

Asthenia 99 – Zlatko's Story

I took a walk last night along Marko Oreskovic
five minutes from home on the Bulbuldar Quart
I was running an errand to the video shop
like I would any night, as any guy would

Then the sirens began, they were loud, people ran
someone cried: 'Pristina's burning!'
my pride, sorrow and hate turning
and helplessness clutching my throat

I continued on my errand, arrived at the video shop
I stood and stared at it for some time
it was closed for business
then I thought about my father

I ran towards home, saw an old lady
move with all her effort to the first shelter
she was maybe eighty-five

I got home and my father was waiting
he said he'd die at home
I said I would too
I read psalms 23, 27 & 91
then I prayed, laid in bed
and hope that we'd all be saved
the radio announced 'no bombs yet'
so I slept only when the sirens slept

Im at work today, two more alerts
and I tell myself 'don't hurry down those stairs again'
then the sirens come
and I am hypnotised

I shoot down the ethernet, close the windows,
lock the door and then quickly, though not too hastily
I head for the ground floor

I go down to the shelter and I talk with my colleagues
we try to joke, like we're above it all
then the cluster bombs come squealing
and we are silent

The TV tells us our fate, it says; 'Kill the killers!'
the TV says we are nothing
the TV tells us their fate on the Macedonian border
they're crying and gathered together
forced by the hands of the powers that be
I want the world to know, can you let them know?
that I am very sorry they lost their homes
and I hope they find their way back soon

I leave the shelter early most days, I have to go
perhaps it's my Serb pride

a careless moment into a city
pitch black and on alert
some nights we see big, red fireballs
then the pounding again
I lose a little of myself every time
I hear the pounding

Tonight 130 are dead
they tell us there's more to come
though I don't think about my life
rather the things I haven't done
and what's the date today I ask?
I don't know, but I remember the 24th March.

Zlatko's story, Kosovo Crisis, 1999

This piece is based on a document sent to me by a Serbian man living in Belgrade during the Kosovo crisis. It is his true story of anguish during a time of immense turmoil in Serbia. It has been written into the form of a poem and published online in Jan, 2005 on the 'Voices In Wartime' website. <http://voicesinwartime.org/voices-wartime-anthology>