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Center for International Education

Fall 2007

## RECENT EXPERIENCE IN BOSNIA REACQUAINTS IA ALUM CARA METELL WITH LIFE OUTSIDE THE COMFORT ZONE

*Cara Metell graduated from UNH in 2002 with a Spanish and International Affairs dual major. During her senior year, Cara won a Rotary Scholarship to spend the year following graduation studying art history and Ecuadorian art in Quito, Ecuador. Interested in pursuing a career in international education, Cara worked here at CIE for two years before enrolling in an MA program in International Training and Education at American University.*

by Cara Metell '02

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*Metell at a UNESCO World Heritage Site bridge in Mostar, Bosnia. The bridge was destroyed during the war, but rebuilt with the help of the international community.*

“Why are you going to Bosnia? They don’t speak Spanish there,” a friend said to me just days before I went to Sarajevo. She was right; in Bosnia and Herzegovina the people speak Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian. I was fortunate many people also spoke English, because I could hardly say “hello,” “please,” and “thank you” in the local languages. As an undergraduate at UNH, I was a Spanish and International Affairs dual major, and I never imagined that my journey as an international educator would bring me to Bosnia. But similar to many people in the field of international education, my path is not a straight one.

In late April, 2007, I traveled to Sarajevo with eleven classmates and two professors from American University’s International Training and Education Program. In two weeks we completed a formative evaluation of a UNICEF-funded school improvement project in Bosnia. For this practicum, my fellow graduate students and I became a team of

international consultants interviewing school directors, pedagogues, students, and parents (with the help of interpreters). We met with UNICEF officers, CIVITAS (a multi-cultural civic education program), and international development organizations working in Bosnia. This practicum was absolutely wonderful because we were able to apply what we learned in our classes in Washington, DC, while gaining the experience of a real international consultancy. We transformed our hostel rooms into offices as we worked late into the night reviewing and analyzing the day’s interviews. We filled internet cafes and overtook the hostel lobby when we met as a large group. In the end, I was proud to present our findings to our client, UNICEF BiH.

For me, a surprisingly delightful aspect of this trip was remembering how it feels when you can't communicate. It had been quite some time since I'd traveled to a place where I didn't speak the local language; on a couple of occasions I had been an interpreter for groups traveling to Spanish-speaking countries. The trip to Sarajevo was a totally different experience; not only could I not speak Bosnian, I hadn't even heard it before! One evening before a work session, I dashed from the hostel to one of the many nearby cafes to grab a quick dinner. I couldn't decide between the spinach, meat, cheese, or potato *burek* (a delicious Bosnian "pie" made with phyllo dough), so I tried to order a small portion of each. The man serving me cut large slices from each *burek*. I attempted to show that it was too large a portion by holding up one finger and repeating "*jedan*" (one) over and over while pinching my fingers together with my other hand. Apparently I was unable to communicate effectively, because I ended up with one **KILO** of each! I was surprised, but didn't possess the linguistic ability to negotiate. Luckily, everyone in my group liked *burek* and there was plenty to share. I had forgotten the thrill and challenge of new international experiences. It was refreshing to be outside of my comfort zone again and feel proud of small accomplishments (*like saying "thank you"*). My experiences in Bosnia and Herzegovina reminded me that humor and patience should always travel with you.

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