

**1. Music** – helping people cope during the war, helping them heal afterwards

Music helped some Bosnians cope during the war. One man, Vedran Smailović, the “Cellist of Sarajevo,” played his cello in ruined buildings as a form of protest against wartime destruction. Others played music to find distraction and moments of peace during the war. In one hard-hit Sarajevo neighborhood, a musician named Zlatko Bostandžić started a choir in a school in order to keep children inside, off the dangerous streets. They sang folk songs, accompanied mostly by homemade instruments. An internationally-known children’s choir continued to perform during the war. After the war ended, music became a way to bring together people from warring groups. The two bottom photos show an ethnically-mixed children’s choir in 2014 in Srebrenica, a city where, 19 years before, Serbs had killed 8,000 Muslim (Bosniak) men and boys. The photo on the bottom left shows two friends – one Serb and one Bosniak – who sing together in the choir.



Vedran Smailović in 1992



Srebrenica children’s choir – 19 years after the killings

To think about: How does music help people in bad times and in good ones?

**2. Art** – helping people express their feelings during and after the war

Art is a way for people to express their feelings about their lives. Right after the war, some groups used “art therapy” to help children express what happened to them during the war and their feelings about the experiences. Through art, even young children without ability to put their memories into words, can share their experiences.



A photo from 1993 of a Bosnian Muslim refugee boy sharing his memories of the war that drove him from his home.

(<https://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/young-refugee-holds-up-a-drawing-of-bombs-falling-from-news-photo/3330118?adppopup=true>)

To think about: How does art help both the artist and the people around him/her?

### 3. Dressing with pride/looking their best:

Some women protested the indignity of everyday life in Sarajevo by dressing up and putting on make-up and jewelry, even to go out on simple (and risky) errands. Sarajevo also organized a beauty pageant, a symbol of “normal life” and a form of protest against the killing of innocent civilians.



A woman, Meliha Varesanović, dresses well and walks proudly even in the midst of the war. (photo by Tom Stoddart - <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/137289488610925384/>)



A famous photo from the Miss Sarajevo beauty contest held during the war.

To think about: Why/how does looking your best help you? How could people manage even during a war when they did not have new clothes?

#### 4. Jokes:

Bosnians are famous for their sense of humor; many claim this ability to joke is a main reason they survived the war and thrived afterwards. In *War Childhood*, author Jasminko Halilović, shares the childhood memory of a young woman joking about the terrible food available during the siege of Sarajevo. Bosnians joked about everything from the lack of electricity and natural gas (for heating) to the United Nations soldiers in the city (whom they called “the Smurfs” because of their blue helmets).



## War Childhood

*Sarajevo 1992–1995*

What was a war childhood for you?

“It was a powdered childhood...  
hahaha, powdered milk, powdered eggs, the house  
around us in powder... but, we were merry!”

*Zlata, 1984.*

To think about: How does laughter and a sense of humor help people in difficult situations?

## 5. Family and friends:

An important part of life during a war (or ANY time) is the love shared by family and friends. Of course, during a war, there is a big risk of losing those people you love, who might be unable to see each other because of wartime separations (as people are cut off from one another because of the fighting, forced to become refugees in another place, or even killed during the conflict). However, loved ones also make life worthwhile.



A Bosnian fighter, Hamzia Sejad, kisses his baby daughter goodbye before leaving to fight on the frontlines, 1993.

(Photo by Tom Stoddard - <https://developmenteducation.ie/gallery/the-photography-of-tom-stoddard/>)



Bosnian friends

(Photo by by Mirza Ajanovic, Children of Sarajevo 92 exhibit - <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/311029918017911146/>)

To think about: How do friends and family help during hard times?

## 6. Playing:

Playing is an important part of life, yet it was difficult – and very dangerous – for children to play outside during the siege of Sarajevo. Many children were killed or wounded when just going outside briefly to play.



Some boys playing basketball during a break in the shelling.

(Photo by Tom Stoddard - <https://developmenteducation.ie/gallery/the-photography-of-tom-stoddard/>)



Children playing in Gorazde, Bosnia, in 1995.

(<https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/325666616789341366/>)

To think about: Why is it important to relax and play sometimes? In these pictures, children are playing outside (which they often couldn't do during the war). What other kinds of play do you think they engaged in when they had to stay inside? (Remember that they might not have electricity.....)

## 7. Writing:

Many people, teenagers and adults, shared their feelings through writing. Have you ever read the diary of Anne Frank? Many young people in Bosnia had read that too, and some say she inspired them to keep a war diary. Zlata Filipović, author of *Zlata's Diary*, is probably the most famous, but others, such as Nadja Halilbegovich, has also had her diary published in English. She began to write on May 31, 1992, nearly two months after the war started, when it became obvious that the war would not end soon. *"Instantly this diary became a friend who listened to all that I desperately needed to share. It was my only place of peace amid the chaos."* (p. 9) Through writing she, and others, were able to think about – and find some healing from – the terrible things they were seeing and experiencing.

*November 24, 1994*

*At night, black and gloomy thoughts invade me instead of sleep. In the darkness, images of bloody, dead children revolve in front of my eyes. One image after another forces itself upon me, I feel such pain and humiliation that I cry and cry. I don't even have the right to dream anymore. For God's sake, I am only fifteen!* (p. 89)



Nadja Halilbegovic

([https://www.kidscanpress.com/sites/default/files/products/assets/MyChildhoodUnderFire\\_1770\\_chapter.pdf](https://www.kidscanpress.com/sites/default/files/products/assets/MyChildhoodUnderFire_1770_chapter.pdf))

To think about: How does writing about their lives and feelings help people in bad times and in good ones?

## 8. Getting water, a job for children as well as adults:

One thing that made life very difficult during the siege of Sarajevo was the cutting of water, electricity, and natural gas lines. Because people lived in modern houses, it was very hard to live without these utilities. People needed water for drinking, bathing, cooking, and flushing toilets, electricity for appliances and lights, and gas for heating during the long, cold winters. Water was the first and most important need. Children often helped out by walking to water faucets or even the river to bring back water for their families. (This could be extremely dangerous as snipers targeted anyone out on the streets, even children.)



Children and adults waiting in line to get water after the water lines were cut during the siege of Sarajevo.

([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Water\\_politics#/media/File:Evstafiev-bosnia-sarajevo-water-line.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Water_politics#/media/File:Evstafiev-bosnia-sarajevo-water-line.jpg))



(<https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/255649716334967272/>)

To think about: Why did children have to help out with this chore? In what other ways do you think did they help their families?



## 9. School:

Going to school was often very difficult during the Bosnian war. Children had to cross dangerous areas to get to school, sometimes running through sniper fire. Even when they arrived at school, children couldn't be sure they were safe. In November 1993, a shell hit a classroom in Sarajevo, killing eight people including the teacher. At times when it was too dangerous – or in cases where the school was destroyed in the war, children had to learn at home. There was sometimes “school by radio” in Sarajevo for those who had batteries for their radio. Sometimes, children couldn't go to school at all, taking shelter in basements or apartments during the worst of the shelling. However, children tried to keep up with their studies.



A child heading to school during the war.  
(<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/25051341647284765/>)



Stari Bila School near Vitez, one of many schools destroyed during the war. (In this photo, members of the Royal Engineers are helping rebuild it.)  
(<https://historycollection.com/the-brutality-of-the-bosnian-war-reflected-in-these-heartbreaking-photographs/2/>)

To think about: Why is going to school so important to people during a war? Why would rebuilding schools become such a top priority after a war?

## 10. The “Tunnel of Hope” (Tunel spasa):

During the first year of the war (April 1992-June 1993), Sarajevo was surrounded by attacking forces and cut off from food, medicine, and supplies. The only way into and out of the city was running across the airport and being shot at by snipers. So the people of Sarajevo came up with an ingenious idea: building a tunnel under the airport runway to connect Sarajevo with Bosnian-held territory on the other side of the airport! It was difficult as they had to dig for ½ mile underground, starting at two different points and meeting in the middle. (Luckily, they knew math and were able to make the ends meet underground!) All the while, they were fighting off attacking forces at one end of the tunnel, as you can see from the bullet holes on the house protecting the tunnel. After it was built, people could bring supplies into the city, take wounded people out, etc. However, although it was safer to use the tunnel, it wasn't easy. The tunnel was too short for grown men to stand upright – they had to walk bent over the whole distance, often with a heavy load on their back or pushing a cart along the tracks. When it rained, the water would get in and people had to walk through the mud and water, all the time worrying that the make-shift electrical system would short-circuit and electrocute them. Plus, it was small, dark, and very claustrophobic. The tunnel *did* bring make life a little easier for people who stayed in Sarajevo and helped others – including some children – escape to seek medical treatment and a peaceful life. Part of it stands today as a monument to the creativity and will to live of the people of Sarajevo!



(<https://www.flickr.com/photos/mucahitcetin/18353427941>)



(<https://twitter.com/Geographymunic1/status/1071126327531589632/photo/1>)

To think about: How did this creative solution to solving some problems of the siege change life for people in Sarajevo? (Why do they call it the Tunnel of Hope?) What problems and challenges did the people of Sarajevo have to overcome to build this tunnel?

## 11. Helping one another:

Helping one another always enriches the life of the community, but it is very important in surviving during a war. Even “small” acts such as sharing necessary supplies or helping a neighbor whose home was damaged or destroyed have big effects. Other people were able to help larger numbers of people. Doctors and nurses worked in hospitals trying to help the wounded and sick even when there were few medical supplies and hospitals were struck by shell fire. Sarajevo’s small Jewish community, who were not specifically targeted by the attackers, helped their neighbors (mostly Muslim, some Christians) by setting up pharmacies and soup kitchens. They also negotiated with the warring sides in order to organize buses that took hundreds of people (Jews and non-Jews) out of the besieged city. And teachers, musicians, and others did their best to help children stay positive and busy during a time that life was very difficult.



Jewish bus taking people out of the city of Sarajevo, medical personnel and other citizens help an injured woman  
(<https://www.jdc.org/voices/spotlight-on-sarajevo/>) (<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/680184349955193272/>)

To think about: Adults in Sarajevo who had skills (organizers, builders) or training (medical personnel, teachers) could easily help others. Children often don't have those kinds of skills, yet they played a role too. What were some ways that children and teenagers could help out during the war?

## 12. Protesting and raising awareness through street art

Some people used street art to protest the war. Sometimes the comments were in the Bosnian language, intended for other Bosnians to see. Sometimes the comments were in English because they wanted the United Nations troops and the foreign journalists to understand. After the war, there is plenty of new graffiti, some in Bosnian about local politics, some in English to make a statement to each other and to tourists.



(<https://pl.pinterest.com/pin/493003490457450963/>)



Note: “Burek” is a typical Bosnian food. It would be as if we said “Make pizza, not war.” (<http://www.thebohemianblog.com/2016/08/after-the-siege-war-tourism-sarajevo-bosnia.html>)

To think about: What is the difference between street art to protest injustice and graffiti that makes a neighborhood ugly?