



The Bosnia List: A Memoir of War, Exile, and Return

Kenan Trebinčević , Susan Shapiro

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A young survivor of the Bosnian War returns to his homeland to confront the people who betrayed his family

At age eleven, Kenan Trebinčević was a happy, karate-loving kid living with his family in the quiet Eastern European town of Brčko. Then, in the spring of 1992, war broke out and his friends, neighbors and teammates all turned on him. Pero - Kenan's beloved karate coach - showed up at his door with an AK-47 - screaming: "You have one hour to leave or be killed!" Kenan's only crime: he was Muslim. This poignant, searing memoir chronicles Kenan's miraculous escape from the brutal ethnic cleansing campaign that swept the former Yugoslavia. After two decades in the United States, Kenan honors his father's wish to visit their homeland, making a list of what he wants to do there. Kenan decides to confront the former next door neighbor who stole from his mother, see the concentration camp where his Dad and brother were imprisoned and stand on the grave of his first betrayer to make sure he's really dead. Back in the land of his birth, Kenan finds something more powerful--and shocking--than revenge.

The Bosnia List: A Memoir of War, Exile, and Return Details

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From Reader Review *The Bosnia List: A Memoir of War, Exile, and Return* for online ebook

Jean-Paul Adriaansen says

Of all the wars ever fought, the civil wars are the most cruel and horrific.

Kenan Trebinčević was 12 years old when hell came down in his hometown in Bosnia. In his book he shares with us the sudden cruelty and inhumanity, the way he and his family were humiliated, robbed, and finally forced to leave their homeland.

It is so well written that you will feel his consternation, his fears, his anger. How do you deal with those demons of the past? Can you ever find redemption? Will you ever be able to forgive?

Just read this astonishing book! A must read for all those who still believe in humanity.

Meredith Crawford says

A must-read.

Alice Dinizo says

"The Bosnia List" is a highly readable and totally engrossing memoir. The author and his family, Bosnian Muslims, survived the horrors of the ethnic cleansing that swept former Yugoslavia in the 1990's and escaped to the United States. Now, two decades later the author and his older brother, Eldin, take their father back to their homeland for a visit. Kenan Trebinčević has a list of who and what he plans to confront while back in Bosnia but powerful events help him change his mind. Buy this book, borrow it, somehow readers everywhere should read "The Bosnia List"!

Sharon says

Absolutely heart breaking but totally compelling to read. Review to come.

J.A. says

It's fitting that *The Bosnia List* begins at the bar with Kenan Trebinčević and his brother, Eldin. Reading this memoir feels like taking a seat next to them at the bar and listening to their story. It's a riveting account of their escape from war-torn Bosnia, told in a conversational style by Kenan with journalist Susan Shapiro. So pull up a chair and keep the drinks flowing, because you won't want to walk away until you hear how it ends.

The escape from persecution is a necessary part, but it's not the whole story. Kenan's friends, neighbors,

favorite teacher, and idolized coach all turned against him and his family when the ethnic cleansing began. Their survival and escape from the deadly conflict is remarkable, but it is the decision to return two decades later that is staggering. Kenan and Eldin go along with their ailing father's desire to visit their homeland, but Kenan goes with his own agenda. He makes a list of a dozen redresses that begins with "Confront Petra about stealing from my mother" and "Stand at Pero's grave to make sure he's really dead." This is no social visit for Kenan, who has been having involuntary revenge fantasies. How he reconciles the items on his list provides the resolution to this tragic tale.

I was in high school when Slobodan Milošević incited Yugoslavia to tear itself apart. I was studying Russian at the time, so I followed the developments in the news, but only through American channels. I didn't have a sense of what it meant on an individual level until I read *The Bosnia List*. I am grateful that Lindsay Prevette at Penguin Books directed my attention to it, and that Penguin is allowing me to giveaway a copy!

Anne says

Excellent memoir of a very misunderstood area and historic period. During the Milosevic regime, the Serbian vision was to occupy and rule all of the former Yugoslavia and ridding the Balkans of Muslims, the detested relics of the Ottoman Empire. This memoir is from the point of view of a Bosniak, the term for a Muslim residing in Bosnia, who was a child of ten when the ethnic cleansing began in his town of Brcko, very close to the western border of Serbia. We learn of all of the atrocities committed by the Serbs, how friends turned on friends.

Most important, in my opinion, is the author's view that the Dayton Accords which ended the hostilities did a great disservice to the victims, the Muslims. The aggressors lost no land holdings and were treated with impunity. Also, Europe supported the accords because they could not condone an Islamist country in Europe.

Secondly, in the author's experience, revenge and distrust are strong on both sides of the controversy.

I am led to research the Dayton Accords to understand the conditions of the agreements to see if I can appreciate his viewpoint. I remember that as an uninformed US citizen at the time, I was happy that the hostilities were ending.

Gabrielle says

A powerful memoir rich in detail. With the help of Susan Shapiro, Kenan Trebinčević tells his family story of loss, betrayal and of finally coming to terms with the Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian conflict when neighbor turned against neighbor. The story expertly interweaves the personal with the political. A beautiful book about war and survival and the endurance of family love.

Frances Johnson says

This may be the best book I have ever read...and I have read some good books. I bought this book on the way into the library to hear its author, Kenan Trebinčević, speak. I heard him speak and it was interesting. I came home and started to read and I have to admit I hardly put it down. I just finished it today (Thursday) and it

fairly knocked my socks off. It was interesting, suspenseful, enlightening, but most of all it truly shows how living well is the best revenge.

One of the most disturbing things about the Balkan War was that people who had been friends and neighbors for years suddenly turned on each other, based on their religion. Bosnians were humiliated and killed by their next door neighbors, their homes confiscated, their possessions stolen, because they were Muslims.

Trebinčević and his brother take their Father home to Bosnia after twenty years in New York. Neither of the sons want to go but Trebinčević makes a list of what he wants to accomplish while there. He went seeking revenge and answers. He got both but was surprised with what else he achieved. I now know the power of forgiveness.

I SO recommend this book to everyone.

Kellie says

Last night I got shaken up by a book that I read. I've always wanted to write in a manner whereby the characters of books would follow my readers around and jolt them into thinking, but I find that I am unable to write and that characters from the books that I read follow me around and story lines jolt me.

This electrifying book was an advance reader copy (arc) of a book by Kenan Trebinčević called "The Bosnian List." It is due to come out on February 25. I am supposed to read for pleasure at my bookstore, and I have to read for my writing class, so I finally have to carve out time to read. I find that I go for memoir, I suppose because a fourth grade teacher told me that everyone has amazing stories to share, and that the greatest battles fought are won and lost privately, at kitchen tables or when someone is going someplace else and not aware of them. This book was no exception.

It's about the transformation of the author wanting to go to Bosnia to extract revenge on people who hurt his family during the war of 1992-1995. He escaped along with his brother and parents, and every member of his close knit family-- aunts and uncles and cousins who stayed in Bosnia-- survived. His immediate family came to the US and thrived. He and his brother became physical therapists. His parents lived long enough to see their sons succeed before his mom died of cancer several years later. While in Bosnia, his family had been successful, and they had lots of friends; Kenan had been a star pupil in his school. The war started and neighbors turned against his family. A teacher tried to shoot him and steal the bread that he had procured for his family, but the gun jammed and young Kenan stole back his bread and escaped. Kenan's friends wouldn't play soccer or work out with him in the karate hall anymore. He would return to Bosnia as a man, and put pieces of his life together to make sense of it all, realizing that his reward wasn't in going back and saying certain things to certain people or in asking them tough questions. Karma has a way of setting things straight and even being cruel, thus he chose his battles, sometimes fighting demons he didn't expect, and other times letting them die, and forgiving people who had wronged his family.

The book unearthed a memory that I'd forgotten, from early 1996 when I was going through some personal issues and the taxi driver who often came to drive me places had just asked me out as he took me to the university. I knew he was from Bosnia and I couldn't tell the difference between Bosnian Muslims and Serbian Christians. I can't remember what I said to him to set him off, it may have been this: "You are all White, how can you tell the difference?" or it may have been when I told him my friend's name (I'd later find out that she had a Serbian name) and he started driving on sidewalks and swearing about "those Serb bastards" in English and, it sounded like at least two of his other languages.

I arrived at school somewhat shaken up, but I laughed about the situation with some friends in the campus cafeteria. He was in America then, so what did he need to worry about? They were fighting, they just needed to get out! Problem solved! I had no idea how hard this could be, not just in getting the correct paperwork together to leave their country, but also emotionally in leaving everything they knew behind and starting from the bottom.

Because of Kenan's book, I understand more about what had happened and can imagine what my taxi driver friend may have gone through. When I asked if he saw any of the fighting, I am sure that I asked with the same blandness that one would ask about seeing sunsets over the Grand Canyon to a friend visiting Arizona. I wish that when my taxi driver friend got upset that I had responded with empathy instead of nervous giggles and then blowing him off. I wish that if I was going to ask such personal questions that I had asked him what had happened over there. You know, I watched news almost every day until the internet became popular and efficient a few years after that. I remember seeing shootings and stories of Kosovo and calling it "a conflict." What part of seeing footage of truckloads of corpses, potholes in roads in which you could hide a car, and the term "ethnic cleansing" being used over and over did I not understand? Just as people were murdered not "killed" in the Holocaust, people were being murdered in the Bosnian War. It may not have been as long as the Holocaust, but there were similarities in the evil and totality done to many. It was not a conflict, it was a war, yet I think that I used the term conflict for years. Thousands of innocent men, women, and children in a population where just a generation before had been uprooted and subjected to terrible living conditions, starvation and often death, were once again driven from their homes, subjected to terrible things, and often murdered.

A family member was on FB right after I read the book. I told him how terrible I was back in 1996 and how insensitive I was, and he assured me that I was all right, "You were stuck in your frame of mind. You didn't know and you were unmarried and pregnant with your own drama going on!" He was right, but I feel terrible now that I finally "get" what was happening. Entire families were being murdered in ethnic cleansings, and neighbors were turning on each other. I heard it on the news and didn't absorb it and I thought the taxi driver was just a little nuts.

My childhood dream of writing is proving to be exhausting emotionally, but I am glad for my eyes being constantly opened. I think that part of the value of literature is that we can read and reflect on ourselves and grow, even if we don't leave our the comfort of our reading chair and our electric tea kettle.

Kavita says

I did not know much about the Bosnian War even though it was always in the news in the 90s. I just never paid attention to the details, being too busy with school and friends. As Kenan Trebinčević should have been. Instead, he was fighting bullets, being bullied by ex-friends, and exiled from his homeland.

The book starts with Trebinčević's list for his upcoming trip back to Bosnia. The list is a poignant one and includes meeting long-lost friends and relatives, visiting cemeteries to honour the war dead, and confronting old enemies to find out why they suddenly turned their backs to the Trebinčevićs. Trebinčević manages to tick off all of them at the end of his trip.

The book has two tracks: one in the past and one in the present. The present talks about Kenan's nostalgia for a Bosnia that no longer exists. It also is the setting for the Trebinčević men (Kenan, his brother, and his father) to plan a trip back to their old country. The second track is that of the old war in the 90s. Kenan is then twelve years old and takes his time to grasp the evil that suddenly erupts around him. A well-loved and well-adjusted child is suddenly thrust into the middle of a genocidal civil war and those he thought loved him suddenly turn on him for no logical reason. This is Kenan's story, but also that of his family and his country.

Of course, the 90s track was the more interesting, but I was glad for the opportunity to get to know Kenan after he became as successful physiotherapist, a great revenge on those who had marked him out for murder and failure. The present storyline also provided a bit of relief from the constant despair of the 90s storyline. This was the best possible way for this particular story to be told.

Even in the first pages, I caught on to the love between Kenan and his brother, Eldin. I knew right away that I would enjoy this book. I enjoyed the relationship between the brothers. Kenan begins with a trip to an old Yugoslavian nightclub in New York and begins to explain a bit of the culture, history, and other snippets of life in Yugoslavia. Trebinčević takes a lot of effort to explain to normal readers all about his country's culture and his old life there.

The description of the gradual ostracising of the Trebinčević family was heartbreaking, especially since it was told from the eyes of a 12-year old. Kenan's beloved karate coach suddenly became a raving fanatic, as did his favourite class teacher. Why? These are the questions that Kenan wants an answer for. And indeed, these are the questions every sane person wonders about. Whatever makes normal people turn evil during certain times?

The political and the personal are enmeshed together quite effortlessly and provide a comprehensive view of the Bosnian genocide from a very personal viewpoint. The book also depicts the power of forgiveness. Ultimately, there are no answers to some questions. One just has to forgive (never forget), remember, move on, and succeed. Which the Trebinčevićs all did!

Nidhi Jakhar says

A true account of 'coming to terms' and 'making peace' with people that destroyed your childhood and made you feel homeless and abandoned in your own country.

The book runs parallel with past and present contexts, former being the years 1992/93 when Balkan war raged in Europe and the Bosnian Muslim Trebinčević family struggled to stay alive and the latter being their

successful lives in America, where they made home after escaping Bosnia.

The protagonist Kenan finally returns home along with his father and brother and finds himself visiting his former haunts, friends, traitors and among them, the Serbs who helped them survive.

The book is a good lesson on the complicated Balkan history and strife and also how even during the most tragic harrowing times, there are flickers of goodness that we must not forget and keep as proof of the humanity that struggles to stay alive within us against the greatest odds.

Totally loved the book and it makes me want to probe deeper into Balkan stories.

Jerry says

A great read: not only do you get a very accessible history lesson on the Bosnian geopolitics that confused many of us during the 90s, but Kenan's story of family conflicts, rage, and forgiveness is something that anyone can relate to. Co-writer Sue Shapiro did a great job assisting this young man, who had never written before, to be able to share his moving story that takes him from the Eastern European town of Brcko to the borough of Queens in New York City.

Caitlin says

One of the best things about having a book blog is the opportunities it creates for you to read things you might not have heard about or considered. *The Bosnia List* is one of those books I'm so glad I got an opportunity to read and review. Complex, nuanced, tragic, and joyful, it is a book that will make you ponder your own good fortune and think about the nature of diversity, horror, and compassion.

Mr. Trebinjević tells the story of his family's life in Brčko before the war, during the war, after their escape, and upon their return. With an understandable mix of emotions, Mr. Trebinjević is wary about returning, but does so to honor his father's wish to see his home again before he dies. Armed with a list of wrongs, people and places he wants to confront, and a lot of well-deserved anger, the author works his way through his list and finds a situation more complex than he had imagined and comes away with feelings of reconciliation and compassion. I admire him a great deal for the latter. I can't imagine how one reconciles with neighbors who stole from you, threatened you, killed people who looked like you, but the author's example inspires me to continue talking to people and hearing their stories. It's when we lose sight of the grays in the world and huddle in the black and white that we begin to lose our humanity.

Jamie says

This was a memoir. The author clearly let the audience into his head and experience events in the book as he did. The interesting, dual culture will apply to many who feel different cultures pulling them in different directions. The book was well written and kept me reading to the last page. I very much enjoyed reading this book and would recommend it to anyone.

Kolumbina says

Fantastic. A really good book. Very well written book. I like 2 parallel stories, one now and the other one in 1992/1993. I was born in Slovenia and lived in Zagreb in Croatia for many years, including beginning of the war and still learned a lot of new things.
