ambassadorial mantle, I sat on the floor and held the keyboard on my lap.

The children eagerly gathered around me as I sang, "Morning has broken, like the first morning . . ." Their foreheads relaxed, and smiles slowly spread across their faces. One sweetheart asked if she could kiss me. I nodded yes and held out my arms. The young divas surrounded me, smothering me with affection.

42. OUTSIDE: Waiting for Christmas

Back in Vienna, we faced a constant press of problems. They converged every Tuesday morning, as some twenty representatives from US federal agencies and our principal State Department officers gathered at the embassy for a "country team meeting." I encouraged the participants to discuss something from their week, even if it seemed not directly relevant to others. In an hour of reporting around the table, we put together a mosaic of US interests, often extending beyond Austria, since many of the attendees had responsibilities throughout the region.

Jean Christiansen, our immigration and naturalization officer, was a mature professional who had worked with dramatically diverse groups. She always responded to cruelty, whether perpetrated by Bosniaks, Croats, or Serbs. So I weighed her words carefully one Tuesday as she described a recent trip. She had interviewed Serb men kept for three years in a concrete silo without a roof, in bestial conditions. One described how, when his friend's head was smashed against the wall, the brains splattered all over him. "There are atrocities on all sides," concluded Jean.

Helena Finn, our public affairs officer, jumped in. She had served in two Muslim settings—Pakistan and Turkey—and she noted: "Our reports are that 90 percent of war crimes are committed by Serbs against Muslims."[2] Of course, that fact and Jean's statement were not mutually exclusive, but the political analysis was heating up.

Another officer, Mike, added more fuel, defending Jean. Mike was proud of his Greek Orthodox heritage, so, just like the Russians, he felt the Serbs were his cultural cousins. He wanted to be sure they were not slandered.

The officers, it seemed to me, were arguing political positions informed by their backgrounds. But finding people whose views were not colored by personal experience was difficult. Indeed, my eight years of theological studies and work on race relations in the US South were bedrock to my own outlook. If we four were facing difficulties in such a

circumscribed situation, it was easy to see why the international community was paralyzed not only by uneven competence but also by conflicting points of view.

At another team meeting, on 19 December 1995, we were passing around Christmas cookies as Jean took her turn reporting. She had just returned from a nightmarish task—interviewing inmates in a Serb-run concentration camp that was to be dismantled, according to provisions in the Dayton Accords.

The eight hundred men from eastern Bosnia in the camp were crawling with lice, Jean told us. Frigid water had been poured on their naked bodies outside for cruel "showers." "Those are the lucky ones," she said. Thousands of others had simply been shot and pushed into mass graves. Of those "lucky ones," she found forty-two who had been set aside for "special handling"—torture, beating, and starvation.

Jean explained that she had been charged with arranging for the immigration of 120 of the men to the United States. They would not be moved until late January, however, because of paperwork. This was Christmas, she explained, and no one would be in to process applications.

Not one of the people around our table registered a reaction. To be fair, her news came amid a string of reports on upcoming press events, elections results, and a dispute over food product labeling. But as I sat listening, I realized that this conversation could just as well have occurred fifty years earlier. In that moment, I glimpsed the psychology—the denial, really—of American diplomats who for years refused to act despite clear evidence of Nazi atrocities. Did they, too, hear repeated reports in their country team meetings?

Jean continued. Forty men were crammed into rooms only ten feet by ten feet. A plastic sack for the belongings of each man hung on a nail. There was no furniture. The men slept on the floor. As she interviewed them individually at a table set up in the room, the others waited outside, barefoot in the winter cold.

The meeting ended, and I asked Jean to come to my office. We telephoned authorities in Washington, insisting that they speed up the men's paperwork. A week later, Jean was away when I received a call from the government agency handling the account, to which my name was now attached. Could I guarantee that all arrangements were in place for the refugees once they left the camps? "Absolutely," I shot back, having no idea what arrangements the official was asking about. The prisoners, I was assured, would be transported immediately.

Even so, some months later, Jean Christiansen reported in another country team meeting that one of the Serb-run camps was again full. Several nations that had pledged to take the former prisoners in as refu-

gees had reneged. The men had been crowded into the worst camp, where they still waited.

43. INSIDE: Serb Exodus

For seventeen long months, US Ambassador John Menzies spent his nights in a sleeping bag on an army cot next to his desk. Accepting the assignment to Bosnia, he was risking his life for a thankless job. He and his few colleagues, a tight team, did the day-to-day work on the ground, while others flew in, detractors said, for photo ops.

Menzies was a hero to me. He'd come to Bosnia through Vienna, where my admiration had taken root. Reflecting my own impressions, Bosnian politicians described him to me as unusually honest and stable. He followed his own moral compass, even when that meant conflict with his superiors in Washington.

The ambassador had invited me to Bosnia several times. When I asked what I could bring, his answer was "space heaters." I put two in my bag. Always a gracious host, my friend accommodated me with an army cot and sleeping bag.

The ambassador also provided an escort and armored Humvee. As we drove through town, my gut tightened when we passed an old warning on a wall, with paint dripping from the large hand-painted letters: "Danger: Snipers." On that stretch of street, more than five hundred pedestrians had been picked off by marksmen in the surrounding hills. Of course, they were just a fraction of more than ten thousand Sarajevans who had been killed.

We continued our drive to the suburb of Dobrinja. Stretching in front of me were long, hand-dug ditches. My driver that morning was from the neighborhood, so I asked him about the trenches. "For soldiers?"

"No," he said in halting English, "for citizens." Through these shadow highways, residents of gutted and burned apartments had run back and forth, bent at the waist and lugging whatever they could to a safer place in the city.

Alongside the trenches was a sad procession of cars, trucks—anything with wheels to carry the mass of Serbs fleeing the capital. The road was clogged as far as I could see. Day after day, panicked families had piled onto trucks everything not bolted down: furniture, bedding, appliances, plumbing fixtures, even the bones of their ancestors.

"Where are you going?" I called out to a driver, through my interpreter.

"I don't know," the man responded.

Despite provisions in the peace agreement, Serbs in the Bosniak-Croat