

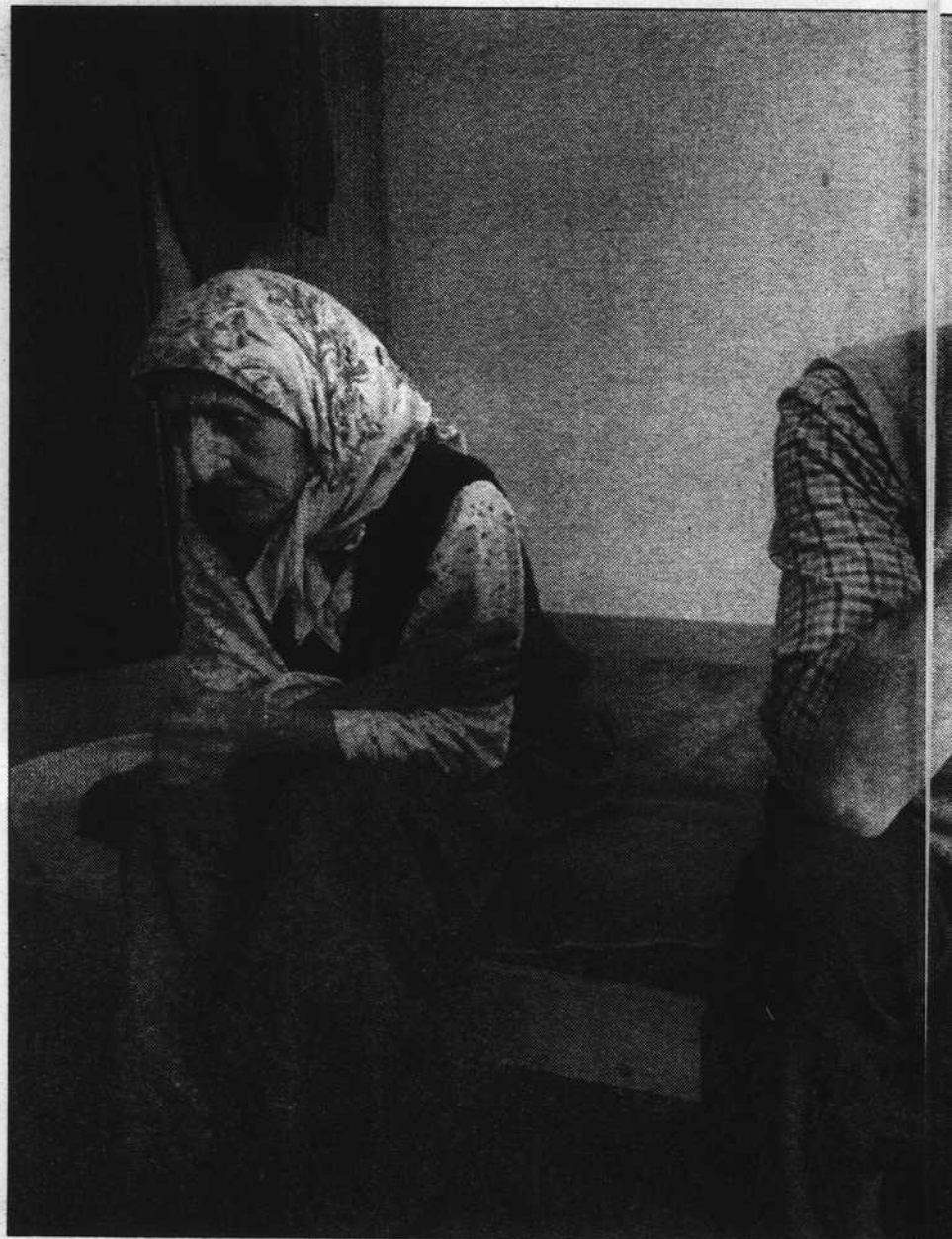
Emin Smajlovic says simple pleasures are the most valuable. He keeps his possessions — a couple packs of cigarettes, a radio and a hat — close by him in his bed.

Staci McKee/DN



A man sleeps the day away in his bed at the refugee camp in Tuzla.

Staci McKee/DN



Halid Hodzic weeps, remembering the beatings he took from Serbs during the war.

"To remember their suffering is to remember that such things are possible whenever one group persecutes another."

— From

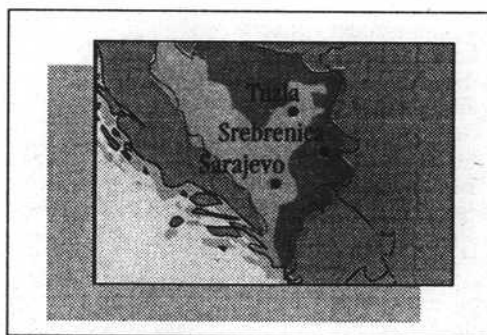
Of hope

Camp

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But the run-down building stays open. It houses a group of Muslims who have made it home. It houses Muslims who have hope. The hope it houses is the dream that some day, maybe with the help of American soldiers, they can return to their homes. And it houses stories of pain, struggle and loss. Stories like that of Smajlovic, who has never walked. If it weren't for his neighbors, he would have burned in his home, which was set ablaze by Serbians. If it were not for UNPROFOR, the U.N. Protection Force, he would have died in Srebrenica. Smajlovic (pronounced smy-lo-vich) has been at this camp for more than four years. His face is riddled with wrinkles, and he has only two teeth. But he tells his tale with humor and tears, with energy and tragedy, all at the same time. He is quick to joke about drinking, and he holds his possessions — a couple of packs of cigarettes, a hat and a radio — close to him in his bed. He shares the 15-foot by 10-foot room with five other men, all of whom are bed-ridden. The room is dirty by American standards, and it reeks of urine and vomit. Each bed has white sheets and two old gray blankets. Windows cover the west walls, overlooking the courtyard below. The floors

are wood, stained and dusty. Smajlovic says he wishes it were summer, when he could go outside on the grass and drink whiskey. But it is February and Ramadan, and he is sworn not to drink this month. But he can still smoke. He buys his cigarettes with the social aid money he gets each month. "That is my money, and those are my cigarettes," Smajlovic says through an interpreter in his native Bosnian language, a dialect of Serbo-Croatian. "It's a strange feeling for me." For the past four years, Smajlovic has passed the time by smoking cigarettes, listening to music on his tape player and drinking alcohol. When the music is beautiful, he cries. The smoking hurts his neck, but he does it anyway. And the nurses get mad at him when he drinks. When asked, the old man smiles a toothless smile and says his favorite drink is "everything." "I haven't any reason to lie," he says, raising his eyebrows. Smajlovic waves his hands in the air and uses his face as an expressive tool when he talks. His conversations wander from what life was like before the war to what he would like to do right now. "I would like to walk," he says for the first time this day. "But nobody wants to take care of me. I am dependent on human aid." Smajlovic was never married. He has no children. His brother took care of him until he died a year ago.



Questions about his brother bring tears, also for the first time. When the war started, his brother fled to Austria, where he died. Now, his sister-in-law comes to visit him from time to time. "Now I have friends here," Smajlovic says. "That is my life." Smajlovic repeatedly tells everyone in the room that if he could, he would go to Austria and Germany, never to return. And he says he would send pictures back to his friends in the room. But he can't leave. He says he will die in this hospital. Simple pleasures are the most-treasured now. Two bottles of water lay on the floor next to his bed. Both are 1.5-liter Pepsi bottles, refilled with water. "I will drink water and think that it is whiskey," he says, just before tilting the bottle up for a shot. After his drink, classical Muslim music comes on the tape player. He turns it up and a tear rolls down his cheek.

"I buy this tape recorder, but it would be better if I drink that," he says, laughing. "I love every kind of music. The tape recorder is work, work, work. It always work." After a nurse tells him to turn it down, he starts to talk about getting out of his house. He says he would rather have died to end the suffering. "It is easy to die," he said, tears streaming down his wrinkled face. A deep breath later, Smajlovic says things are better now. "Now I have water, food, cigarettes here," he says. "It is better than the social aid I was getting before the war." The conversation turns back to his drinking. "Everyone who gives me drink, they think bad for me. It would be better if I never drink," he says. "I don't have enough money to buy drink." Smajlovic stops, looks around the room and says "I feel everybody needs to drink." Just as the head nurse of the camp starts to walk through the room, Smajlovic says he doesn't like her. She is always mad at him for drinking and smoking. She wants him to stop. "But I won't and that's the end," he says, smiling. "I don't ask. If I want to drink, I drink." "She can get mad at me, but I drink." Smajlovic, who sits with his knees folded and his legs underneath him, looks down and says he would like to walk and earn money. "If I sold my tears that came out of my eyes, I would be rich," he said. Smajlovic said he wants to walk and make