

YMCA 175

Oral Histories and Stories

Story teller Dorina Davies

Subject Personal Reflection

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Dorina Davies, National General Secretary, Kosovo - YMCA175, ExCeL London

**Interview conducted by Adam Barrett-Alexander, YMCA Fairthorne Group,
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ABA: Okay everyone, sorry, me again! But don't worry, I won't do a lot of talking. I'll let Dorina do the talking. So, welcome to Dorina Davies, who - [**cheers**] - who is General Secretary of Kosovo YMCA. Thanks Dorina for coming and sitting up here and answering some questions. So, I'll start with the same as we did with Adi, can you tell us your story of how you became involved with YMCA? Where did it all start?

DD: I have a very - for me I think it's an interesting story, 'cause in Kosovo in 2000 there was a - 1998 and 1999 - there was a war in Kosovo. So right after the war YMCA started in 2003, when I was a teenager, and I got involved in youth work activities but there was so many international organisations trying to help people who'd been hurt and houses burned down and a lot of organisations going on.

I was with my friends in the capital city, remembering that at this time we had big computers we could easily hide behind, and this guy comes in and says, 'hi I'm from the YMCA', and me and my friend look at each other - we have no idea who this organisation is - and he's like I'm this and that, he goes on, presenting it, and my friend, because there was so many organisations and we couldn't actually handle participating in all - my friend hides behind this computer which was a big monitor - remember those big ones? And he's like no - no more.

But he said I really need some volunteers and I was like, because I was in the middle of two computers, which I couldn't even hide when they came past - I said 'I can help you' and this is how I got myself with YMCA. Which maybe it's not the most emotional moment but I ended up five years later being chosen from the board as General Secretary which makes me, at that time, the youngest one in the world. Because I was only 23 years old.

ABA: I think that needs a round of applause for that. And so, what is it about the YMCA that pulls you in, and what's held you there, why are you still here with the YMCA?

DD: I think I could say that the key was international work, when the first time - I'd been in different organisation, I worked with UNICEF and different UN agencies, projects and UNDP and others. But what kept me in the YMCA forever is that global aspect of it, so the first time we brought there, new people - it just gets you. And I really felt that it was for me, was a way to help build our country and a lot of people who don't live in similar contexts may not understand that, but coming from our country like Kosovo which was very damaged in war and we have our population is 60% under 30 years old, which means everyone is young and unemployment is high. And there were a lot of houses damaged, a lot of [**inaudible**] so when I saw the global concept of faith and the need for empowering young people, it answered my question in Kosovo.

So I, really wanted to stick around and make sure to build a good YMCA, so our saying is that our YMCA is the fastest growing YMCA in the world which is quite empowering but we do have great leaders. And I might be the General Secretary, we have very good team of people who are leading our YMCA together just to say that our YMCA youngest, oldest person in our YMCA is maybe 35 years old, so we literally don't have senior-older leaders and - that's the magic, this is what's making our YMCA quite natural and very fast growing. We're building camps, we're opening youth centres, we are having a lot of

international participation, young people going abroad on different programmes, coming back. We have leadership programmes, Ten Sing, so there are a lot of things going on, just 'cause we really truly believe in the power of young people.

ABA: Can you tell us a little bit more about the new camp, because myself I've been following it on Facebook, and social media, it's been really exciting to see some of the images that have come out, any updates that you can share?

DD: Yeah! It's exciting. The new camp is actually the first YMCA camp built in the country, we a lot of times make jokes and saying our camp is the biggest and the best etc. of course, because it's the only camp in the country, we can afford to say that! We are building the first camp, with the help of different YMCAs and Y's Men Denmark, Y-USA, YMCA Finland, so we have different partners who are supporting it, what is special about the camp is 20 years ago in the same land there was war, and 20 years after YMCA is building a camp for young people so they can bring peace to new generations, and I think that makes our camp very powerful I think that this is how we should all think, not only what we are doing now, but what we are doing now that could impact the new generations, and this is exactly why SDGs are so important to be taking seriously.

Because today I was listening to that young boy with you who said, shared the story about when parents in some places are going to vote, they are asking their children - nephews - which party should I vote for? Because the reality is people are visionary, that really believe that this world is for young people, they build things for them, and not be selfish to accommodate ourselves.

So I think the camp is quite powerful because it's the first one west Balkan, remember we don't have camps around, so all we are hoping to have regional gatherings of youth that come and build peace, our region has been - the reason for the World War 1, I would say things that happened there we pushed into the world. We're trying to change that and make our country, Kosovo, a place for peace, a symbol of peace, and people see us, and so we have more responsibility than just a daily work, we are rebuilding a country, and we maybe just to share, what I shared in another interview earlier, YMCA started in 2003, but our country declared independence in 2008. Which is only 11 years old, but YMCA is older than our country so we better behave well, and make sure we give good advice, we are helping in different policies, we are trying to change some policy regarding young people. Literally, we are peace at work at helping people to build our new country and which we are following Europe and the young Europeans.

ABA: Thank you. [**Applause**]. How did YMCA Kosovo begin?

DD: In 2003, it began - oh actually it's interesting here I can share that - so the founder of the YMCA, YMCA has an interesting story, our YMCA, because it has - the country has moved from different things - being a part of Yugoslavia, then being for a few years under the United Nations, and then being Kosovo, so if you ask the story back then I will tell you the story that YMCA started in 1925 in YMCA Yugoslavia. But YMCA of Yugoslavia doesn't exist anymore, so then in 2003 there was this man who came and wanted to see the Y in USA, and then he came back to Kosovo - and 'oh wait I can start a YMCA here' and then he gave a phonemail to Y-USA and they said but yes, maybe you should contact YMCA in Europe - of course, because we are in Europe. And he come back, and this is how it started. But remember, my age I was born in Yugoslavia and I lived from 1999 to 2008, I lived under United Nations so our country, we all hold UN passports, and then in 2008 the country declared independence and now I'm Kosovo, I

didn't move anywhere, but I lived in three countries. So that's an interesting story on how it starts.

ABA: Thank you. What's your most favourite part of your job?

DD: Tough questions! Because I have a lot of things I like, I think when I see young people succeeding, that wakes me up, and when I go back and I see youth and myself in people who are really are progress and succeeding - that makes me so happy, of course it's a lot of challenges, lots of different personalities, but so ours depends on the success of young people, and I think that is the best thing when I see just the way people go into - charging batteries!

ABA: Thank you. And before we finish, do you want add or change anything on Adi's story?

DD: I don't know how you managed to bring us both to the same place! Because I had two weeks where I didn't see him [**laughs**], and suddenly we're in the same place! I think, what is there not to love about Adi - and here we are, I'm very proud of him - a great job. I don't think I would change anything, I would just say that I would I fell quite easily for him! [**laughs**]

ABA: Thank you, thank you. [**Applause**]