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Triumph Over Terror

A Bosnian refugee finds life in giving to others

by Ashley Cisneros

Bojan Aleksic's life back in Bosnia was something out of a war movie, complete with a soundtrack of bombs and screams. Aleksic survived the civil war that ripped through his homeland and came to the United States in 1999 searching for a better life.

Coming to the United States opened new doors for Aleksic and filled him up with a new outlook. "The move to America started a new chapter in my life," he says. "Yes, I still have the ugly scars, but somehow, I have managed to fall in love with life and I continue to smile." Life in the U.S. is very different from Bosnia. Here, Aleksic can take as many showers as he wants, can sleep peacefully, and can get an education.

Yet Aleksic never forgot where he came from. He makes it a point to use his experiences to reach out to others. The Eckerd College senior maintains an A average in his international business and German language courses while leading several volunteer efforts.

One of his biggest projects is translating for local Bosnian families in conjunction with the Red Cross. There is no greater reward than to see a mother smile because an interpreter was available to accompany her to the emergency room at 4 a.m., Aleksic says.

His fluency in German, Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian has allowed him to help some 10,000 former Yugoslavian refugees now in the Tampa bay area.

He doesn't take any of his opportunities for granted and wanted to offer these same opportunities to other Bosnian students. That's why he designed a sponsorship program to help them come to the U.S. Aleksic researches possible contributors and then contacts them to donate up to \$30,000 to sponsor a student.

"From what I understand, another student from Afghanistan will be attending Eckerd College this year on this very special scholarship," he says.

As if that wasn't enough, Aleksic is also an author. After doing an internship at the Holocaust Museum in St. Petersburg, Fla., he decided to start writing a book about his own experiences called, "Tears and Terror." While working at the museum, Aleksic was able to meet Elie Wiesel, famous author of "Night", who inspired him to start writing the book.

"I wanted to write about my story, about a beautiful life in former Yugoslavia and the terror of the civil war," Aleksic says. The book is an autobiographical account of his life and memories of being locked up in a basement without food, water, and electricity.

His story recounts of a time where he was "living only on fear and hopes for a better tomorrow."

Another way that Aleksic leaves his mark at Eckerd College is through the International Students Association and with the

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soccer team. He serves as vice-president of ISA and organizes the group's biggest project, an annual fair called the Festival of Cultures.

Aleksic's kindness is also seen when playing sports, in some cases where he literally gave the shirt off his back to a teammate who forgot his.

"He did so without any hesitation for the good of the team," says former coach Jim DiNobile.

When DiNobile resigned from his coaching position to focus on other opportunities, Aleksic stepped in again. He gave up playing on the team to serve as the assistant coach. No doubt Aleksic will continue to touch the lives of many other people in the future.

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