and the refugees were streaming home. They came upon a man showing NATO troops where a mass grave was located. He had lost nine family members prior to that massacre. They had been machine-gunned in the kitchen and their remains were left—bullet holes, blood stains, and bones littered the room. However, the man told them that there were people far more desperate than he.

Walking across the street, they found nine widows with twenty-eight children, sitting in a home with no roof. Some sat outside in the mud. It began to rain. "They had neither food nor money," said Jeff. "But worst of all, they had no hope. We began writing down their names and family information, how their husbands died, what their plans were now . . . and as I took notes in the rain I thought of my wife and children back home. How I would give anything for someone to help them had they been in the same situation as these Kosovar women and children. I felt we had no choice but to help them. The Lord commands us to help them. The command was not attached to any conditions." Jeff's voice cracked as he remembered the sight of those suffering.

"During this last year in Kosovo, I have realized how close to God's heart the widows and orphans are." Jeff continued, "I always thought that spreading the Gospel was witnessing and preaching—that evangelizing meant preaching and converting. I considered the distribution of material aid as just another vehicle to evangelize people. In other words, the Lord has called me, and EEO, to love unconditionally, with His love. The Scriptures tell us to remember the widows and orphans, to minister to them . . . period. And that act of obedience is the love of God being

Right: The outreach team witnesses to a group of children.

Below: Rich Broggi revels in the victory of his team.



extended to them."

"Jesus said if you give a child a cup of cold water, then you have done it unto Him. God has been teaching me that His heart is for people, not for methods of getting them saved. He sees the big picture. The big picture is obedience to His commands. We love because He first loved us. I guess what I am saying is that there has been a revolution going on in my own heart of learning



Paula Thompson gives a young girl a hand with a relay game.



to love anew with God's unconditional love."

As Brad and Jeff left that compound of widows and orphans that day, they knew the Scriptures had to be obeyed. This is where the child sponsorship program for Kosovo began. Maybe their obedience would open the door for the Kosovars to come to Christ at some point, but it should never be a condition for their intervention. EEO's long-term vision is to help establish missionaries here so they can begin building relationships with the Kosovars. The rules for ministry are different in this Muslim country.

"We pray that God will speak to the hearts of many Calvary Chapel Bible College students and others to come invest their lives in Kosovo," said EEO director Jeff Thompson. "This is a tremendous harvest field, so pray for laborers to enter His harvest."



The Reunion

Isuf Begaj ran excitedly to the van as two American men tentatively stepped out. He knew in his heart that these were the Christians that had helped his family. Isuf and his brothers had been fighting in the mountains during the war. A great celebration erupted as tears and laughter filled the village of Banja.

Months before, Jeff Thompson and Brad Warren from EEO had journeyed to Albania while the war was raging in Kosovo. 600,000 refugees had escaped the fighting by fleeing to Albania. EEO missionaries in Albania had introduced them to the Begaj family. The family was jammed with 3,000 other Kosovars into a squalid, smelly gymnasium being used as a refugee shelter. The family consisted of grandparents, wives, and children. Some of the men were fighting in Kosovo or helping with the injured in the mountains. No one had any information. "It looked like a human wave of misery," said Jeff. This family with five children, grandparents, their mother and her sister, were all just lying there on the dirty gymnasium floor. They had already been at the facility for a month. "I knew the Lord wanted us to help this family." An apartment was secured, food was bought, and an entire family could not believe their good fortune.

After NATO's air campaign, the Begaj family, along with thousands of other refugees, headed back home. When Jeff and Brad went to locate the family again in Kosovo, their village wasn't even on the maps. They met people that helped them. Eighty homes had been destroyed in their small village, and remarkably, the Begaj home was one of only two still standing. Serb troops had slept there during the ethnic cleansing campaign.

Left: Randy Harvey is carried in victory by his team.



Jeff and Brad were welcomed as returning heroes. The family insisted they stay with them. Isuf assisted the EEO ministry to help identify the most needy. They offered their home and land to teams coming over with Jeff.

As refugees in Albania, Jeff had prayed with the Begaj family that they would someday be reunited in Kosovo. The grandfather remembered this prayer. He reminded Jeff of it when they were reunited in their hometown. "You prayed! You prayed!" he cried. They sang songs in the courtyard well into the night. The grandfather wistfully commented, "You have brought singing back to the children of Kosovo. We have not been able to sing for ten years because the police would arrest us."

Today, Isuf Begaj is working with EEO to coordinate their efforts in reaching Kosovo with the Gospel through the Kosovo Child Sponsorship Program.

The Amputee

Armored tanks began shelling the village. Helpless women, children, and the elderly would die. The only direction they could flee would take them up the mountain. The escape route was littered with mines planted by the Serbs. It was almost as if they wanted to drive the civilians into the minefield...

Azlan knew he had to pick a path through the minefield for the villagers to escape. Gingerly, he picked up the first mine he saw and put it into his lower pants pocket. Explosives had been packed in a small round container, similar to a tuna fish can. It was just enough to take off your toes and part of your foot so that you would need your comrades to carry you to safety. He was the leader, a corporal in the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). He knew that everyone was counting on him. Beads of sweat coursed down his forehead and stung his eyes. Azlan cradled a dozen explosive devices in his left arm as he dug the last one out with his right. He knew he was caught in a deadly game of clearing a path to escape before artillery reached their position.

Finally, enough mines were cleared to allow a passageway for the villagers to escape. He turned to wave them forward. Only one more step and he would be on a gravel road and to safety. Suddenly, an explosion lifted him nearly three feet in the air. Azlan felt heat from a secondary explosion as the mine in his pocket ripped through his leg. He was temporarily blinded by the smoke and gunpowder vapor. In the split second before falling back to earth, Azlan remembered the other mines he cradled in his left arm. He could not let those leave his grasp or his friends would be injured as well. As he descended back to earth, Azlan felt relief that he was able to land on his right side, keeping



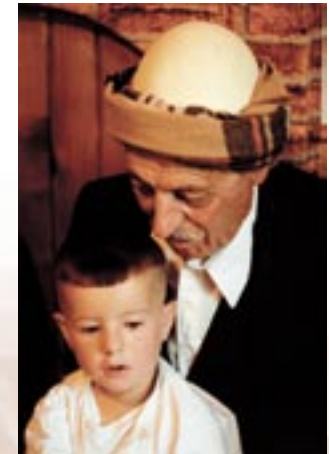
his body from falling on the other devices he held. As his vision cleared, he looked at the pile of leaves, only inches from his face. Underneath, he saw the metallic glimmer of another mine. Instinctively, he raised his hand to halt those coming to his rescue. Excruciating hours would pass as his soldiers took turns carrying him away

from danger. Finally, they reached an area where a nervous young medical student attempted to cut off the toes and part of his foot that had been damaged. Later a shot of morphine would dull the extreme pain. Azlan's fevered thoughts drifted back to his wife and baby girl. Could this just be one terrible nightmare?

Two days later, an experienced surgeon examined his foot. Gangrene had set in, and more of his foot had to be sawed off before the deadly poison ran through his entire body. Azlan cried to himself, something the strong, good-looking farmer had not done since he was a child.



A Kosovar man relaxes at a wedding.



A Kosovar grandfather spends time with his grandson. The child's father had been killed in

Left: Randy and Lycia Harvey, CC Murrieta, CA, lead the children in songs. Recently graduated from CCBC in Murrieta, the Harveys, along with their children, are planting the first Calvary Chapel in the Kosovar town of Malashava. EEO has agreed to build a community center for Malashava in exchange for ownership of a building for worship.

Below left: Group shot of the mission team. **Below right:** Missionaries finish a skit talking about the love of God.



Below: Lycia Harvey leads the children in singing their favorite songs.





A shepherd watches over his flock.



Mim Nellermoe, who led the sports outreach team, dances at a Kosovar

Below: Steve Erskine, CC Chino Hills, CA, gently encourages an older Kosovar man away from trouble.



Kosovar musicians perform in the "men

Caring for Kosovo

Calvary Chapel Eugene Ministers

By Antje Di Geronimo Photos by Marc Knutson

Bomb craters and burnt buildings frequently interrupted an otherwise idyllic trip to Kosovo for a team from CC Eugene, Oregon. The sleep weary travelers headed to the small town of Lapushnik, a rural area virtually ignored by humanitarian groups.

A year before, military strikes rocked the area, and the wind carried an eerie symphony of singing missiles, mortar fire, and bullets. Fresh-faced school children with eager smiles lined the dirt drive, applauding as the bus rolled forward. Word had spread that the Americans were coming to their school.

Reaching Out

In the spring of 1999, the horrors of war and its aftermath flashed across the television. Marc Knutson, military veteran and pastor of CC Eugene, saw the fatigued faces of refugees, mostly children, women, and old men, returning to the remains of their homes in Kosovo.

"It was the first time something like this had ever affected me," said Pastor Marc. "Something stuck in my heart when I saw these people coming home. I thought, we've got to do something, especially for the children, who were victims of a situation they had nothing to do with."

Pastor Marc, his son Eric, and two other

church members journeyed to Kosovo before Christmas 1999. Several local businesses in Eugene had donated 10,000 pounds of supplies. They visited several areas to deliver aid and witnessed heartbreaking sights, one of which was at a local school. Mark Yocum, a Calvary Chapel missionary based in Pristina, had made arrangements to get the school functional again.

The sight of a school with shrapnel damage, broken windows, and the random pattern of bullet holes on classroom walls shocked them. Nearly 400 children excitedly received small gifts in exchange for welcoming handshakes. They were severely underdressed for winter conditions. The team realized that God intended for them to return and offer help in a greater way.

Letting Their Light Shine

"Let your light so shine before men that they see your good deeds and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Matthew 5:16

When the 23-member team from CC Eugene arrived in July of 2000, they



Alice Taylor, from CC Eugene, Oregon, patches bullet holes in the school's outhouse. The facility does not have running water.

Left: Supplies are unloaded by the CC Eugene team to assist in rebuilding the schools and homes.

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were overwhelmed by what they saw and by the condition of the school. Twisted remains of the classroom coal heaters, ripped out by Serbian troops, lay outside among other debris.

“Looking at the smiling faces of these beautiful children, you would not have guessed they had gone through so much trauma,” said Vikki, church secretary and team member. They joyfully assisted the Americans unloading the bus.

Some of the group played with the children, teaching them songs and making crafts. Others spent time patching bullet holes, painting, building a play structure, and digging ditches for a septic system.



Kosovar children enjoy the playground constructed by the CC Eugene team.

Stirring Interest

When the team came together for their worship time at the school each morning, many of the people, especially the children, joined in and seemed very interested in hearing about Jesus. The school director, Alush Thachi, was always intent on the day's Scripture reading and the praise music, peering over Pastor Marc's shoulder to follow the reading.

Alush was also the town administrator, chosen by the people to govern Lapushnik though no formal elections were held. Before the outbreak of war, his anti-Serbian politics landed him a nine-year term in prison where he was regularly beaten.



The school at Lapushnik is being restored by the CC Eugene outreach team.

Along Came Arben

During the war, Arben Sharla traveled nearly 20 miles a day, carrying heavy loads of supplies on his back as he helped the injured and elderly flee to safety in the forested mountains just outside Lapushnik. This 21-year-old English teacher had witnessed several air strikes, one of which nearly destroyed his own neighborhood.

Employed as a translator for the team from CC Eugene, Arben regularly asked team members about their faith. After several evenings of conversation and prayer with team member Roger Langenberg, Arben came to a saving knowledge of the Lord. “In the midst of praying, he broke down, then told me how hard his life had been,” Roger said. “He is a remarkable young man.”

Food for the Soul

The team had given the school a fresh coat of paint and a new playground. A shiny silver pole, planted by the team near the entrance of the main building, stood ready for the flag ceremony. Emotions ran high as a choir of young girls sang the Kosovar national anthem. All eyes were turned to the flags of Kosovo and America being raised.

Afterward, the team hosted a spaghetti dinner in the meeting hall. Each villager was invited to take an Albanian translation of the Bible. Many asked for extra copies to give to family members and friends. CC Eugene's desire to develop relationships and share the Gospel with the Kosovars was realized.



Team members met every morning at the school for a time of worship. Townspeople and children were invited to join.

While the Door Remains Open

Pastor Marc hopes to complete more work on the buildings and eventually establish a youth camp and Bible training center. There is an urgency to move forward and seize opportunities for evangelism and discipleship. The possible withdrawal of NATO troops could hinder the work begun.

“Lapushnik is uncultivated spiritual soil, fertile for planting the seeds of faith. I would like to do as much as we can before the door closes,” said Pastor Marc.