

Then



Now



Sedija Katika and her daughter, Amra, at their home in Sarajevo

WELCOME BACK TO SARAJEVO

U2 sang about it. Now Angelina Jolie has made a film about it. To mark 20 years since the Siege of Sarajevo – which saw 10,000 people killed and lasted four years – *Marie Claire* sent war photographer Tom Stoddart to find the women he first met two decades ago

WORDS BY GLYN STRONG & ANNA SAUNDERS. PHOTOGRAPHS BY TOM STODDART

'I lost both my legs – but I feel strong'

Sedija Katika's legs were blown off by a tank shell in May 1992 while her husband was away fighting. She is now 58, and her daughter, Amra, is a law student

'I was 38 when I was hit by a shell and lost both my legs. I was so badly injured that when my neighbour brought me to hospital, the doctors told him I wouldn't survive. But my neighbour pleaded with him. He said that I had three children, and asked him to do whatever he could.'

'I woke up two days later – and by then my children assumed I was dead. All I could remember about the accident was that I'd been at home preparing a

bottle of milk for my daughter, Amra. I'd left the house to go to the shelter and a tank shell had landed right in front of me.'

'When I discovered that I'd lost my legs, my first reaction was shock. After that, I felt cheated, as if something had been stolen from me. But in some ways I was lucky; at least I was admitted to hospital at the start of the war, when there was still electricity and water. And my children helped get me through. They have always been my priority. Today, I feel strong and capable. I don't see myself as an amputee. I see myself as a mother.'

AMRA 'I didn't even know this photo existed until I found it on the internet six months ago. I could hardly believe that the girl in the picture is me. But I do remember that doll I'm carrying; it was my favourite.'

'When I look at this picture, I don't see an amputee or a mother with no legs. I see love. I see a connection, too, something bigger and stronger than anything I can describe.' *{continued}*

Then



I refused to show my fear'

Meliha Varesanovic was a 37-year-old secretary when the siege began. The iconic image above made her a symbol of the city's defiant spirit. It was also used as inspiration for Angelina Jolie's film *In the Land of Blood and Honey*. 'I didn't carry weapons during the siege, but I did fight – with my defiance, my dignity, and my refusal to run, even when I knew a sniper's sights could be trained on me.'

'This photograph was taken as I walked to work. During the siege, some streets, such as Sniper Alley, were so dangerous that every time you crossed, you wondered whether you'd be able to cross back again – because a lot of people didn't. Once, I remember setting off across a street with a young girl, before changing my mind and turning back. The girl continued, though, and a few seconds later



she was shot. Thank God she survived.

'The snipers wanted to break our bodies and our spirits – and my only weapon against that was to refuse to let them. So I wore high heels. I never ran. I always took care with my appearance, even though it was difficult; I had to heat my mascara to soften it and make it last and, on the very day this photo

was taken, I had to burn the shoes I was wearing for fuel.

'The shop window in this picture still exists. But the sound of guns and shelling have gone. When you walk past, the only thing you can hear is laughter and music from the nearby coffee shops. But I'll still always remember the moment Tom took this photo.'

I never expected U2 to perform a song about me'

When 17-year-old Inela Nagic won 'Miss Sarajevo', images of her unfurling a banner pleading for help made headlines. Inela, now 36, also became the inspiration for the U2/Brian Eno song *Miss Sarajevo*.

'Watching the video clip of *Miss Sarajevo* for the first time in 1996 brought it all back – the siege, the beauty pageant.

'It was my mother who'd entered me. I was 17 and a bit of a tomboy; I'd never have entered a beauty contest myself. But she'd seen it in the newspaper.

'Fighting had been under way for a year by then. Like most kids, I'd been happy when the war first started, because school had shut. We assumed classes would start again at any moment. Instead, the shelling got worse.

'On the night of the contest, we were all very excited. I think we were trying to pretend we were leading normal lives. That was very important to us. During a situation like that, you crave normality. I can't remember whose idea it was to bring the banner, but we'd seen the photographers in the audience and wanted to send a message to the world. We never imagined it would become so famous. When they announced I'd won, I couldn't believe it. I walked out on stage and flowers were flying through the air.

'I left Sarajevo soon after that. I married a Dutch journalist and we went to Paris. It would have been incredibly romantic – except that my mother, father and sister were still in Sarajevo. Fortunately, they all survived.

'Brian Eno first rang me in 1996. I had no idea who he was. But he said that he'd written a song about me. Today, I still feel emotional when I hear it. Occasionally my children ask me about it, but they're more interested in U2 than the war, to be honest, and I've never felt the need to talk to them about it.'

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Inela wins the pageant in 1993



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'I wish I could thank him'

Amila Sacic was 55 days old in this picture of her in the arms of her godfather, Sead Hamzic, a fighter in the Bosnian army

'I don't remember much about my godfather. He fought during the siege, and my mother said he was very brave. But a mortar explosion left him with a bad heart, and ten years ago he committed suicide. He wasn't the only one with psychological scars. I don't remember the war, but the older generation thinks about it a lot.

'I don't know if there's a future for me in Bosnia; jobs are scarce and there's a lot of poverty. If the siege happened again today, I probably wouldn't stay.

'I like this photograph. Sead looks protective, and I feel sad that I didn't get to know him. Apparently, he brought me home from the hospital after I was born. I wish I could have thanked him.'

Now

Amila revisits the location of the photograph

'We could see the snipers'

Minka Salihajic still lives in the Heroes' Square apartment she occupied during the siege with her husband and two daughters

'From this apartment, you could see the snipers. Yet we tried to live life as normally as possible. I'd even tidy the house. Can you imagine trying to keep a house clean with bullets flying in?

'Food was a problem. We got aid packages. Sometimes there were old biscuits from America, left over from the Vietnam War. If you were lucky, and had friends or relatives outside Sarajevo, they would send luxuries like coffee.

But we didn't know anyone.

'I remember watching those towers burn. In one, an entire family died. Every day we'd ask ourselves if we'd be next. Those four years were like a vacuum—everything was sucked out of our lives, except the will to survive.'

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Minka on her terrace where she watched the war unfolding

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'I escaped with my son'

Gordana Burazor, 48, was photographed, crying, on the day she left Sarajevo by bus with her two-year-old son, Andre, in 1992. She now lives in Perth, Australia.

'When I escaped from Sarajevo, all I could take with me was a suitcase, some money – and Andre. I had no idea whether I'd see my parents again. I was desperate. You can see my desperation in this photograph.'

'Different cultures and religions had always lived side by side in Sarajevo. In my family alone, there are Serbs, Italians, Croats, Muslims. I never thought we'd be fighting one another. No one did.'

'Among those killed was my son's best friend. He was looking through his win-

dow when a sniper took aim – at a four-year-old boy – and shot him in the head. Even now, 20 years later, it still shocks me. After that I knew we had to get out.'

'I used personal connections to get seats on a bus carrying orphans and journalists. I knew we'd be safe; snipers wouldn't dare shoot at journalists. But my father was furious. He thought we should stay and fight. Fortunately, both my parents survived the war – but it took years for my father to forgive me.'

'After escaping, Andre and I travelled through Italy. I worked in laundries,

care homes – anywhere I could bring Andre and that paid under the table. It was hard. I was 28, alone and had a two-year-old to look after. But, finally, in 1996, we travelled to Australia as refugees. I've remarried and we're happy here. This is not home, but neither is Sarajevo any more.' ■

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Gordana and Andre in Australia

THE FRONT LINE REVISITED

He's worked everywhere from Somalia to Iraq, but when Tom Stoddart returned to Sarajevo earlier this year to shoot our retrospective story, he admits he suffered from butterflies. 'This particular episode was quite a big thing in my life. Every war photographer has "their story", and I think this one was mine.'

The city that awaited him was very different from the one he first visited in 1992. Back then, Bosnia had just declared its independence, and Serbian snipers

had encircled Sarajevo. It would be four years before the world acted, and by then more than 10,000 people had died.

Stoddart himself was among those injured. However, after recovery, he returned, producing some iconic images. Tracking down the subjects of those photos for our story took months. 'There were some fantastic moments; I'd put the picture in front of them and say, 'Is this you? The marks of the war are still there. But there's a lot of pride, too.'



Photographer Tom Stoddart at Lion Cemetery, Sarajevo

Now



To help women affected by the Siege of Sarajevo visit womenforwomen.org.uk/marieclaire