

# SEDIN MUSTAFIĆ



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Sedin Mustafić survived the Genocide in Bosnia. He had to flee his home with nothing when the Bosnian War started, ending up in the apparently safe area of Srebrenica.



'Forgive as much as you can, but don't forget. If you have hate, it's only going to destroy you. We need to teach young people to not hate and appreciate what they have.'

Sedin was born in 1986 in Zvornik. Sedin lived with his parents, grandparents and older sister. Sedin's father, Hamdija, would work away from home for long periods of time and when he returned, he would bring presents for his children. Sedin and his father had a love of football and he cherished the rubber ball that his father gave him.

Sedin was six when the Bosnian War started in 1992 and his family were forced to flee their home to find safety, shelter and food. They walked for days in extreme weather conditions. Sometimes, the snow was as high as Sedin's waist.

When the family arrived at a village, sometimes they would be given a slice of bread to share between them. Often, they would encounter shooting at a village and would have to turn back. Families would have to sleep in the forest with no electricity, appropriate clothing or footwear. They ate whatever they could find to survive, such as mushrooms, leaves, fruit and snails.

Eventually, Sedin and his family reached Srebrenica, an apparently safe area controlled by the United Nations. In Srebrenica, men were separated from women and children. It was difficult to find food, and people would have to trade items such as clothing or jewellery for a bag of flour or a pinch of salt. Sedin's father would try to bring food to the family as often as he could. As Sedin was a child, he received a small ration of bread and milk every day from the United Nations.

In 1993, Sedin and his mother, sister and grandparents fought for their place on a truck to Tuzla. His father and grandfather had to stay behind. When they said goodbye, Sedin's father gave his family a big piece of bread called *pogaca*. The family assumed he must have had to sell something valuable like his rubber boots to buy the bread. Sedin says 'You never knew when it would be the last time you would see your family'.

During the journey from Srebrenica to Tuzla, small children suffocated between people's feet and many people died due to overcrowding. When they arrived at Tuzla, Sedin felt much safer and even received two letters from his father.

In July 1995, around 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys were murdered in Srebrenica by the Bosnian Serb Army, despite it being a UN-designated safe area.

It was the single largest mass murder in Europe since World War Two. Sedin's father was amongst those men.

When the war ended, people no longer had items to trade for food and many faced starvation. Sedin and his family moved to Zivinice along with many other families who came from Srebrenica and neighbouring villages. The living conditions were difficult, with fifteen people living in one room with a shared bathroom.

Sedin says 'We would always have to work extra hard as refugees, wherever we went, even though it was our Bosnia'. Sedin's mother encouraged him to work hard in school, but it was difficult to obtain good grades when they could not afford school materials and the walk to school took several hours.

Sedin and his family did not know that his father had been murdered, and were still hopeful that they would be reunited with Hamdija. However, along with thousands of other Bosnians, Sedin's DNA was taken in the hope of identifying the remains found in mass graves. A friend of Hamdija's contacted the family to tell them that he knew Hamdija was killed in an attempted escape through the forest. He told them what Hamdija was wearing when he last saw his friend to help with the identification.

In 2004 a DNA match was found, and Sedin and his mother had to identify the clothes on a body. They were the same clothes that his father had been wearing the last time he was seen by his friend in Srebrenica. Today, Hamdija is buried alongside his mother, Sedin's grandmother, according to her wishes.

In the same year, Sedin fell in love with a Bosnian girl called Selma who fled to the UK after the war. She was visiting her grandparents in Bosnia when they met. After a long-distance relationship, Sedin moved to the UK and they got married in 2007. They now live in Hertfordshire with their two children and have fostered young asylum seekers for the past two and a half years, feeling that they can personally relate to people who have fled their country for safety. Sedin still loves to play football and plays for a local team.

Sedin says 'When I first arrived in the UK, life was not easy as I didn't speak any English and had to start from the beginning. However, football and the community made it feel like my second home. Well, I say second but I've lost count of how many I've had.'

Every year, they visit the grave of Sedin's father in Bosnia and pray. There are many people who do not know where their loved ones are buried, so they feel lucky to know where Sedin's father rests. Sedin says: 'At least we have peace to know that he was found and we can say our prayer and try to move on'.

Selma and Sedin often visit Bosnia to help the poorest communities, where they donate money, clothes and cooking supplies to those most in need. They both have a very positive outlook on life saying: 'We consider ourselves so lucky, almost as if we have had another chance at life and we will never take that for granted.'

Find out more... Genocide in Bosnia: [hmd.org.uk/bosnia](http://hmd.org.uk/bosnia)