

Forgotten Fools / Lost in Europe



A proposal for a documentary which will be made with much compassion.

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Introduction

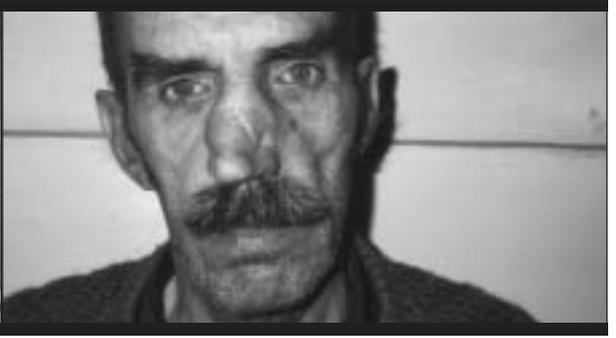
Radomir is pulling on his umpteenth cigarette, finishing it right down to the filtertip. It is the fortieth day of the thirteenth year he has woken up in no man's land. Rohypnol and leponex are on the menu; other than that, there is just another day of boredom to look forward to. Since 1992, Radomir, Mileta and 20 other Bosnians, most of them psychiatric patients, have been living behind bars in a closed section of a refugee camp in Hungary. How they got there? Radomir remembers grenades exploding in the grounds of their old clinic in Bosnia when war broke out. "We were put on a bus in the middle of the night. 'We have to get away!' the psychiatrist shouted." The group ended up in Hungary, where they have been looked after by three nurses ever since. One day, they'll come and get me. I want to go back to Bosnia, to die there," says Radomir. But thirteen years have passed, and no one has come to collect him.

Tijn Sadée, correspondent for the Dutch newspaper NRC Handelsblad in south-east Europe, and I arrived in the refugee camp in Debrecen last February, exactly one year after Tijn's first meeting with the 'Bosnian Fools'. We had worked together before, on a television report in Hungary – an experience both of us had enjoyed. Since then, we had kept up with each other's work, which is how I came to read his article on the 'Forgotten Fools' that he wrote after his first encounter with them. At that time, a lack of sources made us feel that many questions had remained unanswered. How does a group of schizophrenics from Bosnia end up in Hungary? Why have they stayed there for thirteen years? What are their backgrounds, where are their families and which authorities are responsible for the situation? Intrigued, we decided to try to find the missing pieces of the puzzle: the idea for a documentary was born. In preparation, we travelled to Debrecen, accompanied by an interpreter who spoke Serbo-Croat, and started on the process of reconstruction. To make the final film, we will retrace our steps, using our journey as the basis for the story about the Fools.

Debrecen, Jakes and Pale

The film we have in mind begins in the closed section of the refugee camp in Debrecen. We meet the inmates, Radomir and Mileta in particular. They will tell the story of how, in 1993, they were put on a bus in the middle of the night to flee from the war in Yugoslavia, and try to explain why they are still in Hungary today. I am thinking of Radomir and Mileta as the main characters in our film because they are the ones who most clearly express their wish to return to Bosnia. Their 20 fellow patients will be featured around them, each one contributing in his or her way to the identity of the group. Their shared circumstances are what they have in common: after fleeing from the falling grenades at the start of the war, they now while away their days in the camp, relegated to oblivion.

Why has nobody come to collect them and bring them back to Bosnia after thirteen years? This question spurs us on to leave the camp in search of the other protagonists of this story. Not far from the camp, we find Pal Szabó, an embittered psychiatrist. In 1996/97 he was in a position to help the Fools return to Bosnia, but, through no fault of his, things did not work out. Leaving Hungary for Bosnia, we end up in Pale, to speak with Radomir's family, which we have tracked down there. At the end of a week, we arrive in Jakes, the place our Fools came from, where we meet Cvijo and Biljena Zelincevic. Against their better judgment, they are busy building a new clinic – however, it will not have space to house the Fools! Finally, we come to the source of the story: psychiatrist Bojkovic, who sent the Fools off on their adventure, not knowing the disastrous consequences it would have for them. We finish our journey back in Debrecen, with the Fools, so that our film will end where we started our quest.



Themes

Every war sees people forced to leave their homes and set off for uncertain destinations. Some of these displaced people manage to get back to where they belong, usually by way of all sorts of difficult processes. However, this vulnerable group of psychiatric patients is unable to do so. Everything has been taken from them, even their passports. They are like driftwood, washed up on a strange shore after a storm. No questions about their situation have ever been asked of them, because fate struck at a time when the world was on fire. The fact that they did not have a choice makes this story so universal.

You could see the film as a tour of the people who made choices on behalf of the Fools, sealing their fate – all characters who influence the story in their own way. What these people have in common is that their personal stories are all set against the same backdrop: the war in Yugoslavia, which has left many traces, even today. Gradually, a film will emerge which will make clear that, given the circumstances, certain choices are understandable, no matter how far-reaching the consequences.

The documentary will also be a search, during which new answers will lead to new questions, which in turn will lead to new directions to explore in. It is possible that the story will change during filming – if it seems important enough for the film, I will choose in favour of following that change.

Catalyst

I would like to reserve space for a possible epilogue, which would examine the forces that might be set in motion by our film: of course, the story will not end when the film has been shot. This epilogue might include a look at the press conference which human rights activist Branco Todorovic is planning to organise for the Fools, or it might give an idea of what the organisation Global Initiative on Psychiatry could do for the Fools. (For 25 years now, this organisation, which was founded in Holland, has campaigned for more humane conditions in psychiatric care in central and eastern Europe – when we got in touch with representatives, they knew nothing about this story but showed themselves very interested.) I do not know whether any of the plans mentioned will come to fruition, but Todorovic especially seemed to want to take action very soon after we alerted him.

Style and form

What follows are six examples of scenes, which will illustrate aspects of the film which pertain to the style I would like to adopt. Using personal observations which I made during our research trip, they are possible scenes of situations, incidents and events – for each scene, I will give an idea of how I would like to film it.

1 / Meeting with Mileta and the others

We enter the building, walk up the stairs and see the tall railings behind which our Fools are waiting. A nurse opens the barred gate and lets us in. I have never had contact with psychiatric patients before; suddenly, I am surrounded by them. They crowd in, embracing me, grabbing my hands and trying to hug me. I notice the stench: a sickly, oppressive smell. A man comes and stands next to me: I recognise Mileta, a silent man who likes to play chess. I am startled by his appearance: his right hand is trembling violently and he is dressed in rags. His face pale, he is beckoning to indicate he wants a cigarette. Suddenly, everyone is begging for cigarettes. After a quick consultation with the nurse, she decides that the time for distributing the carton of cigarettes we have brought will be after lunch, during the daily portion of medicine.

Soon, Mileta and I are seated on his narrow bed playing chess – luckily, I once memorised the first opening from a well-known chess book by the Dutch grandmaster Max Euwe. Having decided to use scholar's mate, I have to think very hard before I can produce the right moves. I do not do badly, although Mileta has to prevent me from making a number of blunders. After an hour I am check-mated.



Mileta, the silent chessplayer.

For this introductory scene, the first time viewers meet Mileta and the other Fools, I would like to keep the camera close to, preferably in between the characters. I am thinking of a calm way of filming, from the shoulder, to make the meeting tangible. When one of the Fools wants to make contact with me by touching me, the camera will record this by showing little details. When playing chess, we could use a different way of filming. I imagine that my presence can be made to be felt when I am sitting playing chess with Mileta on his bed. The camera will be positioned on a tripod behind me, looking with me over my shoulder, with my arm or hand coming into view occasionally, when I move a chess piece. It is important that Mileta is clearly visible: he cannot talk, so his body language and his facial expressions need to be shown to convey an idea of his state of mind and his reactions to our visit.

2 / Daily life in and around the closed ward

I would like to portray life in and around the closed ward by following daily activities as closely as possible. For this, the camera can take a more observational role, catching the many details which struck me. The following scene serves as an example: it is an observation of the only moment of the day when the Fools are allowed outside the railings.

When the morning is over, the Fools get ready for lunch. They group together by the railings and wait until the nurse opens the gate to let them out. Many of them are not wearing coats; they go out into the bitter cold dressed only in shirts or jumpers. Single file, they move to another building, where meals are served. Mileta leads the way, but when he has arrived at the entrance, he suddenly turns right and walks onto the snow-covered grass beside the path. While one of the patients asks the nurse what he has gone to do, we see that he is standing behind a tree, peeing. "He does that every day," laughs the nurse. Inside, it becomes clear that the building is an enormous sports hall, where long rickety tables have been set out in rows. The Fools have to queue for their hot lunch. They take their trays and sit down here and there.

They are surrounded by regular refugees, gathered here from all parts of the globe: there are Afghans, Iraqis and Africans, to name but a few. The Fools stand out against this backdrop of mostly sombre-looking faces; in fact, they look quite appealing by contrast. After scarcely 20 minutes the food has disappeared and the Fools trickle back out. Those who have a cigarette take this moment to smoke it. Two of the Fools are carrying out a big pot of soup for those who had to stay behind on the ward. Back in single file, they walk the fifty metres back to their building. Lunch is over, they go back in; the barred gate is locked behind them.

This scene will stand out because of its focus on details which might normally be overlooked; for example, the moment Mileta verges from the path to go and pee behind a tree. Of course I cannot guarantee this will happen again during shooting, but it is something the cameraman will have to be on the alert for.

3 / Radomir's brother and other characters

Hospitality is very important in Bosnia – people often get together at each other's houses, sitting around the table or on the sofas. Coffee is served, of the kind that leaves dregs at the bottom of the cups, snacks are put out on the table; and when everyone is seated comfortably, conversation can begin. After a while, homemade brandy is offered as a sign of approval. Afterwards, everyone sits down to dinner together. What follows is a description of a scene in which we meet some important characters, in the form of an interview. The scene takes place at the home of Radomir's brother Momir, in Pale, close to the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo.

"If only Radomir was back in Jakes," says his brother, "things could be very different." But they have not received the news they were hoping for: Radomir cannot come back to Jakes yet. We ask to see photographs of Radomir, but Momir says he will not be able to find the photo album without his

wife, who is out. However, she comes home especially to search for it, and not long afterwards we are sitting down with the entire family, Radomir, his wife, his son, and his daughter, to look at the photos of uncle Radomir, who 'went crazy'.

Radomir's life emerges in black and white, the way it was in a seemingly happy past; he even used to be a chef at a chic establishment on an island off the coast. One of the photos shows Radomir's father, and it turns out he is still alive. After consulting the family, we decide to go and see him, too; I did a little bit of filming in Debrecen, so I will be able to show him some images of his son. The trip to see him will involve arranging for a minibus, since his father lives high up in the mountains. Before we leave we are treated to smoked meats, mince meat in cabbage leaves, homemade cheese and other delicacies. The homebrewed Palinka is served from a Serbian wooden jug which the family has been using since 1928.

The above description gives a clear enough picture of this scene. It will be shown from the perspective of a family gathering to talk about uncle Radomir's life. A one-to-one interview would give the scene a very formal character, and my aim is to strive for a rather informal way of filming, to blend in with the informal character of Bosnian hospitality and culture. I will be striving to portray other characters in the same way.

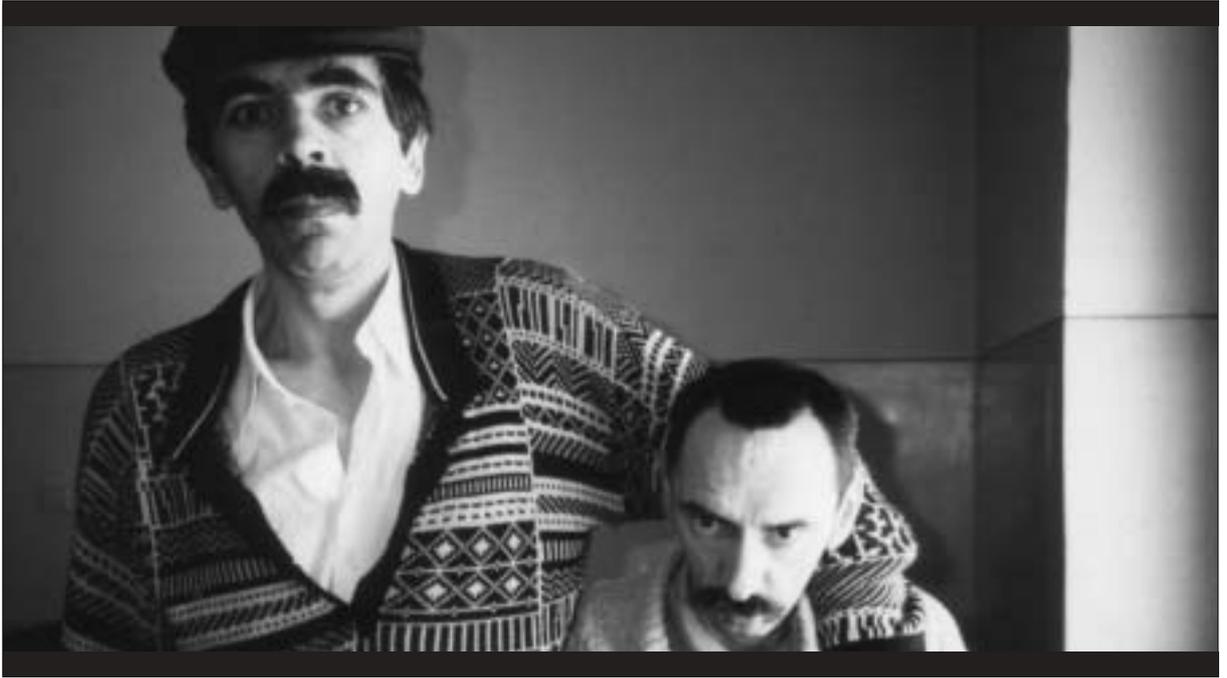
All the people mentioned so far have said they will contribute to the making of this film.

4 / Scarred landscape

This scene shows a seemingly peaceful landscape which, on closer inspection, has been through a period of violence.

The road to Jakes runs along the top of a chain of hills, with breathtaking views to either side. All along it, however, there is evidence of the violence which has taken place here. Each and every house on the way has been shot at. Occasionally, we come across one which has undergone repairs. It is clear there was heavy fighting here during the war, and how systematically the soldiers did their job. Every day, Serbian military units moved into these hills, which were mainly populated by Croats. One by one, the houses were shot at until the families fled. Halfway along the road I think I can see the ruins of a castle in the distance, but closer up, it turns out to be part of a destroyed church. Now, twelve years on, there is nothing left here but gloom. The war devastated this area to an extent that it has been too painful to return.

This region has suffered complete chaos, disorder, lawlessness and all the other terrible consequences of war. This is the backdrop against which we will view the situation in which the Fools ended up in 1992, and against which we will judge the choices made by the other characters in the story.



Radomir (left and friend.

5 / The interpreter and my role in the film

Serbo-Croat and Hungarian are difficult languages and require a good interpreter, who can provide you with translations which are brief and to the point. The need for interpreting in film making means there is always a delay when something is said, and affects the position of the director and interviewer. It will be the interpreter who will have to ask the questions, which leaves little choice when it comes to deciding whether the questions will be part of the film or not. I think that I will have my questions and answers translated on the spot, during filming. Where possible, I think I will only use the answers in the film. My own role and involvement in the film need to be examined, too, especially where the Fools are concerned. In a way, they are very affectionate, emotional and extrovert – and they will not hide those qualities in front of the camera. Our intention is to leave the camera rolling if they come and ask for a hug, or beg for a cigarette – although I will not try to contrive those situations.

6 / My correspondence with Radomir and Mileta

We asked Radomir and Mileta to write to us every week about their experiences. I left them with stamps, envelopes and addresses, and there has been a steady trickle of letters. Once I have collected the translations, I will be able to react to their news, and send them fresh questions.

Radomir is taking his task very seriously, and writes to me every week. His moods can be very different from day to day, which is clearly noticeable in his letters. Mileta is a good correspondent, too, despite his inability to talk. It is my intention to use these letters in the film. I am especially curious about Radomir's memories of the flight from Jakes: how much does he remember, and how precisely will he be able to write about it? The film might feature Radomir reading his letter about the flight out loud. Mileta could 'get his voice back' if the film can somehow bring to life the thoughts he has confided in his letters (and, in addition, in his notebook). This will hopefully allow the viewers to gain insight into Radomir and Mileta's inner worlds.

The characters in the film

RADOMIR is a tall, skinny man with a thick moustache and a cap on his head, his mouth practically toothless. One of the most active members of the group, he was always trying to talk to me about his return to Bosnia: together, he and Mileta are campaigning for their repatriation. Radomir has the most consistent story to tell about the things that happened on the flight from Bosnia. He says he is married and has two children. His mental illness was caused by a coming together of circumstances after a traumatic experience in the army. In addition, he has now developed diabetes. Radomir does not know exactly what is wrong with him but he suffers frequent hallucinations.

MILETA is a very special man. Born in 1962, he is two years younger than I am. He is unable to talk, but knows how to write. According to Vesna, our interpreter, he expresses himself well in his writing, in a style which is customary in the countryside he comes from. His greatest wish, too, is to return to Bosnia, maybe even to be involved in some simple labour on the land again. His file makes mention of schizophrenia, but also talks of autism; and his hearing is supposed to be weak. Erszébet, a psychiatrist involved with the group, has heard him talk, but after the prolonged lack of contact with the outside world he has probably forgotten how to.

ERSZEBET is a psychiatrist who works at the refugee camp one day a week. On Friday afternoons she makes her round on the closed ward, doing what she can. She does not speak Serbo-Croat, so one of the patients, János, has to interpret for her: he comes from Vojvodina, a Hungarian-speaking region in Serbia. Her visits consist of a chat here and there, lots of hugs and the occasional examination. In her opinion, it is of the utmost importance that the Fools return to their homeland – if only so they can be looked after by people who speak their language.

PAL SZABÓ was the first psychiatrist to care for the Fools when they arrived in Debrecen in 1997. He soon came to the conclusion that several members of the group should probably not have been classified as psychiatric patients and for many of them he decided to reduce levels of medication, to see if his theory would be supported. Meanwhile, he arranged for the Fools to be allowed to go wherever they wanted within the camp and made sure they received phone cards so they could make contact with their families back home. Another thing he did at that time was set up a chess team, which Mileta was a member of. However, the authorities in charge of the camp felt threatened by his dynamic approach, and put a stop to his activities. They wanted to keep the Fools under lock and key, rather than allow them to roam the streets of Debrecen, or play football with the other refugees in the camp. From time to time he comes to visit Mileta to give him a game of chess.

THE PANDUREVICS (MOMIR, FATHER and CEDO) are Radomir's family back home in Bosnia. Radomir's brother Momir is a large man, who works as a prison guard in his hometown of Pale. He knows his brother is in Hungary and receives letters from him on a regular basis; he even speaks to him on the phone from time to time. Despite all this, Momir has never made an effort to go and visit Radomir in Hungary. He is unclear about his reasons; all we know is that travelling to Hungary requires a visa, so it is not straightforward. Momir tells us he is frequently in touch with the psychiatric institute in Jakes to ask them if Radomir could be allowed to return.

CVIJO and BILJENA ZELINCEVIC are the psychiatrists currently in charge of the clinic in Jakes; they were not around when the Fools were evacuated in 1992. At the moment, they are very busy with the redevelopment of the clinic, putting up a number of small residential buildings in a modern style, painted in a range of colours. Would they allow the Fools to return here? "It is not our responsibility to get them back," they say. They point at a building which has not been renovated yet: "that would be the only place we could put them up," they joke.

MIODRAG BOJKOVIC is the psychiatrist who oversaw the evacuation of the Fools. When we go to meet him, he is waiting for us in the snow. He looks old and frail; I link arms with him, afraid he could slip and fall at any moment. After some hesitating, he embarks on his story. Bussing the Fools out to Hungary was meant to give them a safe place to stay during the worst of the war. After he had seen them over the border, he returned, thinking they would be alright. On his return, the Serbs accused him of collaborating with the enemy. From that time on, he has been held in very low esteem in his own country, which has been hard to bear. His wife shows us a letter from the UN, written during the aftermath of the war, which is supposed to clear his reputation.



Forgotten Fools

Report of a research trip

Our documentary FORGOTTEN FOOLS will be largely shaped by the trajectory of our research trip of February 2005. There might be some last minute changes, but the film plan will be based on the report of our trip. [Frans van Erkel]

What went before

In January 2004, I, Tijn Sadée, went out on what seemed like a straightforward assignment. It was a report on war victims who, after fleeing countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq and Sierra Leone, had ended up in Hungary, a remote and unlikely corner of Europe for refugees. After receiving EU membership, Hungary has been expected to meet the demands made of all EU countries, which includes accepting a certain quota of refugees. An old Soviet barracks was converted for the purpose, and ringed with high fencing. On the day of my arrival, shivering Asians and Africans were pacing up and down in the snow, anxiously waiting for text messages from the people smugglers outside the camp. After a day with them, my notepad was full – it seemed a regular story, ready for tomorrow's paper.

"There's one thing we forgot," said the superintendent of the camp, as we were saying goodbye. "We have a closed ward, where we're housing our fools from Bosnia. You haven't seen that yet." This casual remark turned my ready-made story into a complex drama.

With the dusk setting in outside, we returned to the central courtyard. "Up there, behind those bars, that's where they are," pointed the superintendent. And that is how I got to meet Radomir, Mileta, Jela, Bahrija, Momir, Dragica and about 20 others. Some just gave me dazed looks, drugged by their medication. Others seemed manic, jumping up and down around me and shouting in their eagerness to tell me the stories of their lives. They all looked unkempt and neglected, as if they had arrived earlier that day after an arduous journey over difficult terrain: their clothes torn, their faces covered in bloody scabs, their shoelaces untied, their bodies stinking of sweat. In the sleeping quarters the rough, rickety beds were unmade and the latrines were sending out a pervasive stench.

During all the commotion, one member of the group, a man of barely forty, remained completely calm, stolidly continuing with his one activity, a deliberate pacing up and down in the hallway, with measured steps. Down to the window and back again, endlessly repeated.

"That's Vedad," said one of the nurses. "He's been walking up and down in the hall ever since he's been in Hungary." "And how long has that been?" I asked. "Nearly thirteen years," she replied.

Forgotten Fools (Lost in Europe)

One year later – a reconstruction in scenes

February 2005

Day 1 / The camp

Our first shock comes from seeing Vedad: he is still pacing the hallway, just as he was doing a year ago. His laces are still undone, the lines in his face slightly deeper. They call him ‘the rocker’. Momir Elek, the patient whose picture appeared with the newspaper report last year, has died, we are told.

We would like a quiet first day, mainly to observe, without asking too many questions. Our intention is to gain the patients’ trust, then see what tomorrow brings. But things do not go as planned: as soon as the barred gate has been unlocked to let us in, all hell breaks loose. “Ever since we announced your visit several days ago, they’ve been restless,” one of the nurses says. “Remember, they never get visitors.”

Ivo, a man with a big pimple on his nose, begins to tell the story of his life. Radomir Pandurevic, a tall man with a jaunty moustache, attaches himself to us. The eldest member of the group is in a rusty wheelchair, which makes terrible creaking noises. He is covered in blood from scratching an old wound. Jela, a woman dressed in the black clothing worn by widows, is leaning against the wall of the hallway. She must be sixty, but the look in her eyes is still full of fire.

We have arrived at an inconvenient moment: the nurses announce it is time for everyone to go for therapy. The Fools come slinking out of their sleeping quarters and form a queue by a glass window, behind which nurses are seated. ‘Therapy’ turns out to consist of administering medication, and, more importantly, handing out cigarettes – each patient gets four a day. Once a month, stocks of these are topped up by a delegate from the Bosnian Embassy in Budapest. “That’s the only thing the embassy will do for these people,” comments Hungarian psychiatrist Erszébet, who has just arrived. She is nicknamed ‘the mama’ by the patients, although she cannot even speak their language. “But we understand each other, through gestures and eye contact,” says Erszébet. She has a full-time job in town; her weekly visits at the camp are made on a voluntary basis.

After ‘therapy’ is over, the patients retire to their rooms, giving Erszébet a chance to tell us what she knows about their backgrounds. Her story is a mixture of snatches of information passed on by other carers, by the patients themselves and by the authorities of the southern Hungarian town of Pécs, which lies close to the border with Croatia. It was there that customs officials discovered a bus full of Bosnians in July 1992, accompanied by a psychiatrist. The driver had disappeared. The war between Bosnia and Croatia had broken out some time before, and it was not the first time refugees had arrived in the area – but it proved particularly difficult to make arrangements for this group of people. They were not carrying passports, most of them were psychotic and some of them turned out to be deaf-mute. Initially, they were put up in Hotel Laterum in Pécs, next in a nearby refugee camp in the town of Nagyatád – where they spent the next two years. A few of the group died in the camp, from illnesses or old age, and two – Redzep and Bozica – had a baby, which was taken away from them by the Hungarian authorities because the couple was not considered capable of raising a child. (The girl, now thirteen, was adopted by a Hungarian family – the parents never saw her again.)

Two years later, the Nagyatád camp was closed down and the Fools ended up in Debrecen, near the border with Rumania and the Ukraine. They arrived in their new surroundings in the middle of the night. The carers who received them were barely given any information about their new

charges. Since that time, nothing much has changed about the Fools' circumstances. From their largely forgotten corner of the camp, they look down on the courtyard and the former barracks, where Romany refugees from Kosovo and war victims from Africa and Asia while away their time, in the hope of securing passage to some western European destination.

Apart from deliveries of cigarettes and coffee, the diplomats at the Bosnian embassy in Budapest have declared themselves 'unable to help'. They argue that there are no provisions for the Fools back in Bosnia, and that their families cannot be traced. The 1995 signing of the Dayton treaty, intended to bring peace to the region, has not changed their point of view. By talking to the patients, psychiatrist Erszébet and two of the nurses have managed to get a bit of an idea of what happened to them back in Bosnia. The stories about falling bombs in the night of 1992, and about the bus in which they started their wanderings recur frequently enough to be believed. As far as their Hungarian carers can make out, the patients started off from Jakes, where they had been in a 'reputable clinic in former Yugoslavia'. Not all the patients' stories are given credit, however: the medication they are on and the frequent hallucinations they suffer may be interfering with their ability to remember things accurately. Now that so many years have passed, however, it seems that finding out exactly what happened is no longer that important. What matters is to keep the patients as well looked after as the scant resources will allow; there is no money for new furniture or equipment, including materials that might be used for play therapy. Erszébet and the nurses have to make do, but they manage to go about their work with a lot of kindness and affection. A sense of humour is what keeps them going.

Later on, Radomir pulls us to the dormitory which he shares with five others. In a bed by the window, which is covered in frost, a patient is lying huddled against a radiator. He does not show himself at all that day, or the next. Radomir opens a drawer in his bedside cupboard and produces a pile of papers and photographs. "This is my brother," he says. "Go and find him! He lives in Pale. And tell him Radomir is angry with him because he hasn't come to get me." Mileta appears from around a corner. "He's been pretending to be deaf-mute for years," one of the other patients teases. Mileta chases her away. He wants to play a game of chess; he goes to his cupboard and gets out his board and pieces.

"Radomir and Mileta are the ones who are most preoccupied with the wish to go back to Bosnia," says Erszébet. "Radomir gets very aggressive sometimes, and threatens to kill everyone." So far, he has not actually been physically violent with anyone. One of the other patients, however, killed a fellow patient in the bathroom, three years ago. Erszébet: "We are still convinced it was an accident. But he had to spend three years in prison. He is back on the ward now. He doesn't talk much."

A list of the patients' names is pinned to the wall of the nurses' room. Scanning the surnames, Vesna, our interpreter, concludes the Fools come from all the different parts that used to make up Yugoslavia. Vesna, himself an emigrant from Serbia, draws our attention to the irony of the situation. "It's absurd, this forgotten group of people sitting here in total isolation, representing Yugoslavia as it used to be – without quarrelling!"

Day 2 / The camp

On the second day of our visit we arrive with a blackboard and some chalk for Bahrija, who makes beautiful drawings. For Mileta and Radomir we have brought paper, envelopes and stamps: we would like them to write to us over the next few months, to let us know how they are doing. When we ask them to describe both the good and the bad feelings they might have, Radomir gives us a sceptical look. "What good feelings?" he sneers. (During the following weeks, letters arrive regularly.)

Radomir has taken his 'task' more seriously than we thought he would. Any letter describing a bad day is entitled 'Black Chronicle'; the more cheerful ones start off with 'White Chronicle'. "Look at this," says Erszébet. She is showing us a letter written by Mileta, addressed to the

Bosnian embassy, begging for help. Mileta has written to them countless times; Erszébet posts his letters for him.

Redzep, whose child was taken from him, comes up to us, carrying some documents. He tells us about the flight from the clinic in Jakes. “It was raining very hard that night. Doctor Miodrag Bojkovic put us on the bus and brought us to Hungary. When he said goodbye to us, he cried.” Doctor Bojkovic did the right thing, according to Redzep. “He is a hero. We had to flee, the clinic was being bombed!” Redzep claims he is not ill at all. “I’m staying here for Bozica, we have a child together. I am a Muslim, she is an orthodox Christian from Serbia. That’s why we can’t get married.” Redzep wants to go back to Zenica, in central Bosnia. “I’m no angel, I spent years in prison. But I’m not a drinker! They love me in Zenica, I was checking tickets in the cinema there. I want to go back, maybe there’s an old people’s home.”

In the afternoon, we retire to a quiet place with Mileta. Vesna, our interpreter, writes our questions down for him; he responds immediately by writing down his answers for us in neat capitals. Small, skinny and dressed in a ragged jumper, he looks like a broken man. He is watching us, his eyes wide open.

“Why are you called ‘the chess player?’”

Mileta: “I win every game when we have a tournament here in the camp. I play chess to relieve the boredom.”

“Where are your parents?”

“My mother died in a car accident in Sarajevo, in 1985.” (A month later, Mileta returns to this subject in one of his letters to us, to correct himself. “I’m sorry, but I told you that my mother died in Sarajevo. That was not right: the accident happened in a town in Serbia.”)

With both parties diligently writing away, this interview on paper is running very smoothly – in the course of the afternoon, Mileta’s story unfolds itself chunk by chunk. He cannot remember his father. He is hungry. “I was never hungry in Jakes.” Another comment: “If I have to stay here much longer, I will be too old to get married.” He, too, remembers that the group fled by bus while the clinic was being bombed. “At the Croatian-Hungarian border-crossing at Báracs I was given 100 forint (40 eurocents) by a customs official. I bought some beer with that.”

“There’s been peace in Bosnia for ten years now,” Mileta tells us. We ask him how he knows. He tells us they sometimes listen to a Serbian radio station. One day, they even heard a report on the radio about the reconstruction of their old clinic. “You have to help us!” Mileta writes, in huge letters. “I have to get back to Jakes.” We ask him why it has to be Jakes, but he does not answer. Later that day, Radomir tells us he wants to go back to Bosnia to die there. “One day they’ll come and get me, I’m sure.” Night is starting to fall; just before we say our goodbyes, Radomir gives us the papers with the information about his family in Pale. “My brother’s name is Momir; and tell him that I’m very angry with him!”

Day 3 / The embittered psychiatrist

Before we leave for Bosnia to track down Radomir’s family and visit the clinic in Jakes, we have a brief meeting with the Hungarian psychiatrist Pal Szabó. The nurses in the camp have given us his telephone number: he was the first to take care of the Fools when they arrived in Debrecen. Szabó is a composed and confident man, who speaks to us in perfect English. What he tells us over a cup of coffee is upsetting.

“They arrived on the train, in the middle of the night. They were remarkably calm and disciplined.

There was no diagnostic information to accompany them. I had a ten-minute conversation on the phone with the doctor who had looked after them in their previous camp, in Nagyatád – that was all.”

“I soon learned that some of the group did not have any clinical symptoms. Most of the women among them weren’t ill at all. Simple and illiterate people, maybe – but in the villages that they came from they would have functioned normally.”

“Jela told me that she hadn’t come from Jakes at all, but that she had got on the bus when it pas-

sed through her village on its journey, because the war had arrived there too. Others, like Bahrija and Redzep, ended up in the bus in the same way – they aren't ill."

Szabó lost no time in devising an ambitious programme for the patients. Geared towards rehabilitation, it was meant to help them get out of the camp as quickly as possible. "The first thing I did was reduce their medication by half. Nothing untoward happened – it was perfectly safe. Next, I arranged for telephone cards, paper and stamps, so they could make contact with the world outside. I encouraged Momir and Mileta to join the chess team in the camp. We would go to tournaments in the area around Debrecen, and the Hungarian players there didn't notice anything out of the ordinary about them."

Eight months later, Szabó was told to leave. "I was too ambitious. They told me my reports had been in late, and that was the reason they were firing me: nonsense! It was a very frustrating experience: if only I had been given more time, I feel I would have been able to rehabilitate the majority of them after 18 months. Someone like Mileta is a good example. You can tell from the way he plays chess that there's nothing wrong with his intellect, he likes to communicate, and he is capable of loving others and of being loved. But now it's been ten years, and it's clear we can't expect anything from the Bosnian embassy. That's just full of vain bureaucrats who are so full of themselves that they haven't got the energy to actually do anything. While it's clear that there must be legal grounds for condemning the situation: how could it be allowed to keep people all that time, on a closed ward, in another country? Their lives are an extension of a war which ended long ago."

Szabó is especially angry that, because of the lack of funds, János has had to take on the role of interpreter for Erszébet. "Can you imagine, your fellow patient translating your innermost feelings for your specialist?"

Szabó is still convinced that he could get many of the patients to function normally again within a year. "It is a scandal that they are still here. Of course it would be best if they could return to Bosnia, where people speak their language. Here, they are existing in a sort of coma."

Day 4 / Look out for mines! – wasting away in Pale

We continue our journey through Bosnia, in search of Radomir's family. Along the main road leading to the capital of Sarajevo, the war has left its scars in many places. In the village of Kulina, some of the perpetrators have left a scrawled message on the wall of a ruined house: four Cyrillic c's, a symbolic reference to a nationalist slogan which proclaims that 'only unity can save the Serbs'. The wind is chasing snow through the skeletal remains of the local Catholic church, another building to have fallen foul of the war. Kulina used to be inhabited by Bosnian Croats, but the war has turned it into a ghost town: those of the older generation who survived the war cannot bear to go back, and their children do not have money for reconstruction.

The ethnic violence of the war years cost hundreds of thousands of lives. The Dayton peace treaty of 1995 left Bosnia divided into a Serbian republic and a federation of Muslims and Croats. Now, nearly ten years later, Bosnia is being consumed by a moral crisis. The newspapers are full of articles about corrupt politicians in Banja Luka and Sarajevo. In name, Bosnia is governed by the international community, but it, too, seems powerless or unwilling to make real changes. The mafia is everywhere and motels and petrol stations have become its latest tools in attempts to avoid taxation. The road to Sarajevo along the Croatian-Bosnian border, only 350 kilometres long, has more than a hundred petrol stations, but hardly anybody uses them: the pumps mostly serve to whitewash money.

The world around us is white: snow has been falling for days. From time to time, there are signs by the side of the road warning us of mines left behind by the war. We arrive in Pale, which is located just outside Sarajevo and stop at a petrol station to ask for directions. The owner has rented part of his building to an arms dealer: cheerful green hunting coats are displayed in the window, but the weapons shown for sale alongside, a Colt Double Eagle and a Sig Sauer P228, will not be used to hunt pheasants or deer. It was from the mountain slopes around Pale that the Serbian soldiers besieged Sarajevo during the war, and the area has remained a hotbed of Serbian nationa-

lism, all but isolating the inhabitants, who have ended up feeling like the pariahs of the Balkan. “The Pandurevic family?” The owner of the petrol station looks at the note with the name and address of Radomir’s brother Momir, and tells us we are very close: it will be the big house at the end of the path which lies a hundred metres down the road on the left. Five minutes later we are face to face with Momir, who looks like a well-fed version of his brother. There is no need for lengthy introductions: as soon as we have mentioned the words ‘Debrečen’ and ‘Jakes’ we are invited in – Momir seems relieved, as if he has long been hoping we would come.

Over the next few hours, we are joined by Momir’s wife and children. We are served ploska, homemade brandy, from a wooden jug which has been used by successive generations in the family since 1928. Stumbling over his words, Momir begins to tell us about his brother. It is clearly an emotional subject: from time to time he has to turn his face away, besieged by feelings of guilt. Watching the footage of Radomir on the screen of our camera makes him feel even worse: “My God, he has got so thin! What are they feeding him there?” Momir’s daughter Biljana, a twenty-year old economics student, wants to look at the images, too. She hardly knows her uncle: the last time she saw him, she was a toddler. Biljana does not get a lot of studying done. “What’s the point?” she asks. “There aren’t any jobs here.” Instead, she works as a skiing instructor in the nearby ski resort of Jahorina. “That’s the only thing happening here now. Other than that, the war has pretty much destroyed Pale’s economy. The metal works factory which used to make parts for Mercedes has gone bankrupt.” Momir, who works as a prison guard, is happy that his daughter is giving skiing lessons. “At least she has managed to stay away from drugs,” he says. “There is so much of that now: most of the prisoners I see are drug dealers.” After a pause, he adds: “I don’t know what we could have done for Radomir – things are just as miserable here, really.”

After Momir’s wife and his son Bojan, a police officer, have come in, we are shown photographs in the family albums. There are pictures of Radomir as a cheerful young man, friends by his side, taken on what is now the Croatian coast. Another one shows Radomir in a chef’s hat. Momir tells us that after training as a cook, Radomir worked at the famous Sveti Stefan hotel, on the beautiful Sveti Stefan peninsula off the coast of Montenegro, a resort frequented by royalty and celebrities like Michael Jackson. We mention that Radomir talked to us about a wife and twin sons, but Momir assures us his brother was never married. “That’s the hallucinations...” (A letter from Radomir some time later contains complaints about his hallucinations, letting us know that they are getting worse.) “Things were fine until he joined the army. Something happened then, and we’ve never been able to find out what. He was very nervous when he returned, and things quickly got worse. That’s how he ended up in Jakes.”

Momir feels that those who run the clinic in Jakes are responsible for repatriating Radomir and the others. He has been in touch with the clinic several times to make enquiries, and feels that that is all he can do for his brother. “But they don’t take us seriously,” he says.

In the late-afternoon, Momir’s son Bojan drives us up into the mountains in a minibus, through very deep snow, to the hut where Radomir’s father lives with his eldest son Cedo. The hut is on the slopes of the Trebevic mountain. When we arrive, Radomir’s father is just making his way up the path through the snow after putting his sheep in the stable.

We are served more ploska. Radomir’s father is 75, with strong features and a chiselled jaw. Does he agree he looks like Clint Eastwood? “Never heard of him,” is the answer.

Cedo sits down, too – he is a bad-tempered, bitter-looking man in his fifties. Together, father and son look at the images of Radomir on the camera screen. Several times, Radomir’s father asks if Radomir is being given enough to eat. Other than that, he is silent, his gaze wandering. The bottle of ploska is emptied to the last drop. Cedo says, decidedly: “We’ll go and get him. He can come and live with us, on the mountain.” But his father shakes his head disapprovingly: “We can’t look after him. Grammy is dead. And we have our hands full looking after the animals.” He adds: “Radomir was a good man. Until something went wrong with him in the army. We went to get him from the police station, he’d gone completely crazy. Nobody ever told us what had brought it on. Then he ended up in Jakes. That’s how it went.”

Day 5 / Chronicle of destruction

We have an afternoon meeting with Cvijko Zelincevic, the present director of the clinic in Jakes, in the restaurant of a motel in Modrica, a stone's throw away from Jakes. There are four packets of cigarettes on the table when we arrive, which will disappear over the course of our interview: Zelincevic is a heavy smoker. We spend hours drinking, eating and listening to his story. He uses the back of his paper placemat to draw a sketch of the situation during the summer of 1992, when the clinic suddenly ended up on the frontline.

"The clinic consisted of four sites, spread over an area with a perimeter of a few kilometres. One building was used for the worst cases, another for the lightest, and so on. And then the war started and the frontline ended up running right through the grounds, so one half of the complex was on Serbian territory and the other half on Bosnian-Croatian territory."

The war destroyed the clinic, which had long had a reputation for excellence. Zelincevic's wife Biljena had been working at the institute as a psychiatrist. "We fled to a nearby village together. But my wife insisted on going back to her patients. Being a Serbian, the new situation meant she only had access to the two buildings which were in the area occupied by the Serbs."

"The Croats and the Bosnjaks (the Bosnian Muslims) cleared one of the buildings on their half to make it into a temporary barracks. They brought all the patients to the other building on that side." It turns out our Fools were in the overcrowded building. Dramatic months were to follow. At least 70 patients died, of exhaustion and starvation. Zelincevic recalls how, in despair, they ended up wrapping the bodies in sheets for hasty burials in the grounds.

Later, in 1999, the international community ordered digging work to be done in the grounds; it had been rumoured there was a mass grave. The bodies of the patients were discovered.

Zelincevic: "I tried to convince them the bodies belonged to patients who had died of natural causes, not to victims of executions. But the media had got their teeth into it by then and nobody would listen."

During that period a local journalist named Vid Blagojevic came to do a report on the situation at the clinic, which included some footage of the state that things were in at that point. Later that day, we are shown a videotape with a copy of the film he made: shocking images of neglected patients, some sitting surrounded by debris in the ruined buildings, staring into space, others wandering around the halls and grounds, often half-naked. Zelincevic points at one of the images, showing a man on a bed. "He's not around any more. He poisoned himself with the fertilizer we used on the tobacco farm.

They used to make their own cigarettes at the clinic."

"It was an apocalypse," says Zelincevic, adding with pride that his wife was one of the few carers who stuck by the patients. The others all fled. "She's a tough lady, my wife." Zelincevic himself fought on the Serbian side until mid-1993. After that, he was appointed director of the ruined clinic. "It was completely destroyed. Bit by bit, we started on the process of rebuilding." He and his wife, who is the psychiatric director, now run the clinic together.

Another doctor who was courageous enough to stay with the patients was Miodrag Bojkovic.

Zelincevic: "He was stuck in the building on the Bosnian-Croatian side. I couldn't tell you how he got that busload of patients out, right through the firing line. Ask him yourself. He lives around here, in Modrica."

Day 6 / Reconstruction

The mosque of Modrica is being rebuilt – its minaret is still wrapped in plastic sheeting, piles of bricks are standing around awaiting action. Modrica is now a part of the Bosnian Serbian republic. Local authorities are working very hard to recreate an interest in the multi-ethnic past, supported by a EURFOR observation team. Since January, European troops have been stationed in Bosnia in a supervisory role.

The EUFOR post is currently manned by six young Portuguese soldiers. In the pubs of Modrica they jokingly call it the Big Brother House. “We are here to observe and report about the state of affairs,” says Captain Pedro Pires da Silva. “We don’t take weapons when we go out on our patrols. We don’t want the children here to be confronted with that sort of image.” The stint in Modrica is his fifth tour of duty in Bosnia. “I see much less fighting these days. It’s corruption, drug smuggling and people trafficking we’re dealing with now.”

Just outside Modrica, Biljena Zelincevic is waiting to welcome us to the main building of the clinic in Jakes. In the footage of the clinic during the war, she came across as a beautiful, proud woman – elegant, energetic and intelligent. She is no less impressive now, her beauty and energy undiminished by 13 years of turmoil. She precedes us across the grounds to give us a tour of the institute. We come past buildings where patients spend their days confined to their beds and past a therapy ward, where patients are knitting socks, making pillows and doing drawings. One patient has filled a large sheet of paper with scrawls representing the Serbian nationalist symbol, the four c’s. Others are watching TV: a news programme is reporting on the Milosevic trial at the international court in The Hague.

“In addition to the group in Hungary, we lost track of 150 patients,” Biljena tells us. “It was a very difficult search. All the archives were in a building which burnt down.” She prefers not to talk too much about the past. “We are rebuilding things,” she says. She points at a deserted building where renovation has not started yet. “That would be the only place we could put up the Hungarians,” she grins. Quickly, she adds: “There is no room for them here. We have 60 people on our waiting list.”

On a nearby farm, the clinic has organised a special project for patients who are close to rehabilitation. A group of ten men and women live together, looking after the animals and cooking their own food. The homemade sausages and brandy which we are served taste delicious.

One of our questions has remained unanswered so far: what do the Zelincevics do with phone calls from people like Momir Pandurevic? We tell them that Momir told us he has often been in touch, but to no avail, and ask them why that is. Cvijo Zelincevic: “I’m sorry, but that’s a lie. The patients here had been left to their fates long before the war started. Their families never came to see them. Everyone who is interested can come and visit here, and obtain information – but no one ever shows up. Most other people in Bosnia have lived in terrible circumstances too since the war. Sometimes I think that the world our patients live in is a better one than ours.”

In the centre of Modrica, on the corner where the mosque is being built, Miodrag Bojkovic is waiting for us. It was his decision, one summer’s night in 1992, which led to the situation that has brought us here. He is a fragile old man, who is suffering from cancer. We walk to his house across the frozen puddles which have formed in the potholes in the road. He holds on to us for support.

Once inside his house, a cramped apartment in a concrete building which dates back to communist days, his wife serves tea. A letter is lying on the table, ready to be shown to us. “Read!” says Bojkovic. The letter is signed by a highly-placed representative of UNHCR, a relief organisation for refugees. “To whom it may concern, (...) Mr Bojkovic’s humanitarian concern and help for these people has been highly appreciated. Thank you very much.” Bojkovic takes the letter with him wherever he goes. It is proof that he did the right thing.

He tells us about the days leading up to the night of the flight. “We were washing our clothes in huge cooking pots. The patients hung them out to dry in the grounds: quite dangerous, because it made us an easy target from the air. But what was I to do? It was the middle of summer, I

couldn't keep everyone in all the time.”

“There were 300 patients in our building. Some fled of their own accord. The clinic had a bus – I filled it with patients and got into my car. We set off in convoy. Those who remained behind were killed by the Serbs when they regained control of the area.”

“We drove to the north, in the direction of Bosanski Brod, on the Bosnian side of the Bosnian-Croatian border. There, we had to wait for three days – a day care centre was made available for us, so we had somewhere to sleep. About ten ordinary people joined our group. In order to convince the authorities that they were ‘crazy’ too, and had to stay with us, I had to make up psychiatric diagnoses for them.”

“Once in Croatia, we managed to get a bigger bus, that we could all fit into. I was an old wreck. The lights were broken. We had to negotiate long and hard with the driver before he agreed to take us to Pécs, in Hungary.”

Bojkovic stayed in Pécs for a month, to look after his patients, then he joined his family, which had fled to Belgrade. They went back to Modrica when things were relatively stable again around there. On his return, it turned out there were more hard times in store for him. “I was interrogated by the Serbian police. Coming back alive makes you look suspicious. They blamed me for fleeing with the patients – even when half of them were Muslims! I should have stayed and looked after wounded Serbian soldiers, ‘our own boys’, they told me. Since then, I have been held in very low esteem around here. My sons never returned to Modrica for that reason.” “He did what a doctor needs to do,” says his wife. “He stayed with his patients.”

Day 7 / Without a trace

We have come to Pécs to visit Hotel Laterum, where the Fools were first given shelter when they entered Hungary on 13 July 1992. At the time, it was a socialist hotel for labourers, but the present management has turned it into a sparkling new establishment geared towards guests attending conferences in this majestic university town. When we ask around in the hotel lobby, there is nobody who can remember the Fools.

In Nagyatád, about a hundred kilometres further on, the refugee camp where the group stayed for the first couple of years has been completely destroyed – not a trace of it has remained. The rickety bus chartered by Miodrag Bojkovic halfway through the flight cannot be tracked down either, nor can its chauffeur.

Seven days later, we drive back in the direction of Budapest. In the next few days, the first letters from Mileta and Radomir arrive. Mileta writes he wants to get married. “But I haven’t found a girl yet.” One of Radomir’s ‘black chronicles’ – apparently written in a hallucinatory state – talks about crimes he committed in the army. “I will turn myself in at the court in The Hague. I am guilty. I broke the oath of secrecy.” One of the ‘white chronicles’ reads: “Here, I have friends, fortunately. What would I do without them? We are waiting for help. I would like to go back to Bosnia by train. But if that’s not possible, I’ll be happy to go by car or bus.”

Back in Pale to pick up supplies

We are back at Radomir's father's farm, high up in the mountains around Pale. The entire family has congregated in the warm kitchen to discuss the possibility of Radomir's return home. According to the eldest son, they could look after him on the farm, but his father feels less sure: Radomir needs a lot of care and attention, there are no psychiatric clinics around Pale, and returning to Jakes does not seem to be an option yet. After a lot of arguing back and forth, and more concerned comments from Radomir's father about Radomir's weight, we finally say our goodbyes.

Going back down the snowy mountain in the dark is a perilous undertaking. Our bus sets off carefully, slipping and sliding along. In the back of the bus is a large suitcase full of food, clothes and cigarettes, given to us by the Pandurevic family to take back to Radomir.

In conclusion

We are hoping our documentary will stimulate viewers to ask themselves certain questions. How would I have behaved as one of the protagonists in this story? What sort of choices would I have made, had I been in Miodrag Bojkovic's position – or in Radomir's family's position? What should I do now that I have seen this film?

The answers to these questions will be very personal. For us, things became clear as we were leaving the closed ward in Debrecen after our first day there. Dark had fallen as we walked down the stairs, and the snow was coming down outside. The stairwell was still resounding with the noise of the barred metal gate being shut behind us by one of the nurses. We looked at each other and said the same thing: "If we don't make this film, no one will do it..."

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