

## Outloud Podcast

### Missing Persons Podcast

#### Audio podcast - Jasmina Živković-Jovanović.

My name is Jasmina Živković-Jovanović, daughter of the kidnapped Paun Živković, who was taken on September 28, 1999, from a Uroševac [Ferizaj] school building, while escorted by KFOR troops. He was the director of the Secondary Technical School in Uroševac [Ferizaj], and from that day on we have no information about what happened to him.

Jovanović is my surname since I got married. I was born on October 26, 1977, in Prishtina. I used to live in Uroševac, where I finished primary and secondary school. Thus, that's my hometown. My parents were born in Štrpce, both parents. After completing primary and secondary school, I enrolled in the Faculty of Law in Prishtina, and all the way up until the third year of studies it was a full-time, regular study program, and I can freely say, the good kind of study – until the bombing started and the war put a halt to my education. To put it simply, life started going in a different direction from that point.

I would like to mention that I got married here back in 2003, in the municipality of Štrpce, in Kosovo. I had to leave Uroševac after the Kumanovo Agreement was signed because it was simply no longer safe for us to remain in our house. I got married, gave birth in Mitrovica, and kept on living here. To put it shortly, I have never left Kosovo for even a single day.

...my parents, because of their work commitments, could afford to move from Štrpce to Uroševac, where they worked as teachers. My mom was a primary school teacher, while my dad was a biology professor, and later on, he became the director of the Secondary Technical School in Uroševac. In the end, he became the director of Uroševac's technical school.

We lived an average lifestyle for a four-member family, actually, there were five of us later on because I have a sister who's 11 years younger than me. And, simply, we lived as the conditions dictated – the type of life in Kosovo as lived by most families. And sometimes, we had to neglect our wishes and expectations, adapting to the situations the way we had to, but I can say that life flowed normally, sort of.

After the Kumanovo Agreement was signed on June 10... As we were the only Serbian family on the street we lived on, we could sense insecurity, so we couldn't keep on living there any longer. Dad decided that it was best for us to go back to Štrpce.

This happened on April 21, when we came here for the first time, to the Štrpce municipality, so that we could live on safer ground, in the sense that Serbs made up the majority population. We

left the house in a rush, not taking anything except what we had on us. We expected to be able to come back when we wanted to because why wouldn't we be able to return? So, we just took some documents with us. The rest remained in the house.

As I already mentioned, dad was the director of the Secondary Technical School. He had a certain responsibility toward his workers and students who also had to leave the city of Uroševac. Back then, when Serbs, all the Serbs had to abandon Uroševac, due to security concerns, it happened, I believe, around June 14. And they all fled to Serbia proper.

However, as they had to enroll in school, and in order to continue education for students who attended the technical school, they contacted my dad constantly, as well as his other colleagues who happened to be there, in Štrpce. Among them, I want to mention uncle Marko Stojanović, who was director of the First Primary School. They would try to get the documents in order to have proof of school attendance to a certain level, so they could continue their education in the place they arrived in; the same applied to students and teachers. Uncle Marko, Milan, and my dad left here in a regular manner to seek permission from KFOR to escort them to Uroševac and to these schools in order to obtain those documents.

It was September 28, 1999, when they received, so to speak, permission for two KFOR vehicles to escort them to the school, so they could take the documents found there, if they hadn't been burned already. Those were school certificates, documents, and other things. It all happened around eight in the morning — without prior notice the day before or earlier — that they would take them on that very day. On September 28, around eight in the morning, Milan Nikolčević came and told my dad: "Paun, today they will take us to Uroševac." And the Polish KFOR designated two vehicles as escorts. There were two vehicles of Polish KFOR and six Serbs whom they took to Uroševac that day. It was only around 7:00 in the evening that two vehicles returned to Štrpce, telling us that Paun and Marko have gone missing and that they are looking for them. They packed their things and left for their base, at Brezovica.

First, we didn't know what they meant, saying, "missing." How did they go missing if they had an escort with them? In the school, in the middle of the city, in broad daylight. How can two people go missing? When we collected ourselves and got together, we went to the Polish base in Brezovica, trying to contact the soldiers who escorted them on that day. However, they didn't allow us to enter. To this very day, we still don't know the names of those who escorted dad and uncle Marko, and how they actually went missing. They never wanted to give us names, nor [facilitate] a conversation with those people. From that day on, I, my family, and uncle Marko's family, his wife and sons, are trying to find out the truth about what happened that day. We still don't know.

We established contact with all possible existing institutions that were then in charge of stability and peace in Kosovo. Unfortunately, however, this produced the opposite results to what they came here to do. And we still don't know the truth. The stories of... when dad and uncle Marko went missing, they were in an office of the First Primary School in Uroševac. I don't know what this school is called today. It's the one at the entrance to the city, at the entrance of the market place, that street.

...they were inside that school. Around 1:00 in the afternoon. Professors and all the students were there, classes were in progress, KFOR soldiers were onsite. Three of their colleagues were located inside the office, the school director, secretary and, I believe, the treasurer. Their job titles aren't... I know for sure about the director and secretary, but for the treasurer, I'm not certain if that was his role back then. They were there together in the office and their first statement initially read that they went out to drink tea in the city and that they never returned, and [another statement said] that someone invited them for a walk outside. In the end, they admitted, mid-conversation, that three men in black uniforms invaded the place. They didn't indicate the nature of the insignia on those uniforms. [They also say that] they asked them what they were doing there, picked them up, and drove off somewhere. That's where the whole story comes to a halt.

[We contacted] absolutely all existing organizations and personal acquaintances. From UNMIK to the local police, to KFOR, to the international Red Cross, to the Red Cross of Serbia to personal connections with Albanians. We spoke to our first neighbor... As I said, we left Uroševac. We offered the house and the entire property to anyone with any information. KFOR offered a reward in the amount of 1,000 dollars for any information. We asked every person we knew personally and every organization, requesting any information about what happened to them. Some more reputable Albanians were also involved because my grandfather, the father of my father and uncle, had many Albanian friends, and that's why we contacted these people as well. However, nobody dared or wanted to tell the truth.

It's pretty pointless to speak about someone from one's own family because, simply put, there can be no other words except for the best. The best description of my father, what kind of person he was, what kind of man he was, what kind of a professor, what kind of a director of the institution, you could get all that information if you dared to enter the city of Uroševac and ask about him. You would paint the picture yourself by doing so because this was absolutely a person, without me using any phrases... he didn't make any differences between people, whether they be ethnic, religious, gender, or any other difference. He believed in people to the extent that you would all say that he was too naive. Simply put, it's as if a person who trusts people so much couldn't have existed back then and today. I think all this happened because he trusted people so much, and that's where this injustice comes from.

He was fully dedicated to his work. From sunrise to sunset, to the last worker who exits the building, he was there, working. He had colleagues, of course, both Serbs and Albanians, no difference... and I repeat, if you could find an interlocutor who knew my father, you would paint the picture for you, a much better picture than what I can say about my father because that's the way it is.

Back then, I was the oldest. *(laughs)* I'm still the oldest of two younger sisters. As I said, I studied law, and my only concern was to prepare for the exam, to pass the exam. There was no other, so to speak, burden or doing other things except for that. Education came first to my father and my mother and also the very people who were with him in the office and the neighbors and

anyone else. They could perhaps provide more detailed information and praise my father more than his daughter.

Justice is a notion that I'm not capable of defining anymore. Up until some 10 years ago, I was wholeheartedly and with my full strength invested in that word, 'justice.' As you grow up... as I said, I have never ever, not for a single day, left Kosovo. And as I observe something and listen, follow events, I'm starting to doubt this notion and the institute of justice. What does it actually mean and how would justice show up for me?

On that day, when dad went missing, the lives of my family and me changed completely. Our life would be totally different if that thing didn't happen. I'm speaking of this because... I'll provide one example to describe it easier. Our faith, the Orthodox religion, is full of holidays. Not only Orthodox ones but also others, like New Year's Eve, when everyone celebrates. Since then, we no longer celebrate those holidays because our souls don't allow us to celebrate.

The next thing I will repeat is that we, Orthodox Christians, have a tradition where we light candles in church. We light them for the health of the living and we light them for the peace of the dead, the souls. We go to church and don't know where to light the candle. All birthdays, we... how do I put this, we somehow set up a system to avoid each other on birthdays. So... more concretely, I don't believe any longer that Kosovo's institutions could lead us to justice. The fact that I still live in Kosovo and have two daughters, I hope that something will change in how we understand justice, especially here, in Kosovo, and how we understand what really happened. In this sense, I'm not making differences between people because every person carries their own pain but here I'm talking about my father and my family. There is still this hope. It's getting bleaker by the day but I don't allow it to disappear altogether because I would want my children to continue living here as well. Bearing in mind the current situation, I can't see a future for us here. I'm still holding on but am also looking forward to changes.

Of course, first and foremost, it's important to find the body. If the body is found, we would find out the truth about what exactly happened. Those who did it... it's very important, maybe not so much for our family – because if I were to hear the name of the person who did it, it wouldn't mean so much to me – but it means for the future, it means for society... if we invoke democracy and justice and if we still want to continue using those terms, and still have the right to pronounce those words – then yes, names are important. And then, it's important who did it. Whether their name will bring any justice, I'm telling you, I don't feel that. It's important for me to find it now, and to be frank with you, this is the first time I'm using the word 'body' because I don't know how to convey my thoughts. Even though I have been fully aware for more than 20 years, I could never muster the courage to say out loud that dad isn't alive. So, I think it's important, above all, for this part of the territory, to find out who were the perpetrators, for everyone, if we want to, I repeat, if we want to continue with the development and with a mouthful of democracy and justice. Without it, things can go no farther.

From the very start, family members have always tried to organize joint meetings and establish contacts. We simply tried to share information. That was, unfortunately, the type of information

as in 'I was told by that person that they may be there,' 'and I was told by that person that they may be there.'

Back then, at the very beginning, it was a very, very narrow space due to the impossibility to move around. Now, in this period and in an extended period, we have largely organized ourselves and we arrange regular meetings, talks, and discussions, with both family members from the Serbian community, whose loved ones are missing, as well as with Albanian community members. We conduct these activities mainly through the [Missing Persons] Resource Center. They have an office in Prishtina.

All willing family members can attend the meetings and share the information we have. This brings us... we can't do much... how do I put it. What we can do now is jointly influence all institutions in resolving the missing persons issue, in the sense that this is a political issue now and that we, Serbs and Albanians, family members, try to apply pressure on Prishtina and Belgrade. I don't know if we are able to do this because this has been done for a long time. And when a humane, human issue turns into a political issue, then more complications and more difficult solutions ensue.

We won't give up. There are some family members who are becoming old and no longer have the strength or have gotten sick. Many have died. Simply put, a lot of time has passed without knowing the truth. We, the younger generations, are doing our best to apply that pressure and will continue doing so. So the answer is yes – both talks and meetings are held to the extent possible. We try to understand each other, we try it all the time.

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