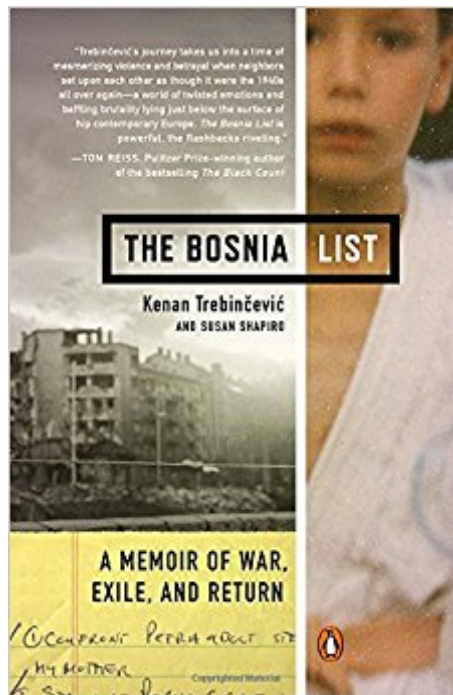


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# The Bosnia List: A Memoir Of War, Exile, And Return





## Synopsis

A young survivor of the Bosnian War returns to his homeland to confront the people who betrayed his family. At age eleven, Kenan Trebinčević was a happy, karate-loving kid living with his family in the quiet Eastern European town of Brčko. Then, in the spring of 1992, war broke out and his friends, neighbors and teammates all turned on him. Pero - Kenan's beloved karate coach - showed up at his door with an AK-47 - screaming: "You have one hour to leave or be killed!" Kenan's only crime: he was Muslim. This poignant, searing memoir chronicles Kenan's miraculous escape from the brutal ethnic cleansing campaign that swept the former Yugoslavia. After two decades in the United States, Kenan honors his father's wish to visit their homeland, making a list of what he wants to do there. Kenan decides to confront the former next door neighbor who stole from his mother, see the concentration camp where his Dad and brother were imprisoned and stand on the grave of his first betrayer to make sure he's really dead. Back in the land of his birth, Kenan finds something more powerful and shocking than revenge.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

When Trebinčević was 12, he fled with his family from their small town in the former Yugoslavia, driven out at the threat of death by the ethnic cleansing of Muslims. His childhood buddies, even his beloved karate coach, turned against him. His father and older brother were briefly imprisoned in a concentration camp. The neighbors slowly stole precious items from his mother. From the safety of adulthood in the U.S., Trebinčević is reluctantly drawn back to his homeland when his aging father longs to return for a visit. If he must go back, he wants some revenge and some closure. On his



agenda: confront his neighbor, stand on the grave of his former coach, leave flowers at his grandmother's grave. Trebinčević alternates memories of his childhood and of his life in the U.S. with its edgy attempts to get along with Serbian Americans. In Bosnia, he faces the jarring complexities of people, including himself, coping with atrocities as he finally begins to put away old resentments that have haunted him. A mesmerizing story of survival and healing. --Vanessa Bush

“The great instruction of this important work is the author's moral transformation that helped him replace hate with grace, if not forgiveness.” —Publishers Weekly “A mesmerizing tale of survival and healing.” —Booklist “An engaging memoir of war trauma and the redemption to be found in confronting it.” —Kirkus “A young New Yorker haunted by searing memories goes on a most unusual overseas vacation—not to sightsee or party but to confront the ordinary men and women who tore his family's lives apart. His journey takes us into a time of mesmerizing violence and betrayal when neighbors set upon each other as though it were the 1940s all over again—a world of twisted emotions and baffling brutality lying just below the surface of his contemporary Europe.” THE BOSNIA LIST is powerful, the flashbacks riveting.” —Tom Reiss, bestselling author of *The Black Count* and *The Orientalist* “With understated elegance and in highly personal pointillist dots, Kenan Trebinčević illuminates how the Bosnian tragedy blighted, and continues to blight, the lives of countless people—both in his homeland and in its far-flung diaspora. This important and original work reminds us, in ways large and small, of the long half-life of an atrocity.” —David Margolick, bestselling author of *Elizabeth and Hazel* and *Strange Fruit* “Kenan Trebinčević fights against the power of memory and his own rage in this remembrance of a time that seems like a medieval anachronism yet was barely a decade ago. This is a searing memoir of war and peace from a young man who sees through ancient rhetoric with stunning clarity, both in his home country and his adopted United States. Read this book for its impassioned honesty.” —Tom Zoellner, bestselling author of *A Safeway in Arizona* “I'm so blown away by this beautiful book. For the first time, a young Bosnian tells a riveting coming-of-age story about the brutal Balkan war when parents disappeared into concentration camps, teachers turned on students and children betrayed children. Two decades later, now an American citizen, Kenan returns to his homeland to confront the guilty and honor the dead in this passionate, nuanced account of a man who refuses to forget.” —Julia Lieblich, author of *Sisters: Lives of Devotion and Defiance* “Kenan Trebinčević's story of survival and remembrance is moving, well-told, and important—for all of us to hear. He makes a powerful case for courage and human decency as the only way through the divisive madness of modern life.” —Ian Frazier, bestselling author of



Travels in Siberia and Great Plains

THE BOSNIA LIST tells a fascinating story of a harrowing and heart-rending journey. It's a graceful, taut memoir of family, friends and faith: a moving recollection of souls being torn asunder and slowly beginning to heal.

"Laurence Bergreen, bestselling author of *Columbus: The Four Journeys* THE BOSNIA LIST was difficult to finish because it touched me so deeply. I've wondered how another Bosniak could describe their tragedy and traumas, watching the transformation of former friends and neighbors becoming animals. Most powerful was how Kenan's mother's voice echoed in his head and became his morality, preventing him from getting revenge. She's one of the strongest, best described female characters in Bosnian literature. And I was rooting for Kenan's father not to succumb to evil and stay a good man. That might be why his family survived. That shows us all: if we stay good, we have a chance."

Dr. Esad Boskailo, Bosnian war survivor and co-author of *Wounded I Am More Awake*

I bought this book on a whim and almost didn't get it. I was driving into work one morning a week or so ago, and heard Kenan on the air with our local guys talking about his book. I was in the 20's when the Bosnian war broke out, and I really didn't know much about it or think much about it. Kenan did a wonderful job with his narrative of what his family went through and the struggles they had to face. I was completely shocked to see this inside story of how friends had turned on him and his family because of his ethnic and religious makeup. The scary thing is, I can see this happening again in many parts of the world. The one thing I didn't like at first with the design of the story was how it would go from current day to the 1990's. It did this many times throughout the book, and I'll admit, it really frustrated me. But what I found was that it kept me sucked into the story and wanting to know more. It also let us cheat a little and skip ahead in the book each time it came to the more present time. I think this worked well and was well executed, and coupled with his skillful writing style, I thought it was a great read. I also loved the fact that he had a list of the names of the people in the book and who they were, same with places, and also a short translation guide on what certain words mean. I found myself flipping to these many times. One item that I really found nice in the book was not only the list that Kenan wanted to do if/when he returned to Bosnia, but the list he made after he visited it. His first list was more on the lines of confronting, but his second list was more on the lines on thanking. You can see the change that happened and that is a good thing. A troubled soul is not a good thing to have. The one thing I wish was different in the book were the pictures. There are not enough. Kenan talks many times about these beautiful and wonderful people who he went back to see and who he met. The times where he went to his Grandpa's grave and



met the grave keeper who repaired the headstone. It would have been wonderful to have seen some of those pictures. Possibly he can place them online for us to see someday. I remember thinking back in 1984 how wonderful Sarajevo looked during the winter Olympics, and how interesting the people were. I recall saying to my parents that I wanted to go there some day. Then to see what this horrible war did to the country and how where the medals were awarded in 1984 was used as an execution place, it just saddens me. How could someone do this to their own people or their neighbors. Anyhow, I'm glad I picked this book up as it has been one of the most enjoyable reads and I was sad when the book was done... not sad on how it all ended, but wished there was more to read. John

i remember reading about brcko during the bosnian wars. very interesting read about a young boy caught in a situation that must have been similar for jews in germany and the occupied countries during ww2. amazing first hand information and shocking portraits of killers next door. i was especially interested in his return to his old city and what he found when he went back. recommended for anyone who wants to know how it is to survive when everyone is against you and how hard it is to integrate into america. it reminds us of how fragile life can be and how ethnic hatred can blow up into killing fields and how hard we need to work to make sure that we keep lines of communication open in our society

Loving this book "such a compelling and human way to begin to understand the confusing and frightening politics of a war most Americans only know from the headlines. Not only a great read but so heartening to see a Jewish American woman and a Bosnian Muslim join together to create this searing story of survival. "The Bosnia List" really moves me to want to reach out to my immigrant neighbors "from anywhere" and hear their stories.

This is an amazing story about the human spirit overcoming a complicated war that most Americans barely paid attention too. The Bosniak Muslims' own neighbors turned against them, starting with pure humiliation to murders and use of concentration camps. Fortunately, the author and some of his family fled Bosnia, risking death if caught, and ended up in the United States, ultimately becoming very successful due to their worth ethic. Other family members ended up in other areas, stayed in Bosnia or didn't survive at all. This book is about the author and his brother honoring one of his father's last wishes and taking him back to Bosnia to reunite with old friends and family who stayed behind. They found that things were never the same and even though the war was long



over, Muslims were still picked on in school, and many of the author's childhood memories had been tarnished. Nevertheless, the author brought with him a list (hence the title "The Bosnia List") of the things he wanted to do and the pictures he wanted to take, that seem rather simple, but were very significant to him in his healing process. The author, now a man, would describe in detail how he felt come back and seeing his home he was forced to flee from during the war as a boy. He describes confronting people that were his friends before his war, but turned on him when the war started. Although his anger is extremely evident, his self control is more than I think I could contain. I believe he did so for his father, who basked in the glory of being the respectable social magnate he had been before the war. This is a memoir of survival, healing, forgiveness (to some extent), and the love shown for family. I hope the author at least took pride in the fact that he returned as a strong man, with a good career, while the people who turned on him I'm sure were terrified because they knew what they had done. He definitely took the high road and that deserves great praise.

Stop everything and order this book. It is such a riveting story and account of love, hope, and forgiveness. A must read!

This book tells the real story of what happened when Yugoslavs started killing each other. Far too few people know of the horrors that had to be endured by minorities. That so many Yugoslavians were killed and tortured just because they were of a different religion proves the stupidity of, for example, the Serbs in their attempt at killing all Muslims in Bosnia. To bring such ignorance that is based on prejudices that go back to the Ottoman Empire is unbelievable in any civilized society. All should know that if a religion believes in the killing of human beings, those who believe in that should start the killing with a suicide.

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