

***Bosnian refugee  
Dragomir Savic was  
deeply traumatised  
when he came to  
Australia, but then  
he found something  
that pulled him out  
of his despair.***

***By HELEN BASILI.***



# **Finding an anchor of life**

After living through two major wars there is one thing that Dragomir Savic is sure of: "Any war, I think, has been started by idiots...Material goods can come back, but people who disappeared during the war cannot be brought back. That is the biggest mistake of wars - there are no more people. Whoever starts the war has lost it before it has even started."

Savic was born in the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo in 1934 and during his childhood saw his country destroyed by World War II. Perhaps that is why he devoted his adult life to 'rebuilding' his hometown and engaging in community work.

When Savic finished high school

he served an obligatory period of time in the Yugoslav military but, because of his loathing of war, soon went on to forge a new career. "I would fight not to fight," he says, speaking through an interpreter.

He worked briefly as a train driver and went on to become a machine technician, a trade which allowed him to fully participate in the rebuilding of Sarajevo. Over the years, Savic helped with the construction of train lines, stadiums and housing complexes. He became a justice of the peace, a trade union activist, a council representative and a community worker. Along the way he collected numerous medals and awards, tokens

of appreciation from the city he had invested in so deeply.

Savic was driven by the enormous sense of pride he felt in his country and culture. He loved the way different religious groups coexisted peacefully: "In one short space there was a mosque, synagogue and church and all nationalities, we all lived together. Priest, immams, we all worked together and no one was bothering anyone and that's the way the town [Sarajevo] was," he says.

"We celebrated all the religious holidays together - Muslims, Serbs and Croats. We respected it all!"

Savic studied in Sarajevo, married in Sarajevo,



worked in Sarajevo and had his two children in Sarajevo. He expected to finish his life in Sarajevo but it wasn't to be. In 1992 one of the most horrific wars of the 20th century broke out in Yugoslavia. Tragically, the majority

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of those who died or suffered were civilians. Savic was among them. After spending a lifetime reconstructing his battered country after World War II, he stood back in dismay and watched it being destroyed all over again.

Early on in the war, Savic became separated from his wife and children who sought refuge in Germany. For another two and a half years he lived alone in his war-torn city. He suffered through endless fighting and witnessed the deaths and maiming of those exposed to grenades and sniper fire. He remembers seeing pieces of human bodies scattered on the streets. It was difficult, if not impossible, to get adequate supplies of food and water and Savic spent many cold, sleepless, hungry nights listening to the sound of gun fire.

Savic was not lucky enough to escape injury himself. He became partially deaf in one ear after a grenade exploded near him and had several shrapnel wounds after being

physical injuries he had insomnia and nightmares, panic attacks, impaired memory and concentration, flashbacks, was easily startled and found himself shaking excessively. "I don't know what [traumatic]

symptoms I didn't have," he recalls.

Soon after arriving in Australia, an interpreter referred Savic to STARTTS. "I came there [to STARTTS] and I was feeling lost. I didn't know where I was going or what I was going there for," says Savic, who saw a counsellor, physiotherapist and psychiatrist at the service.

"I needed someone who could understand me and help me...I thought it was fantastic, I couldn't believe it...[I got] full, complete care."

Savic says he has changed dramatically over the course of his counselling and other treatment. "I am much more stable, in my legs and also psychologically stable. Now I know that if I have any problems, STARTTS will help to fix it...STARTTS is an anchor of life."

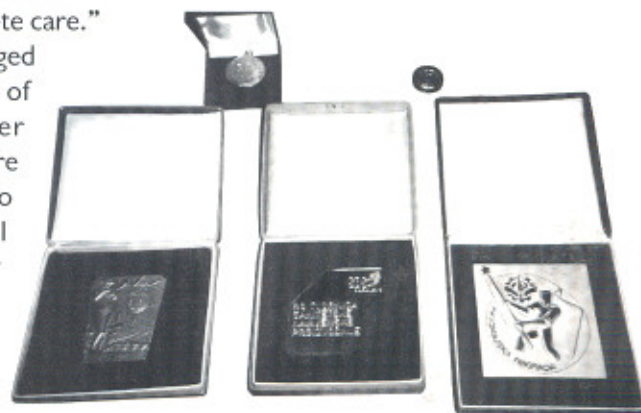
Now that Savic has started to rebuild his life here in Australia, he is contributing to the 'building' of STARTTS. On May

"I've met ministers in Bosnia but here, as someone who was a client of STARTTS and handicapped in so many ways, being able to go and talk to a person who actually governs the country, it's a big thing, it's a really big thing...it was empowering," says Savic.

"The minister asked me 'what do you think about STARTTS?' It's hard to say what I found at STARTTS. I don't have good enough words to describe it."

Savic also had some advice for Knowles: he recommended that STARTTS staff receive more pay, more annual leave and less occasions of service. "This is the work of slaves, very hard work," he says.

Despite his progress in counselling, Savic has had a recent setback. He is currently planning a visit to Sarajevo for later this year:



**Pictured above: Some of the medals that Savic was awarded for his work in Sarajevo.**

**On May 31, Savic went to Sydney's parliament house for a meeting with the Minister for Health, Mr Craig Knowles.**

exposed to shelling. However, Savic could not get immediate medical attention. He was only able to see a doctor when he escaped to Germany many months later. By the time he got there, all the family's property had been lost or destroyed.

In 1995 Savic and his family arrived in Australia as refugees and began the momentous task of restoring their lives. Savic was particularly traumatised by his experiences. In addition to his

31, Savic went to Sydney's parliament house for a meeting with the Minister for Health, Mr Craig Knowles. Knowles is particularly interested in the development of STARTTS and made a visit to the service earlier this year. On this occasion, Savic was accompanied by his counsellor, Ms Jasmina Bajraktarevic, who acted as an interpreter, STARTTS' executive director, Mr Jorge Aroche and STARTTS' psychiatrist, Dr Derrick Silove.

"They told me I need a visa to enter Bosnia. Imagine! A visa to get into my own town! A town that I gave so much to!...When I go to Sarajevo, if someone asks me for a visa, I'll show them my medals".

Savic now lives a quiet life with his wife in the Sydney suburb of Liverpool. He thinks Australia is a wonderful "second home" but he will never get over the loss of his beloved Sarajevo. "My homeland is still calling me," he says. ■