

STORY OF RETURN

SASHA AND SUNCICA



Since 2011, Danish Refugee Council has facilitated the return of displaced from minority families from Serbia to Prizren, Kosovo with funding from the British Embassy Pristina. Suncica and her husband Sasha are two of the many beneficiaries who were able to return to their birthplace as a result.

'It was a tough life in Serbia,' says Suncica. 'We were always moving from place to place, never able to stay anywhere for long because we couldn't pay the rent. We have three daughters and they are also struggling to provide for their families. We didn't want to be a burden for them. When the British Embassy Pristina rebuilt our house here in Prizren we finally had an opportunity to come home.'

The place where Sasha and Suncica were born is one of the oldest neighbourhoods in the historic centre of Prizren and has been twice destroyed; once during the conflict in 1999 and again during the riots in 2004. The houses are built in the style traditional of this area and due to their historic significance they are protected as cultural heritage. With British Embassy Pristina funding, the process has begun to restore and revive this remarkable neighbourhood. All reconstructions use traditional building styles, materials and original colours.





'It was a difficult decision to return, because we have no income here. Between my pension and Sasha's disability payments, we have to make do with 170 euro a month, but at least we have a roof over our heads here and a real home. We took good memories with us when we left Prizren. This is the place where we went to school and where I met Sasha. We were neighbours as children and have known each other almost all of our lives.'

Sasha and Suncica have been married for 40 years. *'In sickness and in health and with an anniversary gift every year for Suncica....that's the secret for staying together for so many years,'* says Sasha.

At the age of 60, Sasha has developed respiratory problems and can no longer manage physical work. To assist their reintegration, they received food and furniture packages from Danish Refugee Council after their return. Since then they have been relying on their neighbours for support.

'The last winter was very harsh and we were worried how we were going to cope. But then our neighbour who is Albanian gave us enough firewood so we could manage. We have not been able to pay him back yet. Even though he did not ask for money we want to pay him back, be independent and provide for ourselves,' says Suncica.

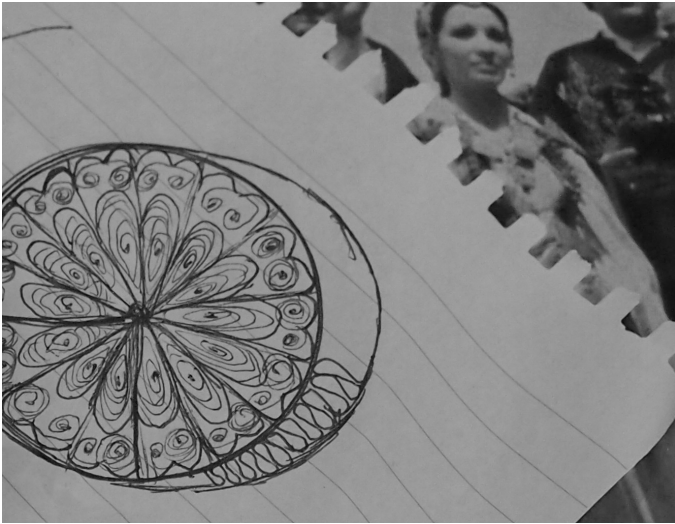
To make a small income for themselves, Sasha wants to use his skills as a filigree jewellery maker. When he was young, Sasha trained for 4 years to become a master at this traditional metalsmithing technique. To get him started his neighbour Lekë, who himself is a skilled artisan, lent him tools and some materials. Lekë is part of the Albanian Catholic minority in Prizren, which is famous for its workmanship of traditional filigree adornments.

'Sasha and Suncica are both creative people and I want to help Sasha to put his talent to good use. I have my own workshop at home and I could lend Sasha some tools. We also eat and play cards together and we take care of each other in this neighbourhood. Religion and ethnicity do not matter to us, only if you are good or bad people,' says Lekë.

With Lekë's help, Sasha started to sell some of his work to tourists who come to visit the fortress. *'I can't produce a lot of new pieces at the moment because I can't afford to buy materials, especially silver wire, and tools. If I had enough material, I could start exporting to Croatia where there is a larger market. All I need is a little help to get started.'*

While their life is difficult at times, both Suncica and Sasha agree that they are finally home, surrounded by both old and new friends.





To make this delicate jewellery, Sasha weaves silver threads together to form intricate lace-like designs. After many hours of curling and shaping these fine threads, the finished ornament is covered in solder dust and fired into one piece.

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