



**Dino Mehic & Mesa Mehic
Euro Grill & Café and Bosna Market
Charlotte, North Carolina**

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Interviewer: Tom Hanchett
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[*Start Interview*]

[00:00:00]

Tom Hanchett: So we're ready to go. All right. We are here at Bosna Market/Euro Grill. It is April 19, 2017. And we are going to do an interview for the Southern Foodways Alliance about your family and your family's grocery store and restaurant, and how immigrant food is changing in Charlotte. So I appreciate you being here, thank you so much.

[00:00:30]

Dino Mehic: Thank you for coming.

[00:00:31]

Tom Hanchett: Tell me, each of you, your name and spell your name. Because even though I have it written down, this will get lost and it will only be on tape. So tell me your name and how to spell your name, and your birth date, when you were born.

[00:00:46]

Mesa Mehic: Hi my name is Mesa—well should I say my nickname?

[00:00:53]

Tom Hanchett: Say both.

[00:00:54]

Mesa Mehic: Well, real name Mehmed Mehic. And spell it M-E-H-M-E-D M-E-H-I-C.

[00:01:01]

Tom Hanchett: And everybody calls you.

[00:01:03]

Mesa Mehic: Mesa.

[00:01:05]

Tom Hanchett: Good. Does Mesa mean something or is it just a nice version of your longer name?

[00:01:09]

Mesa Mehic: I'm not—

[00:01:15]

Dino Mehic: A short name.

[00:01:16]

Mesa Mehic: Yeah, just, like, short. Birthday on September 18, 1996.

[00:01:18]

Tom Hanchett: Where?

[00:01:28]

Mesa Mehic: Where?

[00:01:28]

Tom Hanchett: Yeah.

[00:01:28]

Mesa Mehic: In Munster, Germany.

[00:01:29]

Tom Hanchett: Cool. Very good. Dino?

[00:01:29]

Dino Mehic: Yeah, I'm Mehdin Mehic. Short name, Dino. M-E-H-D-I-N M-E-H-I-C. Short name Dino, D-I-N-O. I'm born, January 28, [19]69. In Bosnia. At this time, Yugoslavia was Bosnia.

[00:01:46]

Tom Hanchett: Cool. And today—tell people where we are. We're on Central Avenue in this wonderful grocery store and restaurant. They can't see it. Tell people what is here. Tell us about the grocery store and the restaurant.

[00:01:51]

Dino Mehic: Yeah. When I come here I not have idea what I could do—because in this time, it was very hard, I don't speak English, I need some job, I need make some money. I got two family. And all my life I am in restaurant, I'm in restaurant business and groceries, and that's first idea, can I open some small groceries? And depending on how much, how big is my budget? That's the reason why it's so small. And I begin in 2003 with small groceries. But before that, I got some cleaning service. It's very hard. But I need to do something for family. And that's—I work in this cleaning service something like, almost two years. And after that I opened the grocery, Bosna Market.

[00:03:08]

Tom Hanchett: Wow.

[00:03:12]

Dino Mehic: [Referring to **Mesa Mehic**] He was two years old when I bring him here in United States. He born in Germany. And my daughter, she's now seventeen. She's born here, actually. And, I don't know, that's one of the first things — what can I do? Here, something easy for me, for family—can I keep my family around me and help [them]? Open some small business?

[00:03:43]

Tom Hanchett: So, you came to Charlotte, you came as a refugee. When did you come?

[00:03:51] **Dino Mehic:** That's a long story. I leave from Bosnia in 1992. I go to Germany. Stayed there until 1998, like refugee there. I meet my wife there and my son, he born there. In 1998 I got a chance to go to the United States. And I came here to Charlotte.

[00:04:23]

Tom Hanchett: How did you end up in Charlotte? Why Charlotte?

[00:04:26]

Dino Mehic: Actually, my father-in-law was before me here. And I meet him first time here. Because I meet my wife in Germany and she's father was already here in Charlotte. I got to choose to go somewhere in the United States, like refugee, and I pick Charlotte. It's not bad.

[00:04:46]

Tom Hanchett: And she is Bosnian herself.

[00:04:50]

Dino Mehic: Yeah, she's Bosnian too.

[00:04:53]

Tom Hanchett: Probably pretty painful, but talk about what Bosnia was like that you had to leave. Why did you have to leave?

[00:05:07]

Dino Mehic: Why? Actually, Bosnia was, like, beautiful country. Nobody—I'm not understand what's happened, it's so short time. And I must be leaving because of the war. My family stayed there and my father stayed there. And 1995, I lost my father in Srebrenica [genocide of over 7,000 Bosnian Muslims, mostly men and boys]. I lost him. And he [referring to his, Mesa] born in 1996. And he take my father's name.

[00:05:45]

Tom Hanchett: Did you fight in the war?

[00:05:48]

Dino Mehic: No. Me myself?

[00:05:50]

Tom Hanchett: Yeah.

[00:05:50]

Dino Mehic: No, I leave just before, a couple of days.

[00:05:55]

Tom Hanchett: And going to Germany, was that your choice or did you just sort of get out of Bosnia and then you ended up in Germany?

[00:06:04]

Dino Mehic: Yeah. Nobody knows this war would take so long. I got my aunt in Germany. And she

called me and told me, "Come on up for a couple of days, a couple of weeks to finish there." But I stay almost six years. Nobody know we would stay so long.

[00:06:24]

Tom Hanchett: Did you have to learn the language?

[00:06:26]

Dino Mehic: A little bit, yeah. Yeah for [being there] five years, I speak very well. [laughter] Something like [my] English now. But when I come here, I speak nothing in English. I was very, very bad—only “Hi.” [laughter]

[00:06:44]

Tom Hanchett: And when you came to Charlotte your wife was able to get a job in a factory, if I remember correctly.

[00:06:51]

Dino Mehic: Actually, I got the job first. The cleaning service. I work for somebody else for a couple of months. And, I opened myself, [my own cleaning] business. Because she was pregnant. And after the becoming baby—my daughter—she got her own job and—the name of this company?

[00:07:17]

Mesa Mehic: Eckerd?

[00:07:19]

Dino Mehic: Yeah. Eckerd [a regional drug-store chain with a large warehouse on Charlotte’s Statesville Avenue. Bought by Rite-Aid in 2007]. Yeah, in warehouse.

[00:07:24]

Tom Hanchett: And Eckerd was a drugstore. The name, I think has gone away.

[00:07:27]

Mesa Mehic: It changed to Rite-Aid.

[00:07:33]

Dino Mehic: And after that, we don't have so much choice. Somebody must be taking care of him [referring to Mesa] and his school, take him to school, pick up from school. Take care of daughter, home. It's only right—can we open something, or do something and take care of kids? And already I got experience in groceries and in restaurant. And my idea—all these refugees, almost, are around here in Central Avenue apartments, the first two, three years, something like that. So we opened this small grocery.

[00:07:58]

Tom Hanchett: So, tell about Central Avenue because people are listening to this will have no idea what Central Avenue is—but there are a lot of apartments here, there are a lot of old business buildings. Did you first find an apartment on Central Avenue?

[00:08:28]

Dino Mehic: First apartment, find for us by the refugee office, was on Green Oaks Lane.

[00:08:36] **Tom Hanchett:** Where?

[00:08:36]

Dino Mehic: Green Oaks Lane here. And many Bosnian refugee was there in these apartments and the Morningside Apartments here. And that's the reason why we opened on Central Avenue. Central Avenue at this time, it was scary. It was not nice. But there's a lot of change. There's a lot of change. Now it's great.

[00:09:02]

Tom Hanchett: What made it scary?

[00:09:02]

Dino Mehic: So many criminals here in this time.

But after a couple of years, almost ninety-nine percent Bosnians buy a home around Charlotte. And moved. But we are staying on Central Avenue because Charlotte grew up, Central Avenue grew more and more international. And we stayed here. And moved from this small plaza 300 yards [to their current building]. Downstairs we opened the grill. Euro Grill.

[00:09:38]

Tom Hanchett: So now there's a grocery store on one side, and there's the grill on the other. And the grill has [counts the chairs in the restaurant] one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen chairs.

[00:10:03]

Dino Mehic: I wish it could have been more. [chuckles] Actually, the Bosnian people make me pressure [to open the restaurant]. Because the *cevaps* is traditional Bosnian food. They make pressure to open small grill.

[00:10:19] **Tom Hanchett:** And spell *cevaps*, because I always say it wrong. I say it the way that American would say it. How do you spell it?

[00:10:22]

Dino Mehic: C-E-V-A-P.

[00:10:28]

Tom Hanchett: And these are the little sausage sandwiches.

[00:10:29]

Dino Mehic: Yeah. It's a sandwich with homemade bread, and that's traditional Bosnian food. And many people are pressure to me, because I'm the only store like this in the Charlotte area. And the population [of Bosnians in the Charlotte area] is something like maybe 2,000-2,500. And this is the only type of food like this in Charlotte area. That's why I opened the grill, too. And I opened, my planning was—can we open this grill, for pick-up or something like that, with one, two chairs? But now it's more.

And I need [even] more. Because on this side, the restaurant side, I got, maybe eighty percent is American customers. On the grill side. Everybody trying something different.

[00:11:28]

Tom Hanchett: Do you get customers from the other different international groups here, or just Americans and Bosnians?

[00:11:34]

Dino Mehic: Actually my customers in store, too, and that's not only Bosnians, that's ex-Yugoslavians or East European. Romanian, Bulgarian, Germans, I got you. And ex-Yugoslavians, Serbian, Bosnians, Croatian. And this is customer.

[00:11:49]

But actually now, restaurant side now is mostly American. Because, traditional—Bosnians go buy the fresh meat, fresh *cevaps*, and take home and grill at home, and enjoy at home or something like that. You know, and the American people like trying something different. And I'm happy because, I make people happy. It's a very hard job. But what can I do?

[00:12:33]

Tom Hanchett: I love it.

[00:12:33]

Dino Mehic: Sometimes I am so tired. It's been a long time, almost fifteen years, and I don't have day—I got a day off, Monday, but it's my busy day. Kids need time for the school. You know, that's, sometimes it's—I'm closed, but I cannot close that's too late. I cannot close. I'm the only one, something like that, Bosnian, and I am like Bosnia here in small. I cannot close here anymore.

[00:12:59]

Tom Hanchett: [Laughs]

[00:13:00]

Dino Mehic: No. That's really.

[00:13:02]

Tom Hanchett: When do you come in in the morning, when you go home at night?

[00:13:05]

Dino Mehic: So I am here in the morning 9-9:15. And at night, I go home something like that in PM.

[00:13:14]

Tom Hanchett: And when in the evening?

[00:13:15]

Mesa Mehic: Like around nine.

[00:13:15]

Dino Mehic: Around nine.

[00:13:16]

Tom Hanchett: So a twelve-hour day. Seven days a week.

[00:13:16]

Dino Mehic: Six days a week. Monday I leave for something else, you know.

[00:13:24]

Tom Hanchett: And then, as time has gone along the Bosnian community has gotten stronger. I know that when you opened the grill, people came in and helped you cook the first few days. Talk about the community getting stronger—the church, the other people in the community.

[00:13:47]

Dino Mehic: Yeah. The people from Bosnia is family people. Hard worker. And not wait too long to buy home. Everybody, I think ninety-nine point nine percent have apartment or home. And that's happened—

[00:14:08]

Tom Hanchett: That they own?

[00:14:08]

Dino Mehic: Yeah. [Cell phone rings] That's mine? Oh, I'm sorry. And then, we're open to some organization. First things Bosnian or west American Bosnian. That's—then we build a mosque because most of Bosnians is Muslim. And after they build it, [inaudible]. And [church] get the people together. You remember then your office was there was some dancing people? Yeah.

[00:14:57]

Tom Hanchett: Yeah there was a Bosnian dance organization that was at Midwood School that I'm in now.

[00:15:03]

Dino Mehic: Correct. And we are trying— this not big community, but we are trying to stay together. And then I opened this place, the grill, everybody was happy and everybody try and help me because— everybody's happy when I stay in business. You know, bring some friends: “Come on, you try some Bosnian food, what you think?” And many, many Americans visit it now in Bosnia and try this food there and looking it up online: “How can I find it here in Charlotte?” They are looking at online and find it and so happy.

[00:15:41]

Tom Hanchett: And it's very good food. Everybody that I bring here just absolutely loves it.

[00:15:44]

Dino Mehic: Thank you.

[00:15:45]

Tom Hanchett: Where do you get the sausages from?

[00:15:48]

Dino Mehic: *Cevaps?* Mostly just sausage I make here. I make here, I use the ground beef and veal, and make homemade bread, too.

[00:16:03]

Tom Hanchett: And say the name of the bread?

[00:16:07]

Dino Mehic: *Lepinje.*

[00:16:08] **Tom Hanchett:** How do you spell that? We don't know. Okay, we'll work it out. So you make your own *lepinje* bread.

[00:16:16]

Dino Mehic: Yeah. Pita bread is a little bit thinner. This is a little bit deeper and just special bread for the *cevaps*. In Bosnia, every corner has this type of food. And it's fresh. And it's homemade. And it's huge. And I'm sorry, but that's the reason why McDonald's closed in Bosnia. There's no McDonald's in Bosnia anymore. And closed because McDonald's uses frozen food. The Burger King, too. And it's so small and so expensive. Bosnian people is picky and like fresh, fresh. Go shopping every day, bring fresh meat, fresh food, you know. I think that's the reason. And so small, and expensive, most expensive like a [inaudible].

[00:17:19]

And we was there together, [referring to Mesa] he was there in 2003. This—2003. No, 2011. Yeah, 2011. There was one grand opening, McDonald's in downtown Sarajevo, he was there and said, "Hey daddy! That's so small and more expensive than everything," you know.

[00:17:37]

Mesa Mehic: Like, McDonald's over there, it's twice as expensive as it is here. Yeah, it's ridiculous.

[00:17:45]

Tom Hanchett: So, talk about this from your [directing the question to Mesa] perspective. You're hearing about your dad's world, but you've grown up in this world.

[00:17:50]

Mesa Mehic: Yeah.

[00:17:52]

Tom Hanchett: And. Just talk a little bit about. The food and the place.

[00:17:58]

Mesa Mehic: Well, I mean basically I, you know, grew up around that food, around the *cevaps* and stuff like that. So, I mean I've just really grown to love it. But when I was a kid we would go out and, I remember we would go out and we'd get like, you know, Burger King and McDonald's and stuff like that. But I mean, it's not as good as the *cevaps* and like, the *burek*, like the pita that we have. Yeah, it's really good.

[00:18:27]

Dino Mehic: But that's—we make this almost every day at home, too. And I grew up with this food, and he too. But he grew up here in America, and that's normal that he'd like American food. And that's not so bad.

[00:18:47]

Tom Hanchett: What's your favorite American food?

[00:18:49]

Mesa Mehic: Burger and fries.

[00:18:50]

Tom Hanchett: Burger and fries, there you go. Cool. Things like spaghetti? Tacos?

[00:18:55]

Mesa Mehic: I mean, yeah. I mean, I would eat anything like that, yeah.

[00:18:59]

Tom Hanchett: But burger and fries are it. What are you—from when you were a kid. What are your first memories of this place. I don't think you have memories from Germany? Do you?

[00:19:11]

Mesa Mehic: No.

[00:19:11]

Tom Hanchett: Your first memories are here.

[00:19:13]

Mesa Mehic: In Charlotte? First memories. I just remember--I don't remember being in an apartment as much, because I was still really young, but I remember when we built the home. We built like a Habitat [for Humanity] home. And I remember some of that and then starting, you know, elementary school. Starting elementary school, I went to Westerly Hills. And those are some of my first memories.

[00:19:43]

Tom Hanchett: Are you still in the Habitat home?

[00:19:46]

Mesa Mehic: No. [To his father, Dino] When did we move? About?

[00:19:46]

Dino Mehic: 2008.

[00:19:49]

Mesa Mehic: Yeah, 2008.

[00:19:50] T

Tom Hanchett: Where was the Habitat home? Do you remember?

[00:19:52]

Dino Mehic: It was in West Charlotte. That's first choice, what can I do? But I appreciated it. It helped us so much. When you're coming here and you got to choose to pick some Habitat home.

[00:20:05]

Tom Hanchett: And so you helped build the home.

[00:20:08]

Dino Mehic: Yeah, we build together. I spent 500 hours on building this home. And this was great home. And when I sell this home, it was so, so, so sad. That's my first home in America, and I moved there in 2000. And great deal, great home. The reason why I sell this home and moved, both kids little bit better school, or something like that.

[00:20:37]

Tom Hanchett: Where did you move to next?

[00:20:39]

Dino Mehic: In South Charlotte.

[00:20:41]

Tom Hanchett: In South Charlotte. Cool. [Directs question to Mesa] Going to school, was it hard being a Bosnian kid?

[00:20:51]

Mesa Mehic: Not really. Because, you know, I picked up English really quick. I mean, I just started, you know, hearing what other kids said and just really picked it up right from there. And, I mean not a lot of people didn't think I was from a different country until they heard my name. You know? Once they heard my name, then you know, they started asking where I was from. Stuff like that.

[00:21:12]

Dino Mehic: Everybody asked me where you're from. Asked me.

[00:21:12]

Mesa Mehic: Oh yeah. [Laughs] Because of the accent.[Laughs] But I didn't really have one.

[00:21:27]

Tom Hanchett: He's not Latino, is he? [laughter] Yeah, I think there was a feeling among people in Charlotte who had never seen very many immigrants in the '90s [1990s], if you were an immigrant, you were Latino or Greek. And you're not Latino. And you're probably not Greek. [Laughs]

[00:21:41]

Dino Mehic: Yeah, but was small town, I remember that—I remember this downtown, with small buildings. A couple tall buildings, that's it. And I think so, here in Morningside Street was an exit to [Highway] 74. Behind the—

[00:22:04]

Tom Hanchett: Yeah, Independence Boulevard. So as you're going to school, do you ever run into any feelings of weirdness because maybe you brought Bosnian food to school? Did you bring Bosnian food to school?

[00:22:15]

Mesa Mehic: Actually, never. We never did. I never did. I always say it like school lunch or something like. Yeah, so it wasn't really anything like that.

[00:22:22]

Tom Hanchett: Did you bring your playmates to the grocery store? To the restaurant?

[00:22:28]

Mesa Mehic: No, we didn't really—I never really talked about that much when I was younger though, yeah. But. Now, you know, I tell people to come by, eat food. But, you know, as a kid I never really thought about that.

[00:22:43]

Tom Hanchett: So what do you tell people now?

[00:22:47]

Mesa Mehic: Come try Bosnian food. Yeah. I actually told some of my friends from school to, you know, or give them a to-go menu or something like that. And, you know, tell them to come try it.

[00:23:00]

Tom Hanchett: And you're at Central Piedmont Community College? Started when? Studying what?

[00:23:06]

Mesa Mehic: Oh well, I'm doing basic classes there, but I should be transferring to UNCC to study physical therapy.

[00:23:17]

Tom Hanchett: Cool. Very cool. I noticed that soccer game is on [here in the restaurant] and your eyes keep going to the soccer game. And that's a good thing. That's a very good thing.

Is soccer in your growing up as well, Dino?

[00:23:31]

Dino Mehic: Here or?

[00:23:32]

Tom Hanchett: Either place. Are you a sports guy?

[00:23:33]

Mesa Mehic: Oh yeah.

[00:23:34]

Dino Mehic: I played soccer, yeah.

[00:23:36]

Mesa Mehic: He played in Germany.

[00:23:38]

Dino Mehic: I played in Yugoslavia and Germany, yeah.

[00:23:38]

Tom Hanchett: And are there people to play with here? Or are you too busy?

[00:23:44]

Dino Mehic: Right now I'm too old. I'm not too busy for soccer, but I cannot, I got trouble with my knee. But, when I opened the store we sponsored one Bosnian team for a couple years, maybe seven, eight years.

[00:24:01]

Mesa Mehic: They were really good team, and we would play indoor soccer, outdoor soccer.

[00:24:13]

Tom Hanchett: How many Bosnian teams were at that point?

[00:24:15]

Dino Mehic: At this time? Just one. But we tried it here with some other teams.

[00:24:18]

Mesa Mehic: Yeah, different leagues, you know, sometimes there'd be Bosnian tournaments that they'd have, I'd go up to go to those.

[00:24:23]

Tom Hanchett: Here in Charlotte or someplace else?

[00:24:28]

Dino Mehic: Here in Charlotte.

[00:24:28]

Mesa Mehic: In Charlotte. Sometimes they'd go to Atlanta, go travel with them, you know, Jacksonville. It's fun. That's real nice.

[00:24:37]

Tom Hanchett: Were you part of the dance troupe? Were you part of the dancing that would practice at my office?

[00:24:49]

Mesa Mehic: Oh. No. I'm not really much of a dancer.

[00:24:50]

Tom Hanchett: I'm trying to get a picture of this whole community that's around you -- that I can't see, but that is so much a part of your life.

[00:25:02]

Dino Mehic: Yeah, very nice international festival is last weekend of September, I think.

[00:25:09]

Tom Hanchett: This is the one at UNC Charlotte.

[00:25:10]

Mesa Mehic: [Directing question to Tom] Do you go?

[00:25:10]

Tom Hanchett: I go all the time. It's a wonderful thing. You guys have had a tent out there for many years.

[00:25:21]

Dino Mehic: Correct. Last year we made *cevaps* there. Helped the community. I think so this year too.

[00:25:23]

Tom Hanchett: Who is the organizer of that tent?

[00:25:34] **Dino Mehic:** Most of the community, our leader in the Charlotte area, in North Carolina, actually is Professor Mirsad at the college. [Dr. Mirsad Hadzikadic at UNC Charlotte]

[00:25:48] **Tom Hanchett:** Cool. Mirsad in the business school. You pronounced it correctly.

[00:25:53]

Dino Mehic: Yeah. He's first one here, and he's a very cool guy and helps the community. Built community here, and all these organizations here. When you need something for information. Ask him. Everybody. And he never say no. And he find time for everybody. He's a great guy.

[00:26:23]

Tom Hanchett: And he has a wonderful sense of humor, too. He was on the board at Levine Museum of the New South. Very, very. giving guy.

One of the things that you need to do this [the grocery and restaurant] is money. Did you, did the community make a loan to you so you could get started or did you go to a bank? Or? It seems impossible to start a business. I don't know how you do it.

[00:26:55]

Mesa Mehic: Savings.

[00:26:55]

Dino Mehic: Actually I got a couple of credit cards. I used the credit cards when I begin. Some people help me, give some money for beginning. That's very hard, the first couple of years. It's very, very, very hard. Because this stuff, all this stuff is import and expensive. And when you have nothing here and you need to pay rent, that's not your building, and you need pay insurance and tax and everything. And pay credit card back and that's—at that time it was a very, very hard time for me. But now it's much better. Because almost fifteen years in business. Now I think only about—keep the business like this and help the kids finish school.

[00:27:58]

Mesa Mehic: I think once we finish school, you know, he's going to start setting down a little bit. Maybe.

[00:28:03]

Dino Mehic: I hope so.

[00:28:04]

Mesa Mehic: Yeah, maybe sell the place.

[00:28:07]

Tom Hanchett: So you want to be a physical therapist when you grow up. Do you think you will still be involved in the restaurant or the grocery store?

[00:28:15]

Mesa Mehic: Well, if it's around, yeah. I will. I'll definitely help out.

[00:28:19]

Tom Hanchett: What's the thing you like most about the restaurant? About the restaurant and the grocery store? What's the thing that's the most fun?

[00:28:30]

Mesa Mehic: Eating. Eating the food. I mean, I enjoy helping him out, you know. Seeing him with a smile on his face. When you help him out, it's nice.

[00:28:39]

Dino Mehic: When the kids finish school, I told you a couple minutes ago, I try and maybe retire from this, from this business. But I cannot because—

[00:29:00]

Mesa Mehic: So many people.

[00:29:01]

Dino Mehic: I'm so happy when the people come here and eat and leave happy and go to, say to friends or somebody else, "We was in some Bosnian place,"—nobody say Euro Grill, Bosnian place—"and eat good Bosnian food." That's my business. I make money here, and everything. But I present my country, where I born. That's important. You know? I cannot—I just need somebody to help me here or give to somebody who can do same business. Keep same business.

[00:29:54]

Tom Hanchett: You were talking a little bit earlier about how different your life [referring to Dino] is from your life [referring to Mesa]. Talk about that some. When you were—you're how old now?

[00:30:05]

Mesa Mehic: Twenty.

[00:30:05]

Tom Hanchett: Twenty. So when you [directing the question to Dino] twenty, what were you doing? When you were twenty?

[00:30:12]

Dino Mehic: [Laughs] Twenty. Oh yeah, at twenty-one I was already refugee. I leave my country. Was I twenty-one? I think so. Or twenty-two, yeah. 1992. And I fight with life, you know. I need to make money. You know, I have myself only, you know, and a different country, no language, no speak the language. You know, that's very hard. He's twenty [referring to Mesa], he's got a normal life, he go to school. That's easy for him.

[00:30:55]

Mesa Mehic: I couldn't imagine what they went through back then. He went to Germany with probably nothing. It's tough.

[00:31:06]

Dino Mehic: I just visited Germany thinking that what's happening in Bosnia [will be] finished in a couple of days—couple of weeks. You know, nobody knows it takes three or four years. Yeah, and I've got nothing, just what's in my hand and pockets. I go there and visit some family, and then after that, they send me to the refugee, and I find a job, and I fight for the life.

He got behind him the whole family and it's easy for him, I think so.

[00:31:35]

Tom Hanchett: Now, it's easier than he [referring to Dino] had it. But it's not easy.

[00:31:41]

Mesa Mehic: It's not easy, yeah. [Laughter] He thinks it's really easy. A lot of Bosnians—parents because you know they went through such a hard time, you know. So when they see the life that we have here, they're like, "Oh my god. How you not be able to make it?" Or something like that.

[00:31:56]

Dino Mehic: Yeah, life is not easy. But you have so much, so many choices.

[00:32:03]

Mesa Mehic: Opportunities, yeah. Yeah. I mean, he's right about that.

[00:32:08]

Tom Hanchett: Do you worry that you're losing your Bosnian-ness?

[00:32:15]

Mesa Mehic: No. Because we—ever since I was a kid, I remember me and my sister would try to speak English at home, and he'd always say, "I don't understand you," you know, on purpose just so we can continue to speaking Bosnian at home.

I don't think I'm losing any of it, especially being here in the restaurant and, you know, seeing Bosnian people come in, talk with them, you know. I don't really lose any of it. But I do see some

other kids, you know, Bosnian kids, you know, like, speak English a lot more than Bosnian. Even with their parents.

[00:32:53]

Dino Mehic: Like kids, everyone's kids need something from parents, you know. When he needs something, you ask in my language. Bosnian. Why you forgot the language, but one more school [inaudible] they have already two languages, that's great. And English is his first language, and that's easy for him. But—when he needs something, "Hey daddy I need"—I don't understand.

[Laughs]

[00:33:26]

Mesa Mehic: [Laughs]

[00:33:26]

Dino Mehic: And both, my daughter and he—both speak almost perfect Bosnian.

[00:33:35]

Tom Hanchett: That's great. We've got Drako Hernandez here and, Drako, you're listening to this as an immigrant yourself. What questions would you ask these folks?

[00:33:48]

Drako Hernandez: A lot of questions about, I mean. Like he say, everything he get through to come to the United States. It's amazing. I mean, as a Latino, you just have to cross a desert. But he crossed basically everything to come to United States.

I mean, there is a lot of things. When—as a kid, as a young person today is asked “What do you want to be all your life,” I mean “What are you going to do with your life?” And he say, "I don't know." [ie kids today can seem aimless – but not Dino]

I see him [Dino] as example. As like, a hero person. Like a model person. When you see him: "I don't know but I want to be like him," you know. To have great, go to places with the determination. It's a great person, this is great guy. He's like history, man.

[00:34:49]

Dino Mehic: Thank you. But that's almost—everyone Bosnian refugee has almost same story.

[00:35:03]

Drako Hernandez: That's amazing, that's amazing.

[00:35:04]

Dino Mehic: I know it west Europe [there] was something like one million refugee from Bosnia. And something like sixty percent or sixty-five percent, must be leaving [ie now have the choice to stay or go], go back to Bosnia. I myself have choice, go to Canada, U.S.A., Australia or New Zealand or something. Somewhere. I pick United States.

I didn't know, before. I never did think about that, you know, I got a life with my family, good life in my country. But that's happened because— it used to be Yugoslavian life was very good. I don't need to go to somewhere make me more happy. I was happy in my country, Bosnia. But that's happened. Nobody understand, the small people like me are, nobody understands what's happened so quickly or, you know. Too much loss. Lost friends, lost family, lost country. Lost home. Everything. And now, when I talk with my family or friends [they are] in West Europe and Germany and France, in Netherland, Holland—

Germany. Big [in the news now]. Right now there's one million people from Middle East, but the German people now cry, cry, "Why did the Bosnians leave?" Because they built a good life, accepted—

[00:37:00]

Mesa Mehic: They're accepted in their culture, basically.

[00:37:00]

Dino Mehic: Culture, you know, that's great, great people. Family people. Very, very hard workers. And now the Germans are crying for the Bosnians, "Why did they leave?" They made another country happy.

[00:37:19]

Tom Hanchett: So Bosnians are leaving Germany now?

[00:37:24]

Dino Mehic: Maybe something like fifty percent stayed—

[00:37:34]

Tom Hanchett: —and going back to Bosnia?

[00:37:34]

Dino Mehic: Yeah, going home to Bosnia or another country, like me, I come here.

[00:37:35]

Tom Hanchett: Wow. So would you go home to Bosnia? Is Bosnia still home? Would you go home?

[00:37:40]

Dino Mehic: Yes. I will myself, but my home is broken. My home is broken.

[00:37:49]

Tom Hanchett: So you can't go home to Bosnia?

[00:37:55]

Dino Mehic: Yeah, I can. Why not.

[00:37:55]

Tom Hanchett: You could? Or will you?

[00:37:55]

Dino Mehic: No, my home is here. I build my life here, that's—now it's too late. When I go there, I like it, but what can I do there? I stay here for almost twenty years. My kids grow up here. I got you a home here. Business here. You know, that's my home here now.

But when we [Dino and Mesa] visited Bosnia last time— 2011?

[00:38:24]

Mesa Mehic: Yeah.

[00:38:24]

Dino Mehic: After two weeks — because too far, everybody take two, three or four weeks, you know— I watch him, he watch me. “Time to go back home,” you know? Nobody say nothing, but home is now here.

[00:38:44]

Tom Hanchett: And what did you think of Bosnia when you were there?

[00:38:47]

Mesa Mehic: It was nice. I mean, it's a beautiful country definitely.

[00:38:50]

Tom Hanchett: And tell me, is it a mountainy part that y'all lived in or—

[00:38:58]

Mesa Mehic: No, we lived in the capital. It was like a city, a small city. I mean they didn't have too much there. It's like, small you know. I mean, it's like every other city, you know. And—but I don't know. It's just the people, sometimes they're—

[00:39:12]

Dino Mehic: After war, after war it's—everybody say the people has changed, no. People stay the same. But we are changed. And there is too much corruption. No. Economy is bad. And when you come from the country it's easy to find a job, or finish the college—easy to finish college there too. But after you finish college you—really hard to find a job. Because the politicians is very corrupt. Corruption is number one problem in Bosnia. Yeah. Economy is down. What can I do there?

[00:39:57]

Tom Hanchett: Wow. That is powerful. Well the one thing that I have written down to ask about that I haven't asked about is, where you get your things from for the grocery store and the restaurant, and who you sell to. So how did you find all of these things? Is there a big wholesaler in Atlanta or New York or—?

[00:40:14]

Dino Mehic: Yeah, in New York and a lot of time in New Jersey. Chicago. Saint Louis.

[00:40:20]

Tom Hanchett: When you were starting out did you go to those places?

[00:40:24]

Dino Mehic: Yeah, I visited everybody and talk about—about stuff. But when we are starting business, was one in New York and one in Chicago and distributors. And not so many things like this right now. Right now it's much more easy and much more distributors and now the stuff, the wholesale product is much cheaper than before. But the guys helped me, you know, gave me some stuff and I pay after two weeks. It's much, much better. And, yeah, that's like everyone that's—

And first one year I go every, every Friday morning to Atlanta and bring the stuff here. In one van. When we were beginning I buy this van. I remember I paid \$1200 and prayed to God, "Come on, not stop, please. I need you, I need you, I need you." First year. Every Friday in the morning I wake up at three o'clock in the morning and go pick up the stuff.

[00:41:27]

Tom Hanchett: And where was it in Atlanta?

[00:41:34]

Dino Mehic: In Atlanta. Something before Atlanta, Lawrenceville?

[00:41:37]

Mesa Mehic: Lawrenceville, yeah.

[00:41:37]

Dino Mehic: I got some friend, he got us some—same business in Bosnia, you know, and I talk with him, what can we do here?

[00:41:50]

Tom Hanchett: So he ran a wholesale business?

[00:41:53]

Dino Mehic: Yeah, a wholesale business.

[00:42:02]

Tom Hanchett: Do you know, what was the name of it?

[00:42:02]

Dino Mehic: The Bosnia Market, too.

[00:42:02]

Tom Hanchett: So you started out with your runs to Atlanta, and then what was the next distributor that you found?

[00:42:07]

Dino Mehic: A guy that's—Grand Prix. Grand Prix in New Jersey. Actually we got all the stuff from him. The first couple years. He bring to Atlanta and we close to Atlanta and go pick up. And after maybe two years, he got two big trucks and delivered. That's much easier after that.

[00:42:30]

Tom Hanchett: So he was running from New Jersey down here. Where else would he go in the South when he was from New Jersey? He would go here, go to Atlanta—

[00:42:40]

Dino Mehic: The guys opened the distribution center in Atlanta. And the guys from Atlanta driving around in Florida and North Carolina, Virginia and this side of America, yeah.

[00:42:57]

Tom Hanchett: Are there many Bosnian stores in the South today? In the Southern United States?

[00:43:02]

Dino Mehic: The closest one here in Greensboro.

[00:43:06]

Tom Hanchett: In Greensboro. Any others in North or South Carolina?

[00:43:08]

Dino Mehic: No. Because not many people. Not many people. Most of the refugees are in Charlotte and in Greensboro.

[00:43:25]

Tom Hanchett: In this community there are Bosnians, there are Serbians, there are Croatians, and you all kind of get along somewhat?

[00:43:33]

Mesa Mehic: Oh yeah. They get along. Yeah. That's not—

[00:43:38]

Tom Hanchett: What's—there's are religious differences. I remember somebody telling me that Yugoslavia had been about one third Muslim, one third Christian, one third—

[00:43:49]

Mesa Mehic: Catholic.

[00:43:50]

Tom Hanchett: Catholic. Okay. Help me talk about this.

[00:43:57]

Dino Mehic: Yugoslavia— Actually Serbian is mostly Orthodox.

[00:44:05]

Mesa Mehic: Orthodox Christian.

[00:44:06]

Tom Hanchett: Okay, okay.

[00:44:06]

Dino Mehic: And the Croatian is mostly.

[00:44:10]

Mesa Mehic: Catholic.

[00:44:13]

Dino Mehic: Catholic. And in Bosnia it's mixed.

[00:44:16]

Tom Hanchett: That's right. That's what told me.

[00:44:18]

Dino Mehic: This was a central republic or country in Yugoslavia, and that's mixed. And so many mixed marriages. Actually, in our family we've got everybody. And that's Bosnia. And somebody trying to broke this and make separate. Croatia, Bosnia tried—Croatia and Serbia tried to half, to split. But you cannot split, that's so many mixed marriages and the same people. It's crazy. Just fight for three years for nothing. You know, and lost maybe 250,000 people for nothing. And now after that, the economy is so bad. Corruption is so bad. The politicians, like everywhere, that's—crazy. I don't like to talk about that.

And here in Charlotte, we are not have any problem. We not have any problem. I've got customers here— we go down Central [Avenue] and there's Nova's, he's from Serbia.

[00:45:22]

Tom Hanchett: Yeah, the Nova Bakery.

[00:45:28]

Dino Mehic: Yeah, the Nova Bakery. Down the street is Intermezzo, it's Serbian, too. We work together and nothing wrong. I think so, only politician there is bad. Yeah. The people here are no problem.

[00:45:38]

Tom Hanchett: Drako, anything else we should ask?

[00:45:45]

Drako Hernandez: As an immigrant, what's your dream when you come to the United States? I

mean, when you come to the United States, every immigrant comes with a— imagined how, how good your life is going to be in the United States. When you came to the United States, what was your dream? What was your American dream?

[00:46:09]

Dino Mehic: I don't have dream. I don't have some American dream. My dream was can I—I'm healthy. Can I bring my kids here to finish good school? Because my life is, in this age, was not so good. And I don't have so much choices. He got it, she got it. [ie my son and daughter have choices] And my dream is only when the kids finish school and get some easy life not like mine. That's my dream. I don't have some dream can I rich be or something. I don't need that. No, that's really. Really, I don't have dream. I used to but I never think about America.

[00:47:00]

Tom Hanchett: Very last thing I can think about is the South. This is for the Southern Foodways Alliance. And when you think about the South, what do you think about? You may not even think about anything.

[00:47:13]

Mesa Mehic: Probably the food. It would be like fried chicken or like that. I mean, you know, biscuits. That's what I think about when I hear South, like South— America.

[00:47:34]

Tom Hanchett: What do you think, Dino?

[00:47:34]

Dino Mehic: I never think about that. I don't know. What's different.

[00:47:43]

Mesa Mehic: Soul food.

[00:47:52] **Dino Mehic:**

You know that. Really, I don't have time to think about that, or I don't thinks. I'm so happy when we see here or when we meet some different people, different culture from South America—or there's so many countries too. The guy here from Peru [customers have come into the restaurant, Latinos

who Dino knows]. Where you from originally?

[00:48:06] Unidentified Speaker: Peru.

[00:48:07] **Dino Mehic:** You too?

[00:48:07] Unidentified Speaker: No, he's from Peru. I'm Mexican.

[00:48:14]

Dino Mehic: I like this country because so many, so many difference. Different people, different culture, and everybody stay together. In my small street, we got a street where anybody asks me, "Hey Dino, how are you?" And they say, "Good morning," "Come on drink beer together," or something that. That's cool. That's why I like this country. This country.

I don't like problems. He [Mesa] asked me a couple times can he go somewhere, and like, police or something, and then like, no, please no. No. I'm not scared, I don't like it. Maybe bad experience or something like that, but I don't like it. I don't like to hurt nobody.

[00:49:00]

Tom Hanchett: Thank you.

[00:49:06]

Mesa Mehic: Thank you.

[00:49:09]

Dino Mehic: That's it?

[00:49:09]

Drako Hernandez: Thank you.

[00:49:10]

Dino Mehic: Thank you, guys.

[00:49:11]

Drako Hernandez: Now we need thirty seconds of silence.

[END INTERVIEW]