

Family torn by war reunited

The Radakovics are together again after fighting in Bosnia separated them.

By Mark R. Fletcher
News-Leader

Three young children met their grandparents for the first time when their family — separated by war and genocide in Bosnia — was reunited at Springfield's airport.

Petar and Boja Radakovic, both 69, along with their daughter Dusanika and her son, arrived in Springfield on Wednesday — leaving Bosnia-Herzegovina just days ago.

The elder Serbian couple lived a few miles from the front lines, near Banja Luka, during the Bosnian civil war.

"It was very hard for me," said their son Rod Radakovic, 44. "I watched CNN nonstop looking for new info."

In September 1995, Muslims bombed their hometown of Sanski Most, said Sister Fran Stein, with the Catholic Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau's Office of Social Ministry and Resettlement.

The ministry works with government and private organizations to help refugees, such as the Radakovics, settle in their new homes and find jobs.

"They lost their house and everything they had," Radakovic said. "After that I lost contact with them. But I had a sister in Bosnia who could make contact."

The attack on their town started a flight from danger that ended nearly two years later with their arrival at the Springfield-Branson Regional Airport.

The Radakovics first fled to Prijedor, a town 30 miles from Sanski Most, where they took shelter with a relative, Stein said.

"The front line is between those cities," Radakovic said. "So they had to cross (it) to get there."

Their relative's modest home was packed with nearly 50 people, Stein added.

After that the family fled from city to city until the U.S. State Department granted them refugee status. Their son — an engineer with a furniture-manufacturing company — was then able to bring them to the United States.

Rod Radakovic has lived in the United States for 12 years, and



Mike Wingo / News-Leader

Refugee Petar Radakovic hugs his granddaughter Nina, 7, after arriving at the Springfield-Branson Regional Airport on Wednesday. Radakovic and three others were separated from family by the war in Bosnia.



Mike Wingo / News-Leader

Boja and Petar Radakovic were reunited with family members in Springfield on Wednesday after suffering through the war in Bosnia.

recently moved to Lamar from Virginia with his wife, 43-year-old Gaspova, and three children.

Tuesday the elder Radakovics flew from Belgrade to Rome, then to New York where they went through immigration processing.

Then Wednesday, after an overnight stay in a hotel in New

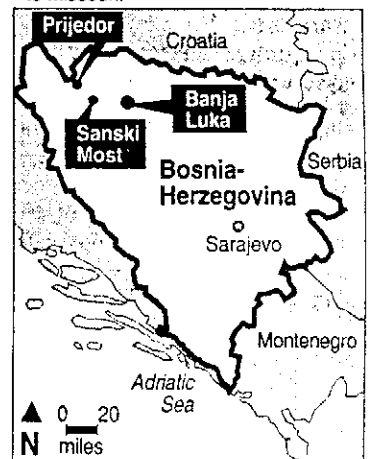
York, they flew to St. Louis and then to Springfield.

At 12:45 p.m. the Radakovics were finally reunited.

"It was an extraordinary event," Stein said. "All over the top floor of the airport, while people passed and watched, they met and embraced and wept. It's really hard to

Escape from Bosnia

The Radakovics' trek to America began when their hometown, Sanski Most, was bombed in 1995. They fled to Prijedor and lived in other cities before coming to Missouri.



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describe."

For Rod Radakovic's three children — Petar, 10, Nina, 7, and Ana, 9 — the reunion was especially important. "Those three children met their grandparents for the first time at that airport," Stein said. "They'd never seen their grandparents before."