

ARTICLE FOR GAZETTE  
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My husband and I have recently returned from a trip to the Balkans. Visiting Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro and Slovenia, we were pleasantly surprised by this beautiful territory south of the Alps. Much of it is green and mountainous. The seacoast, rocky and rough, rises high out of the sapphire waters of the Adriatic Sea. The lakes region of Slovenia with 17 lakes at different levels, connected by waterfalls, feels peaceful and serene. A small train takes visitors deep into the limestone caves of Postojna, the largest limestone cave in Europe. The architecture styles, from Roman to Venetian, Austrian to Turkish, present fascinating variety. Although we saw some bombed out buildings and houses with missile holes remaining from the war of 1992-1995, there has been much rebuilding in Zagreb and Sarajevo and the physical setting of both these cities, in river valleys between high hills, is superb.

I returned with an image firmly embedded in my mind—a photograph I saw in Sarajevo. Taken by Mikhail Evstafiev during the war, it shows the partially destroyed National Library filled with rubble from the bombing. The National Library with a million and a half books and documents, many of which were of great historical value and irreplaceable, is one of the now destroyed treasures of Sarajevo. The structure itself was part of the library's wonder. It was built by the Hapsburgs who employed an Arab architect to design the building. It was an easy target for Serbian bombs coming down from the hills above. The photo shows it filled with great piles of broken pillars and stones.

Sitting on top of the rubble is a man dressed in a tuxedo playing a cello, as bombs continue to fall around the building. The cello player is Vedran Smailovic who often played for free at funerals during the siege despite the fact that

funerals were targeted by Serbian forces. You can see the photo at on the web at <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image:Evstafiev-bosnia-cello.jpg>

What a picture of faith and hope! Our lives may feel like a pile of rubble at times, filled with chaos and confusion. Yet, by the grace of God, through the love of Jesus Christ, we can climb on top of that rubble and sing our song to a world longing to hear it. Perhaps our voice will also give courage to others to rise above the circumstances that threaten to destroy us. Perhaps together we can rise above the rubble to envision and work for a bright new day.

It actually is working in Sarajevo. With United Nations peacekeepers in Bosnia, the situation appears to be stable now, and money is coming in from around the world, from the West and from the East to rebuild the National Library and to replenish its books. No, it will never be like it was, but there is hope!