

Oral History Kosovo

INTERVIEW WITH GORDANA ĐORIĆ

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Present:

1. Gordana Đorić (Speaker)
2. Anita Susuri (Interviewer)
3. Besarta Breznica (Camera)

Transcription notation symbols of nonverbal communication:

() – emotional communication

{ } – the speaker explains something using gestures.

Other transcription conventions:

[] – addition to the text to facilitate comprehension

Footnotes are editorial additions to provide information on localities, names or expressions.

Part One

Gordana Đorić: I am Gordana Đorić. I am born on 19.09.1959 in Prishtina, my father, grandfather and great grandfather are from this village, from Llapllasella where I lived until eight-nine years old, then we moved to Prishtina, and then, in 91, when I got married in '80, then we bought this land because I wanted built a house in my village and live in a healthy environment with my family.

Anita Susuri: Your childhood, first memories.

Gordana Đorić: I said, my first memories, if we're talking about the village, they're great. Simply, firstly, a healthy environment. Secondly, the value system was different. People loved each other more, they socialized, the children also, and we helped each other. For example, when there was reaping, or something, in the fields, or around the house, neighbors helped, and, of course, as children, we were always there with our parents and helped each other. Children didn't have any worries. Of course, none of us had much back then, but we were content with what we had.

Games, which in everyday life, so to say, we included them in our everyday life, they were with different plant, then with stones or something like that, with a ball, it was a game, we made balls out of rags, out of something, out of wool, because no one, we rarely had money to buy, I mean, at that time, balls, girls made dolls, they sewed them by hand, I don't know, but we were outside all day with a lot of friends, which now is rare.

Anita Susuri: What were your parents like, what was your family like?

Gordana Đorić: I can say it was big (laughs), firstly big, but my father was married. In that marriage (coughs) he had two daughters and a son, specifically two daughters and two sons, but a tragedy happened, his son got sick when he was 17 years old and died in the hospital. And that day, when they were told that their son had died, his wife died on the doorstep [of the house] because she couldn't

bear the pain. After some time, several years passed, my father married my mother and in that marriage he also had two children, so me and my brother. But really, when it comes to harmony between us children, it was never an issue but we were very, very close, even to this day, it's the same. But unfortunately, two of my brothers and my oldest sister have died, only me and my sister are left, who now lives in Niš, with whom I am very, very close, also with my brothers' children, the son, my sister's daughter, we're still so close. I think this is the real wealth, because, let me tell you something, all other values are transient, but love in the family, community, this is something that is most important and that should last because, when you go through the hardest time, your relatives are still there to give courage and help or, of course, rejoice in your success and support you, and I am happy about this, and maybe, maybe this is a motive for me, I mean, for progress but also for overcoming many problems we had during our lives.

Anita Susuri: Did you have any traditions at home, celebrations, how did you prepare them?

Gordana Đorić: Of course. We even at that time, but if I may say, the stories are different, but in the time of the former Yugoslavia, in the time of communism, we celebrated our holidays, and even though my father was a warrior and fought in those great wars, all of us here, especially in this village, all celebrated our holidays. Our family holiday was St. George's and of course then we prepared everything at that time, with the opportunity we had because we weren't so rich, and definitely prepared what was important then, and we had guests, and I know as children we rejoiced in those days of celebration that lasted two or three days and the guests who came to us, of course, at that time and the socialization that we had during the holidays. I mean it is, not to mention Christmas, Easter, I mean they were celebrated as they are today and this is something that is part of our tradition which we have cultivated and will cultivate in the future.

Anita Susuri: You told me your father fought in the Second World War, right?

Gordana Đorić: In the second, yes.

Anita Susuri: Did he have any stories about this, did he talk about this?

Gordana Đorić: Well yes, but his stories weren't nice, he tried to spare us from those bad stories, but it always affected us to be good people, to respect the diversity of other people, to appreciate people, if they're good people or what, because this is transient, I consider material wealth temporary, but people value and love that we should share with people is the most precious.

Anita Susuri: What was it like in the village when you were a child? Because you said you lived here.

Gordana Đorić: Yes, yes. I'll tell you this river was clean (laughs). Really... it was a place where as children we gathered. We swam there during the summer. Our parents, our mothers and grandmothers washed clothes, especially at the bridge in the center of the village. There was a windmill on the road to Gračanica, on the left side, I would often go with my mother, help her wash clothes, swim in the river. During the winter, the river would freeze and we would ski there, then we

would play with some wooden sticks and we would put them on ice. We had a marker there and we would play there all day long. There was a lot of greenery, I can, my house is in front of the House of Culture, in the center of the village, and we all gathered there, but also something that stuck in my mind, for example, that winters were very snowy.

For example, from October, beginning of November, when it would snow, the snow wouldn't melt until February, at the end of February, the beginning of March. It has happened. The snowfall was so great, I remember my father carried me on his back (laughs) to school. So, the school was, as far as I remember, the new school that was built where it is now, and the house is, around 200, 300 meters away from the school, but my father had to take me to school. To tell you the truth, we never had livestock, cows or something, but I helped my friends, I helped them look after cows, gather produce and so on, and this was always interesting to me, but it was important for me to be together.

Anita Susuri: When did you start school, which are your memories from school?

Gordana Đorić: Memories (laughs) are such, I was a spoiled child, I can say so for myself, and I always separated from others because I had (laughs), certain attitudes, you know, how to act with the teacher and so on. I was some kind of, I needed to protect someone, to be the one who justifies people, for example students or so on, that's why my teacher (laughs) always called me "lawyer" because if she critiqued a student, I said, "Teacher, you're wrong. He did this, he did that..." "Come sit here, lawyer." So, this is a memory of mine, when we talk about the teacher she was just, but she was strict, but to this day I think they were right and we got the right kind of education that we have to be respectful but even our parents if God forbid we did something wrong at school, we didn't dare tell our children because they punished us (laughs) twice as hard.

But like this, that's why we all were successful, if it is about knowledge, but we also had good education, I'm mentioning it again, they taught us to love people in school. You know what they say, they don't say it, but it probably is the same with you, because when we talked at that time with friends, Albanians, Turkish and so on, we all had the same thoughts, we said, "God created people to be loved, and things to be used." Unfortunately, the system has changed now and people love things and use people to gain those things. This is a tragedy. Back then we were educated like that and we were happy, all of us.

Anita Susuri: Do you remember the first time you travelled, for example out of the village, in Prishtina or somewhere else?

Gordana Đorić: This was also funny, let me tell you, because here we all learned we had to greet elders, when we were on the streets in the village, when an elderly person walked by, we would greet them, "Good afternoon!" This was basic. And, and (laughs) when they brought me to Prishtina, and now suddenly (laughs), I saw many people, I would turn around surprised, I didn't know what to do, I said, "Good afternoon!" And, of course, my mother told me that this doesn't happen in Prishtina because (laughs) there are many people. So, there are, I will never forget these memories, I was really young, but after that, we went to live there and I saw these things differently. I have memories of when

I first traveled to Belgrade by train, and the train left from Fushë Kosova. This was an experience for me, because there you can go around, move to different cabins, talk to people, then other children, we played there, a very interesting experience for me. And, of course, later (laughs), the experiences were completely different.

Anita Susuri: School then, did you come to Prishtina to...

Gordana Đorić: Yes, in third grade...

Anita Susuri: Third grade, ah.

Gordana Đorić: I finished the third and fourth grade in Prishtina, I further went to school...

Anita Susuri: Did your family then come to live in Prishtina, or what was it like?

Gordana Đorić: No. No, they stayed here. My mother worked in Prishtina, then I had an apartment there, when I had to go to school there, I was near her.

Anita Susuri: When you grew up, what was Prishtina like then for you? Did you go out, can you describe it for us?

Gordana Đorić: Well, I'll tell you something, Prishtina was the place where we all experienced our first loves, and maybe people told you, we had *korzo*,¹ where each had their own place, where we gathered with friends, at the wood, or in front of Kraš, or in front of Avalla, *Vllaznimi* Cinema and so on. And of course men hit on girls, especially if we were a little more arrogant, and we all were, in a situation, because the education was of that sort that if you liked someone you should not accept them immediately, but you have to wait a little, you have to refuse them a little, as they said (smiles). And this caused a little anger to a lot of men, sometimes they would offend us, especially if you refused them, you didn't want to talk and get to know them, they were more rough, but it was interesting to me because we had friends, male friends also, and we knew how to organize those evenings, to be interesting, and so on.

Then, at that time, for example, there weren't many places to go out, but we organized parties. For example, we celebrated birthdays, even when we didn't have birthdays. It was an excuse, "Ey," allegedly, "It's my birthday, let's party." We would all gather in an apartment, each of us would cook something, or our parents would, for example, my mother, we prepared something then we would play music, those long play records, and we socialized in the evening, and of course, it was fun for us.

Anita Susuri: What kind of music would you listen to then?

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Gordana Đorić: Well I was, I was a rocker (laughs), ever since I remember myself. For example, I adored Tom Jones, Rolling Stones, foreigners, while from here I listened to Zdravko Čolić, there was Đorđe Marjanović, then Zdravko Čolić, and the singers, Bijelo Dugme, Riblja Čorba and all the singers and groups back then, and, of course, for us they were... Zdravko Čolić was more popular among women (laughs), girls then, we adored him the songs, “Gori Vatra,” and all others.

Anita Susuri: What other cultural activities did you have then, did you go to the cinema or...

Gordana Đorić: Yes, there was, there was only the cinema and the theatre. Good, it was mostly the cinema, more available for us, but I have to say that through those activities, for example, through school I was involved in clubs, Red Cross, then we went there were activities, we gathered some boxes from Red Cross and we went through the city and gathered certain groups of people, children or this and that, in UNHCR or something like that. I was also involved in the United Nations Club, which was once in Prishtina, which was part of television. You know that shopping center at the market, it was closed, there was also our library, a library, because the city library was here and there as children gathered in that club. We did a lot of activities and we also had our hotel in Gërmi, we went there to camp, and I mean, it was really interesting.

Then I was involved in a folklore society, for example in Fusha Kosova, “Branko Medenica”, and through that society we went through all of Yugoslavia and we socialised, especially in that folklore society. We cultivated folklore there, folklore dances of all nationalities, there I was a soloist of *shota*, *çoçek*, Turkish dances. Of course, Serbian dances too, *čačakin*, *moravcin*, Vranja dances and so on.

I told you then we were part of festivals of all folklore societies, because we were a folklore railway society which was organized in Ljubljana in the Tivoli Hall, and we won first place with our *shota* dance, where I and a colleague of mine Živić were soloists and won the prize, I don’t know the sum now, but with that money we were able to buy original outfits for all the dances, which was for us really a great success and something beautiful...

Anita Susuri: Which year did you win that prize?

Gordana Đorić: Now I don’t remember the year, but I was around 16 years old, 15-16 years old, you calculate when (laughs) a long time ago, a long time ago. So these are some beautiful memories for us. For me.

Anita Susuri: Which high school did you go to?

Gordana Đorić: I went to the Economics High School.

Anita Susuri: Where was this, in Prishtina?

Gordana Đorić: In Prishtina, what’s it called, the Factory of Kosova, there.

Anita Susuri: How did you decide to go to that school?

Gordana Đorić: Well, let me tell you something, simply, I thought that again, I am, I also like accounting. And after this, even though I finished the Economics High School, accounting, I never worked in education, but, for example, all that I learned in accounting helped me when I started working at Transjug Rijeka because there, I ran the administration and, of course, it mostly helped me when I opened my own enterprise in the '90s when there was a law that we could register private companies, this helped me control and plan the finances in my company. That's why I chose it, because it isn't hard for me to look all night, accounts look for mistakes, if they see them anywhere. So this was the reason I chose that school.

Anita Susuri: So your first job was in that enterprise?

Gordana Đorić: Yes, that was my first job, in Transjug Rijeka, which was in Lakrishte. Munibca Hasi was our director, I respect him a lot and I can say I learned a lot from him. He was very strict, but he was so that we could learn more and have better results. And I said, the knowledge I got there, I started working in the administration, as I say *potrčko* [*beginner*]. I started with that job, then I got awards from the SWO² from Šibenik, Rijeka, because it was one of the best companies in ex-Yugoslavia which had their own SWO in all capital cities of the Republic then and it was a huge honor for me when I won awards for being a successful worker, a good worker, and so on.

Anita Susuri: How were the working conditions in that company, at that time?

Gordana Đorić: Well, I can say that the conditions were phenomenal in every sense, because, at that time, the system was in power, and this was very important for all of us. And, for example, me as a beginner, you had the opportunity to teach me all that is important to be successful in my profession, if I may say so. Secondly, for example, in our enterprise, all knowledge was leveled at four levels and you now start from the fourth and reach the first, if you are capable, of course, you don't remain a new clerk forever. Only if you aren't capable or don't want to progress. So you are given the opportunity to learn everything you need to know. We were able to go to be educated, to attend various seminars to be more successful, and it was very important that at that time there was no corruption, I can confirm this, of course, but on the contrary, the value system was such that you had to respect it, you had laws that were respected and you were able to plan your work six years in advance, and, according to that plan, you are organized, which was very important.

Of course, the income was adequate based on how much you contributed as an individual to your enterprise, and how much you showed mastery and how much result you achieved. And this was quite important, so, you were motivated to try, to work because you know you will, you will be rewarded for it, and of course you learn, you get educated to have more success that unfortunately today this, rarely exists.

²Social Work Organization

Anita Susuri: How were your relations to colleagues? Were there any Albanians?

Gordana Đorić: Of course! I told you at that time, privately and at work, we all collaborated and didn't care about nationality. For example, the director was Albanian, Munibca Hasi from Gjakova, but there were colleagues, and other Albanians, there were Turkish, I had two Serbian colleagues, so, we were like a family. I'll tell you about a situation, every year we organized days of TansJug. And this was the opportunity we had to welcome and honor all our partners, and we organized it at the Grand Hotel at that time. But we didn't have enough money to invite 200, 300 people and have the company pay for it. I mean, this wasn't common then because the presentation was small then, and it had to be within those other costs.

But then together, even those of us who worked there, we bought food and cooked, you know, so we would have richer table, so that all our work partners who came from other places would brag about it, from all over Yugoslavia, we also had guests that were politicians or the directors of customs, and so on. I can say that we bought and cooked 80 percent of the food.

And this was the opportunity to socialize with them and thank them for working together, I can say throughout the year, it wasn't like now, "Let's go to a coffee shop, let's go to a restaurant, let's go..." No, no, once a year we cooked, and this made us unified and we had a good time as colleagues, we cooked together. Was it here in my house, in my living room, or in my colleagues' houses, some cooked themselves, but this was very important. It was also important to help each other. If we needed, we had a common safe, for example, which now I think none of the youngsters do it, if one of our colleagues needed it, their child got sick, or what do I know, they got sick, or their house burned down, or if their car broke down, and their salary couldn't cover it, we would give them the money from the safe. Or, for example, we would gather, go to their house and help with whatever they needed.

I mean, I am very happy and I have great memories, and I am thankful I have beautiful memories of that time. How I worked and how I couldn't wait to go to work. So, I was happy to work every day. When the weekend came, I had many obligations as a woman, of course, as a mother, and we still had friends, we lived here, in this house, then friends with their children would come here and we would spend the weekend here, we would socialize, men played with cards, women cooked, children played, different nationalities, it wasn't only Serbs, or only Albanians, but we had Albanian godparents, Slovenians were also our friends, Croatians who lived here, but they also had the same interests as us. They liked sports and skiing. For example, Besim Shala, who was my best friend at that time, taught me to ski in Brezovica, but sadly he now doesn't live here, he lives in Canada. He worked at Jat [travel agency] at Grand Hotel, that's why he was good at skiing, also Fatmir Hapçiu, who worked at Kosovo Drvo, he was also good at it, and we gathered and went there.

For example, the bus left from Hotel Grand in the morning. We went to Brezovica, then there were the Hotel Narcis and Stojkova Kuća, but there was also a small gondola lift, then we went there in the morning and skied all day long, at five in the afternoon we came back. Also, all of those friends, for example, these are my memories, but I didn't mention that my ex-husband was a fisherman, so was

my father-in-law and... when we got married, I also started to like fishing. And I can say that the only prize the team from Prishtina won was the prize I won. There were competitions in the south... in...

[The video stops]

Gordana Đorić: Is it working?

Anita Susuri: You were talking about your colleagues...

Gordana Đorić: Yes, yes, colleagues, then I was talking about my friends. I said, apart from skiing, we also went fishing. I said that the only award at that time, Kosovo that won first place in Yugoslavia for fishing, an award that me and my team won. And the race was held at Lake Batllava, the federal race. Of course, I had the full support of the team, our association, which was called Božur. So, Uncle Muja was the president of the association and all the men who were disqualified then from the race supported me, and encouraged me on the day I caught the largest number of fish and won the first prize in Yugoslavia for fishing (laughs).

So, this was very worth it for me, but I said, the fishermen were Albanian and Serbian, all together, we prepared. For example, during the weekend when the weather was nice, we went to Batllava or to Drini, Sitnica, any other lake here, then each of us took food from home. If we went to Drini, then we came back to Prizren at three in the morning, bought food, and then we went fishing all day long. There were different experiences there. If we celebrated children's birthdays, it was normal to visit each other, generally during holidays, Eid, I couldn't wait for it, I love the homemade baklava my friends made, of course. In addition to this, when we went there to wish them a happy Eid, we would get (laughs) a plate of baklava home. So I have great memories and I miss that life. I miss those people who are not in the city anymore, some even have died. Most of them are abroad, but we keep in touch through Viber, though the internet. Sometimes we laugh, but sometimes we cry when we reminisce. I feel sorry that youngsters now won't have such fond memories.

Anita Susuri: When you finished high school, did you continue your education?

Gordana Đorić: No, I got married, I had children, but I registered at the High Economical School, I finished accounting, it lasted two years. I never worked in education, because after Trans Jug, when the law came, then with my ex-husband... we opened our own company and so on. I managed the private company, which was one of the most successful at that time in Kosovo, which had about 75 employees, we had business partners from different nationalities and we collaborated with many companies which are still successful here. And it's beautiful, for example, I'll tell you just one event... something that happened to me a few years ago.

A person came to Prishtina with a friend of mine and I noticed he seemed familiar but I didn't know who he was, Albanian. He said, "Gordana?" I said, "Yes." "Eh," he said, "I am this person, from this company. When my friends said..." I'm not going to mention names, "that he is in contact with you and that you're also on Llapasella, I asked to come with him. I came to tell you that I will never forget what

you did for me.” My company helped his company. Believe me, I had no idea what it was about. Because really at that time, it was not about the interest or whether you would get something out of it, but we had to help each other in order to be successful together and to enable as many workers as possible to get hired and have the best salaries and so on. And to survive because it was then that Yugoslavia was torn down, it was very difficult to work then and many were left jobless and so on.

We also trusted each other, and if I did something like that, so did others, if I could put them in contact with a company or something, or guarantee for them, I did it happily, like most helped me. Because trust was very important then, that, that, that you could work, work successfully, and then it was, controlling the value of a company or the person who runs that company. And so, in such a situation, it was very important who you were doing business with and who I would guarantee for you, or for me and my company, like me who could guarantee for many companies that were successful, and which are still successful in Prishtina.

But I felt very good when I experienced it, not to say other things and other positive situations, to say, that I had when I met my former employees, Albanians who wholeheartedly wanted to help me and that they showed great respect for all that I have done for them, personally but also for their families, which I think is most valuable to a people.

Anita Susuri: When did you start living there?

Gordana Đorić: This was since third grade.

Anita Susuri: With your family?

Gordana Đorić: I told you I was there with my mother, with my mother.

Anita Susuri: With your mother?

Gordana Đorić: Yes, with my mother.

Anita Susuri: Can you tell us a little more about this, where did you live, what kind of a neighborhood was it?

Gordana Đorić: Good, this is, let me tell you something, when you live privately, then you go, so to say, from a neighborhood to another, or from a school to another. We lived in many places. For example, I went to Vuk Karadžić, but I also went to Meto Bajraktari, but I also went to Branislav Nušić, at the end of Prishtina, at Gërmia, on the right side where Tuakbashçe is, as we used to call it, because now the names have changed, I don't know you...

Anita Susuri: It's still called so (laughs).

Gordana Đorić: So I want to say, as negative as it was, it was positive in some cases because I made a lot of friends. When you go to different schools, then you have a lot of friends. But, negatively, because the moment you meet someone, you get familiar with me, a new school, you have to move again because it was like that then, you know, as I said, we, my family was quite poor. I mean, we didn't have favorable conditions. Then, childhood was not so great, the memories of those games and so on, but I suffered as a child. And there were a lot of negative things in my childhood so, to be honest, I don't want to think about those days so much. But maybe for that way of life, I was in a situation to offer many things to my children and grandchildren, because I considered giving them as much love, attention as I could, because I lacked those things as a child. And then I wanted my children and grandchildren to not lack it, which shows that we are all close to each other.

Anita Susuri: How many children do you have and what do they do?

Gordana Đorić: I have two boys and a girl. They have their own private company. There's a bakery, sweet shop, they make dough, they sell in school, they have that coffee shop, sweet shop, they make sweets, cakes and so on. They're all together. I have four nephews, for now. The fifth will come because my daughter is pregnant (laughs). So I'm fulfilled as a grandmother, as a mother, so what I said, what matters is that my children are close, they help each other, even though they're different and so on. But, they accept those differences, and they keep the love among each other, and they help each other as much as they can.

Anita Susuri: Then you lived with your family in Prishtina, right? Your children and...

Gordana Đorić: Yes, yes, yes we lived in Dardania for about 20 years, near Kurriz. But we had an apartment, then we bought an apartment behind the Chamber of Commerce, on Rajko Dimitrijević Street, formerly Hajdar Dushi. There we were on the second floor.

Anita Susuri: How did you live there? Did you have neighbors...

Gordana Đorić: Of course. Let me tell you something, Prishtina is an amazing, small city. For example, in Dardania, I spent more than 20 years with my neighbors, my director lived there, the one from Transjug, he lived on the third floor, I lived on the sixth floor. We had a great relationship with our neighbors, and we helped each other. We went to get coffee, parties, celebrations, and so on. Of course, if we had to help each other, we did so.

Of course, there were people who didn't adapt, but it was like that everywhere. But, 90 percent of people were positive, as I said, my memories are positive when talking about those neighbors. And here on [the street] Rajko Dimitrijević, behind the Chamber of Commerce, or Hajdar Dushi, as it was once called, the same, there we had fewer neighbors, there was a building. Four flats, one floor, one flat. And with those neighbors, we were quite close and we were respected, to the maximum. My godparents and many of my acquaintances and friends also lived on that street, so we visited each other and so on.

Anita Susuri: So in the '80s, the demonstrations were in the '80s, how did that affect you, what were those years like for you?

Gordana Đorić: Let me tell you something, this was, it was very powerful, in the beginning... none of us understood what was happening. Now I'm also talking about my friends. Because I told you we were all equal, Albanians, Serbians, Turks, even Slovenians, and Muslims. Also, my best friend was Muslim. It was the same as Transjug, we couldn't understand what was happening, why this is happening, why were those demonstrations initiated, but I need to tell you a story.

For example, the demonstrations were in '81, in '82, we had the day of Transjug and then the deputy general director came from Rijeka, Vencislav, he was Russian and then we had that party in Grand and we were thus sitting all at the table. And at that table sat my director Munibca Hasi and I, my ex-husband, then Živorad Jako Jokanović, a lawyer who is still a lawyer in Prishtina, well known, a special man, special not to mention professionally and respected by all to this day, both Albanians and Serbs, and all, and some people, a certain Đorđe Aksić who is also our family friend. And the deputy director general, Vencislav, asked me, "Gordana, what happened? What is the situation here after the demonstrations?" And I said, and he said, "What do you think about it?" I was young then, I said, "We really can't understand what happened." I mean none of us could understand, Albanians couldn't understand it either, those who worked, who were with me. He said, "What happened there?" and I think, we lived well, we had good salaries, we all had agreements, really, even anyone who came to Pristina, then from any place in Yugoslavia.

They were jealous of our way of life. This can be confirmed by 90 percent of the citizens of the old generation who lived in Prishtina then. Those who were normal people, who didn't think it's important to get involved in politics, or create negative situations, but people were important for us, socializing. And I said, "I don't know what happened, I can't believe what, what is happening to us." He said, "This had nothing to do with Albanians. Or what they're asking for. Simply," with these words, there are people who can confirm this, this was in '82, he said, "Simply, the world powers, one of them America, wanted Yugoslavia to get destroyed. It was just the beginning. Let's see," he said, "What the reaction will be. In a year or two will begin," he said, "The attack on Slovenia's army." Believe me, I swear, I was so upset when I heard these stories. I mean, for all of us, to destroy Yugoslavia. Because Yugoslavia was the notion of a beautiful country, beautiful living. We were appreciated by all countries in the world, our passport was valid, we were able to go where we wanted and, when we went somewhere and when we were asked, "Yugoslavia." "Ah, you!" We were really respected as a nationality, Yugoslav. One of the best in the world. We couldn't believe that what he was telling us could happen, that the attacks on the Slovenian army would start, then the chaos, then the wars, this and that, and that we would really experience all that we have experienced .

You know what Živorad Jokanović told me then, the other director went and when the party was over, he said, "Girl, this director isn't well." You know, meaning he's not sane, what he is talking about. Unfortunately, we experienced everything he said, later, in later years, and also, (coughs) I feel sorry for all the people who lost their lives, who lost their loved ones. And, of course, I can't move past the

pain for the life we used to have and we never will have again, and no one will have a life like we did in Prishtina.

Anita Susuri: During the war, it was hard for the Serbs and Albanians who lived here, what was it like for you?

Gordana Đorić: It was, let me tell you something, very hard. I mean, in the beginning, we couldn't understand that this could happen to us, even though we had experienced (coughs) they came from Croatia, Bosnia, you know. It started there first.

[The story continues in part two]

Part Two

Gordana Đorić: The only thing we could do was see how much we could help them. Then when the bombing started, then my neighbors were in danger, Albanians, they started, they moved. The only thing I did was knock on my neighbors' door, and they can confirm that...

Anita Susuri: You were then in Prishtina?

Gordana Đorić: Yes, in Prishtina, I asked them what they needed so I could bring it to them. If they needed to buy something or so on. But we tried, whoever wanted to leave, they asked to accompany them to the train station safely, or the bus station, or to the border, we took some to the border. I mean this is it, you shouldn't have asked me this question because I can't contain my emotions (cries) with Mister Žika Jovanović, who I appreciate a lot, he called me (cries), "Come on, Girl, let's drive some of our friends." Then we drove down some streets there (coughing) as much as we could to accommodate families, some family members. Then we drove here, drove in, then we experienced the encounter with someone, you know, with these, the police, or... those groups that appeared in such situations. Then you had to risk yourself in order to protect the people you tried to help, to send them there to a certain place. But I say, all that I have done, I would do it even today. Because I thought we should all help each other.

But unfortunately, when the bombing ended and when international organizations and KFOR entered here and when the people of Prishtina started to return or others who, I say, many came and usurped Prishtina itself, and I mean, our homes, apartments, companies or this and that. I couldn't, I didn't experience the same protection that I gave. And now, the excuse was, let me tell you something, the excuse was that they were scared. Yes, they were scared, but I also experienced threats from various groups, but I did it. Regardless of the threats, I didn't allow anyone to scare me that much that I wouldn't help my neighbor, my friend, to be available when someone needed me, which is very important.

I was quite disappointed then, by, by many people, who didn't, but still, those old friends who could, there are some, I will be thankful as long as I live because there were some difficult situations and those people helped me. And thanks to all that, I still have never lost faith in people and faith and I haven't lost that love for people. And for me the greatest value is a person and what they have within themselves. Another thing, and I'll finish this story — it happened, it should never be repeated. And we should all try, really, I advise you youngsters that whenever you should spread love every time you have the opportunity and that value should remain value, the knowledge and goodness that person has, not how much money they have, or if they have a good villa and car because these are all very, very irrelevant when it comes to quality of life in question.

Anita Susuri: I wanted to ask you something more beautiful. How did you meet your current husband?

Gordana Đorić: (laughs) This is a story. Let me tell you something, things that you can't plan happen in life. Simply, I think it's meant to be from birth. And as much as you try to avoid many things in life, you can't and they happened. I didn't mention that I was divorced in '98. We couldn't make it work, we had many problems. I knew him from the city. And we worked together because my company, we had a collaboration with RTS, RT Prishtina.

We also had friends in common, we would gather and so on. His wife got cancer and unfortunately died. Then our children were friends, went to school together, and so on. And, as friends, we tried to help him get through the pain, that situation, he was alone with his children, then, you know, your whole life changes when you lose a family member, especially your wife. We really were friends. I tried to help him then. He told me about his life story for days, his relationship with his wife, then some good and bad things that happened in his life, it was easier for him to have someone to talk to, to remember, and get through his pain of the biggest tragedy that happened to him.

And through that friendship, time passed, of course, months, simply when they say, "You found each other." You know? And, and, and understand me that first, we're very similar, because he is a great person, and you can ask any Albanian from Prishtina, many know, many have worked with him. As long as we have been together, for 21 years, I've never heard anything negative about him. So, no one has ever said anything about him, on the opposite, "Ah, Zlatko? He is a king." You know, I think, this is basic for me to be with someone. It's basic, even if I'm friends with someone, let's be clear (laughs). So, he is really good. So we're together, but we didn't legally get married, but I really am thankful to God for these 21 years, for putting him in my path because he is a great friend, he is my brother, my support, I have everything I need from a person. Secondly, he has two sons, four nephews. I also felt very close to his wife's family. So, they're great people, they're from Prizren.

So when there's love, we shouldn't worry, we have eight grandchildren (laughs), the ninth is coming. And when, when all of them are in Belgrade, when we go there, we try to go often, because we miss them, we want to see the children and hang out with our grandchildren, but they also come here during holidays and so on. And we all gather. Now, our last gathering was when Zlatko retired, and he won the award from the League of Serbian Variety Artists for life work. And this was the reason we celebrated, then we all went to a restaurant (laughs) my children, his children, grandchildren, and we

spent an amazing afternoon together. Other than that they talk to each other, they help each other, they're all family-oriented people, me and Zlatko help if they need someone to take care of the children, to help, or to take them here with us or anything else they need.

Anita Susuri: So, you were together for 21 years.

Gordana Đorić: Yes, we've been together for 21 years, I said, God rewarded me (laughs) regardless of the citation we had in '99, and there were some really hard moments. There were moments when I almost died, I didn't tell you, I was on the bus that crashed in Livadica. And I was injured, but...

Anita Susuri: '90, was this in '99?

Gordana Đorić: No, no, 2001. 2001, February 16. And luckily I was only injured, and unfortunately you know that twelve people died... but, I have experienced all of this, it was much easier when I had someone, someone who loves you, who cares about you and can help you, support you in every way. Whether it's personal or professional life, because then I continued working here, because my company was usurped, everything was stolen, I didn't have anything. I couldn't provide for my children and then I opened a gas station... where I employed five people, and I did that until 2010, and I provided for my family and myself, and, of course, all my workers there had income.

Anita Susuri: So, in the '90s, you opened your own company?

Gordana Đorić: Yes.

Anita Susuri: Really?

Gordana Đorić: Yes.

Anita Susuri: How did your work go then?

Gordana Đorić: Let me tell you something, from the knowledge I got at Transjug, and, of course, all that the director then, Munibca Hasi, taught me, but also the friends I had at that time, really, I could take the steps needed so the company would quickly expand. Then, the economical situation was bad, then, when a quality company appeared, I tried to offer quality, the goods, the services we did because... we expanded it, the situation was like that. Then, as I said, trust among each other was very important.

And, I said, at first, I started working alone, then I hired two, three other people, I started working from home, I mean, service activities. Then I expanded, it was necessary to have space, and the first place we bought was the building of Auto Prishtina then, where Hotel Viktoria is now, it was on the last floor, the storehouse was downstairs, we sold auto parts, HTZ parts, we collaborated with the Shock Absorber Factory, we were the biggest buyer of building material. Then we started with computing. Computing was developed there, so to speak. We were one of the first to know the market demand

then, and we had young people who were excellent IT experts. Of course, we sent them through certain trainings and seminars to get educated or qualified for some things. And then, there was the embargo that Yugoslavia had then from other countries and then you couldn't find either the hardware, when it comes to, so, parts of the computer, and you couldn't find the software either. We were the ones, my company, the computing part, you could order software. All that was necessary.

We collaborated with many factories, institutions, so, everything that was necessary for computer engineering, so to say, we were prepared, as a company offering those services and normally various trainings and all of that. So our company had 75 employees of all nationalities. I can even say that at one point there were the least Serbs. So, they were Albanians, Roma, Turks, and Muslims, and Serbs of course.

I mostly hired young people, and I spared a lot of time talking to them. I didn't hire them strictly for the profession needed, but I wanted someone in front of me to be able to succeed in that line of work, then as a company, I would give them the opportunity to find themselves, where they can offer their knowledge, their expertise, and find themselves there. Because the company had many sectors, with many opportunities, but I offered each of them, whoever worked with us, a month to notify the company and change sectors. Until then, they could decide where... and of course they gained professional knowledge, training and everything they needed, and at last income, personal income, up to the point they contributed.

So I had great cooperation with all of my co-workers. And also as a company we tried to also help with their personal problems, as their superior and their colleague, to say so, to help them personally. And I think it's very important if you want the best from your worker. They have to feel safe with you as a supervisor, but also with the company they work for.

Anita Susuri: So you had that business until the war happened?

Gordana Đorić: Until '98, when I also got divorced. Given that my husband was the co-owner. And then, after the divorce, I ran it because we made a deal to get the company back on its feet, so those workers could have good wages, but unfortunately, after that, everything happened, so that failed (laughs, because the company was stolen, usurped. At the time of the bombings, it wasn't possible to work, and then after that everything failed, so to speak.

And then, we couldn't finish the division of marital inheritance, so I (coughs), I didn't have any income and then I only had the gas station in Llapllasella, we used for our cars, make it functional together, of course, then we didn't have money, but a young man from Llapllasella, he had the tools, he invested, and we worked together. Then I managed it myself. Of course, I paid for the investments and until 2010, I had a gas station (laughs).

Anita Susuri: So, you came here after the war, how do you feel now in Llapllasella?

Gordana Đorić: It's nice. I really am happy here. And anyway... When someone asks me, "Hey, how can you, even though the political situation isn't stable..." horrible, for 20 years, because I hear my friend's stories. The situation isn't getting better, there's no system that we can all plan and live our lives here. We can't plan anything here. You can't even plan your private life, let alone work. Precisely because of the system that doesn't work. Real government doesn't exist, but it is those interest groups that decide everything. Political or others. And of course these (laughs) world powers which dictate how, what and everything depends on their interest, so our life depends on them.

But regardless of all this, I, I am still with my people. Because I have known these people since childhood. Many people from Prishtina came here, or from some other place, Mitrovica or so. Then, we meet and... Secondly, I have wonderful neighbors, because when you have good people in the neighborhood, then it is really fun to live in that environment. They have known me here since childhood and here I don't need to show who I am, what I am. They know that I am so and so and then it is much easier to live in a circle where they know.

And, secondly, people remained close to each other. And I couldn't live somewhere where, where people don't love each other, where they hurt each other, where, as far as I know, they are stuck in their small community {crosses fingers and joins hands} or they don't want to socialize at home. We socialize here. Here, I think, it has never happened to me to go to the yard and no one from the neighborhood to not come and say, "I'll help you." Or for them to do something and us to not go. Or, as far as I know, whatever event takes place in Gračanica, we are there together. Whether it is a cultural event, or is it, how do I know, a religious event, a family event or so.

And then you know, when you live in, in such conditions, I'm used to something like that, I don't need anything else. I am not a person who loves luxury, to go somewhere, visit, some, some places that are popular, to see people there and so on. But for me it is important with whom I will sit and talk with, if that person radiates positive energy. I always need that energy, just as I try to radiate that positive energy that everyone needs wherever I go and, if I can, so people remember me through beautiful stories and events or the help that I gave it, not for whether I have a big villa, or I have, what do I know, or if I was in a meeting where the most famous, the "most famous" were {gestures quotations marks} people in quotation marks {gestures quotations mark}. And so, that's it, I...

Anita Susuri: You also organized the association Avenija. How did it come to that?

Gordana Đorić: Let me tell you something, in '99, given that we were all unemployed, driven out of our cities, our companies, also from society and the private sector, everything was destroyed. And I, as the owner and director of the company, I was very active in those economic associations, the Chamber of Commerce of Kosovo and Metohija then or the Chamber of Commerce of Serbia, or Yugoslavia at that time, or the association of small and medium enterprises, or Employers' Union and so on. Because we formed the Union of Employers of Serbia since '86, then, where all, I think, those employers who considered that they should join because I considered that I should join because always in such associations, meetings, you can introduce other business partners and start cooperation, you can better introduce your company and, of course, have a better business.

So, in '99 then, together with the Chamber then which was, moved to Mitrovica and to Pri, the Chamber of Serbia, we formed the association of entrepreneurs, in those small spaces in order for people to gather there and get information and see what they can do, because without work, you can't survive, you know. But it was also a fact that at that time women, (laughs) our women, could never speak. Because you know we are, we live in a patriarchal society. No matter the time and no matter in, I mean, the profession or, I say this, the pressure they have from the relevant institutions, the association, this, that, that women are equal, unfortunately, it is still a problem, of the '90s, respectively in 2000 when we even started working more intensively as an association, it was very difficult for a women to express themselves.

It is also a fact that women are more courageous in difficult situations. Because her motive is to help the family, the children, taking care of the family and the survival of the family. And she will invest all her skills, all her strength, courage, to save the family, to help the family. And that was what our women showed then. And then I, of course, with the agreement of the Chamber of Commerce of Serbia, because, as an association, we were registered in the Chamber of Commerce of Serbia at that time and here in my house, given that I have space, we didn't need the money. There we set up the office and there we offered women the opportunity to come with me since I have great experience in entrepreneurship, even in economics, to see what we can do based on what they have - do they have the knowledge and experience or if they possess something to start any work and survive. I mean, those families should survive first, and then hire other family members of course.

This was my motive. So, the economic development of women. Then we had great help from USAID, through their projects, KBS, CBS. Then, we had great help, of course, from the Chamber of Commerce of Serbia at that time, we also had help from the Agency for Regional Development of Serbia in which there were certain people who wanted to help. Because, the institution as an institution, the agency as an agency, are not valid if they don't help people through some activities, projects, really help the community. Or a certain group of people. At that time, there were people who sincerely wanted to work. Because that value system had not returned {moves hands in a circle} I mean, inverted and not broken. I'm talking about that time.

That's why we got help through advice, education, but there were also funds that, not the association, but I insisted that the members be helped directly. For example, if they distribute something, the request for a greenhouse, then directly that member was brought there. She would make the deal with that, I mean, foundation, whatever it was. Whether it was KFOR and they had such tools, or some other organization, they also gave. And I was there to help those members who... to design that small business. And, of course, to help network them, the various economic entities where they were able to buy equipment or then market their products which was very important.

And we were very successful then really. But after that, many have changed to this day. Well, I have to say publicly, and probably you also had the experience that now you can't apply somewhere if you aren't asked for percentages. I mean, if you can't share percentages for certain people. It's awful. To me, this is terrible. I just just can't function that way now. Because if we want to help each other, then I

will invest everything I know for that project to succeed and this project of yours and someone else's who will help our community, so we see some say, others, and hear some other stories perhaps, "Wait I'll change my conscience. Everything is not as someone told me, but I also have that space." Or, for example, to try to get economic development together and start here. Let's start with the opening of new jobs, keep young people here, stay, push institutions from the judiciary to everything else, let the rule of law ensure that we are all safe here. And to look and create the real environment where they would come to, to, work and live and not leave here.

But, unfortunately, no matter how hard we try, me or you, in front of another non-governmental organization or a third, I simply say, we have won that group of people for whom the value is mainly money and who does not choose the way to get to that money. Through corruption, through crime, through I mean mobbing and the elimination of all that is qualitative and good, professional in, in our environment. And this is something that overwhelms me as a person or even as a professional, someone who, someone who can still contribute a lot, I say to my community, to, to help, to feel safe here to earn up to..., enough enough to live a normal life. Not to, to survive as if it has been happening for years or just to look at the possibility of escaping from this circle, everywhere. But everyone who goes, just says, "Wherever it is, just not here! Everywhere, just not here."

Now, as a society, what do we need to do to change that? There is no way we can, if we say so, break these, these interest groups that have ruled here for years, and say, destroy our lives. Here, honestly. Because in our conversations with a lot of people, let me tell you, people, wherever they are in a situation, in any situation to initiate something positive, they encounter obstacles of this kind, which I say, and then you see that everything is rotten. From these international organizations that have easily embraced all those rules here for these interest groups, who, who do not care about the situation here and who all have a normal life together, to develop economically, to strengthen, to improve the quality of our life, to create social situations again and not look at who is with what nationality, but what person he is and whether it is good to talk to you. Unfortunately... I do not know. I am saying hope is the last, something that, you know, the last that dies, and still, I still hope that something will change, but unfortunately, it is already fading so to speak, faith.

And the worst is for a person when you are powerless to change anything. I mean, the more you try the more helpless you are. There is here the honor of exceptions really, there are expert people, quality people who, this one, have the same thoughts when we speak like that, but they become powerless. Unable to change anything because they do not ask you, you are not (coughs) you do not make a decision you, you are a minority, a very large minority. I am talking now about the quality of people, not about nationality, that whatever we change in that part then we are left with only that, you know, pray to God and say, "Will something happen..." {looks up and opens her hands} do you know, to suddenly change this, to let the sun shine here, really finally begins to... in another direction, in a better direction, of development, do you know about the quality of life and the quality of people. Unfortunately, so far it has been so, and...

But still, during life people are taught that, many things, shouldn't affect them, you know, I am talking emotionally, because I couldn't, I couldn't live, because I don't want to be in a situation to be she who

always complains, dissipates negative energy, which is always afraid of something. On the contrary, I have always been positive in life and, and, and somehow I say, “It will get better” and even if someone comes I say, “It is so, but these people have it even worse. Let’s...” you know, if I couldn’t change something for someone in this way then I try in [the third way] {moves her hands in a semicircle}, fourth. I don’t give up, I don’t lose the will and the belief that something can change. As for me personally and what I can decide for myself, I really try to make the most of this, and make the most of every day and change something in that direction. And so it seems to me, I think and I’m sure {puts her hands up} that so (laughs) he will die in the end. And I want, I say, to spread from my family to friends, to spread those positive, positive stories, I’m saying ideas that can bring people together, that can contribute to a better life for people and so on.

Here, these individuals who are in some institutions... thankfully, you meet such people who sincerely want to join you. Then together as if pushing something forward to do something. Sometimes we do not succeed, but... there would be much more if it were not for corruption, that blackmail, so to speak, here, “You will have the project, but...” you know. “We have to share for this person, for this...”. And modesty does not exist in them, but they are more and more without..., without satisfaction and they are looking for more and more, and I have never wanted {gestures no} to be framed in such a way, I say, work, because you have to give an explanation to your coworker, your neighbor, your colleague, do you know where the money is? Where did you spend them? And I am 60 years old, now 61. If I have lived this way so far, lived mainly from my work, so that everything you do is transparent, public, useful to everyone, that is why I say, I have always tried that whatever I have done, and I have done for the interest of society, for the interest of my employees, for interest, that is, for the general interest, it is important to me. And when the general interest is satisfactory, then so is your personal interest (laughs). People can never understand this, they know, but they look primarily at their own interest without thinking about how, because of such actions, because of such actions that they wanted to enrich themselves personally, that they personally, they took advantage and I am saying to fill their pockets, they destroy big things, big things around them, unfortunately, the citizens feel for the quality of their life and from what they cannot change.

Anita Susuri: Good, Miss Gordana, if you have anything to add, if you forgot something?

Gordana Đorić: I’ll tell you something, (laughs) for the story. We can talk for hours. First of all, thank you for starting this project, we are free and all, not all normally because I need time (laughs) for something like that, but at least the basic, what you asked me I answered you as I feel personally. And I hope that all these stories of all those people who have spoken to you in front of the camera will probably influence many other people to look at each other differently and still love each other. And this is the most important thing. Because when you love man, everything else is irrelevant. Then try to really help that person, and cultivate that friendship, so that that person stays in your circle. And normally, together, I am saying, maybe there is a little bit left for this older generation to create better conditions together, as I said earlier, for all those who live here, for my neighbors or fellow citizens, my or, young people who (coughs) have confidence in the future living here, this is it.

Anita Susuri: Thank you very much!

Gordana Đorić: Thank you!