



Six Bosnians, An American Tourist, and a Simple Little Song

By Pam Bridgehouse

When my dad asked me to go to Germany with him in the summer of 1993, I dusted off my German and prepared to converse with the local people in their native language.

During our stay at a guesthouse in the quiet little village of Klais, our hostess asked for help. A woman from Bosnia, who worked at a neighboring guesthouse had been granted a permanent visa to Australia for herself and her children. She needed help filling out necessary forms and reading official letters that were written in English. We were thrilled to help. Azemina, who spoke only Croat and German, came the next day and we helped her with her forms and had a chance to visit about her escape from Bosnia.

After she left, it occurred to me they might need some help with English, so I made for them a book of phrases which included English pronunciation using German phonetics and English and German translations. After several hours of work I set out to find Azemina and her family.

I walked through the village looking for an apartment in the location Azemina had described. After seeking information several times, a woman directed me to the back of a building and a dark concrete stairway leading to servants' rooms. Not knowing which of the four doors was hers, I softly called, "Azemina"? After the second time she came to the door, welcoming me in.

I showed Azemina the book I had prepared and she read it easily. Her fifteen-year old daughter, having studied English, read and understood it very well.

As we visited, we looked at each other's family pictures. It was hard not to cry when she showed pictures of her husband whom she had neither seen nor received news of since the day the Serbs attacked Sarajevo. As the visit progressed, we were joined by Azemina's brother, her sister, and her eight-year old son, Monsad.

At one point, Azemina's daughter began reciting the alphabet. There were a few holes here and there, so I taught her the ABC Song and wrote it in the little phrase book. Azemina's sister asked Monsad to sing the song his teacher had

taught him in English. He sang “Oh, once a farmer had a dog and Bingo was his name-oh...” We all joined in the singing – six Bosnian refugees and an American tourist sitting in a 12x12 servants’ bedroom in the Bavarian Alps. We sang heartily with big smiles and laughed and laughed with delight. The unity and connecting we felt was indescribable.

When we parted, Azemina said, (in German), “I have friends in America.” I said, “I will have friends in Australia.” We hugged in the moonlight and have not seen each other since.

As I walked home, I thought of the teacher who had taught Monsad a song in English. That little song opened our hearts and while we sang it we were one. That night, I resolved that each year my students would learn at least two songs in languages other than English.