

Dear friend,

I was a frightened and bewildered eight-year-old when my family fled to England. Our lives had been torn apart by the Kosovan war. When I stepped off the plane in Manchester, I had no home to go to, I couldn't speak a word of English and I knew nobody.



But we were not alone. The kind people from Refugee Action welcomed us so warmly. There was a private room for us to go to with phones, so we could tell our relatives we were safe. I remember the table piled high with food and the play area for us children.

When I was very little, Kosovans and Serbians lived in peace. Then there were massive tanks in the streets as I walked to school. One day I woke up and they'd set fire to the village near my town. People who used to be our friends and neighbours were shooting us dead in the streets. We used to hide from the bombings in my great-grandparents' basement. People made big holes in the walls, so you could run through the neighbours' houses without running into the street. Homes were burned down and people shot. Women were raped and children murdered.

The men formed an army because they wanted to protect us, but they weren't trained soldiers and didn't have the right equipment — many were never seen again. One day, I saw some men on the balcony with my father. My little brother started crying, "Daddy, Daddy, Daddy," and wouldn't stop. Mum brought us out, so Dad could comfort him. Later I learned they were trying to recruit my father, but my brother's tears stopped him going. We left the next day.

We headed for the Macedonian border. Massive queues of desperate people were clamouring to cross. I nearly suffocated in the crush and we barely ate for three days. Finally, we made it across. But my brother urgently needed medical treatment, so we boarded a flight for the UK as victims of war.

I'll never forget how welcome Refugee Action made us feel. They arranged activities to help settle us in. Then they found a house for us and a school for me where I learned English. I worked hard and was good enough to be narrator in next year's Christmas play!

In secondary school I found friends and focused on my studies. By year 9 I was in the top set for everything. Despite this, my English teacher thought I should go for the lower tier GCSE exam but I was determined I could get a higher grade. I insisted on taking the harder exam and got an A*! I went on to study law and found a good job, but I wasn't fulfilled. I decided what I'd really like to do was immigration law.

Today, I work at the Citizens Advice Bureau helping refugees — I often direct them to Refugee Action. They are so traumatised. The Home Office is hostile to them and they're scared of what's going to happen. I tell them my story, encourage them and they calm down.

At the end of the day, the world is everybody's, it's just land and earth. I wish people could go where they want. It's not fair. People were more tolerant when I arrived but now it's harder. But there are people out there who help. There is Refugee Action.

Without them, I don't know where I'd be today. Now I'm doing what I can to help refugees, but it's not enough. That's why I wonder if you will help them too? By leaving a gift in your Will you can make sure Refugee Action is there to welcome and support other families in years to come, other frightened boys and girls. It really could transform their future. I know, because it made all the difference to me.

Elsa

PS If you think you may be able to help refugees like me in years to come, please fill in the form you'll find with this letter.