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Second Kosovar family arrives in Albion Bela brothers tell of horrors seen as they escaped from home

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The second family sponsored by the Orleans Ecumenical Refugee Project arrived in Albion Wednesday. Two brothers, their wives and children have moved into a second house on Platt Street.

The brothers, Avdurrahim and Adem Bela, said they are thankful to have their families in the United States. They escaped the devastation caused by the Serbian military and police in Pristina and Kactanik, Kosovo, that followed when the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) assassinated the Serbian police chief.

Many of their friends, along with two cousins, did not escape the retaliation taken by the Serbs, they said. They opened a Macedonian newspaper for a visitor that had two pages of obituaries and said there are 45 people they knew who were killed by the Serbs and now lay in a mass grave in Kactanik.

According to the Associated Press, this same grave is now guarded by U.S. Marines and will be used as evidence of war crimes against civilians. Also, the AP translates the spelling of the town as Kacanik.

Project translator Cosmo Matuka helped with the discussion, often shaking his head sadly as he related what Avdurrahim or Adem said.



Brothers Avdurrahim and Adem Bela, their wives and children, are making a new life for their families in Albion.

(Photo by Karen Sampson)

It was important to Avdurrahim and Adem that they tell their stories and show newspaper photographs to their visitor. The pictures were of a make-shift morgue in a mosque and of the dead laying on the ground. Two pictures were of KLA soldiers.

They are two of seven brothers. One brother is in Germany, another is in Great Britain. The others are unaccounted for. They do not know where their two sisters and their families are.

Avdurrahim said in one day he buried five people he found along the road so their bodies would not be eaten by

wandering animals. He added there were many more bodies of people who tried to flee left in the mountains that were not buried.

"In my town, before the bombing started, there was danger," Avdurrahim said. "They came to find the KLA. They came in and it was dangerous."

"He left his village," Matuka said for Avdurrahim. "There was another village where he was hiding. The situation was bad because the Serbian chief of police was killed by the KLA."

Avdurrahim explained the "Serbian police" were neither a civilian nor military police

force but said they were "Slobodan Milosevic's police" and were accountable to him. These are the same police, the Associated Press has reported, that tortured civilians in Pristina, British investigators have found.

"He was looking for the KLA and the KLA killed him," Avdurrahim said.

"He took his wife and kids and they left," Matuka said, motioning toward Avdurrahim when he finished speaking.

Adem said the Serbian police chief was killed on March 28 in Kactanik. In retaliation, Adem said, the Serbian police went into a home and killed 13 people.

"It was a Muslim holiday, Barjram," Matuka translated. "They killed the people to take revenge. They killed an old man with one leg."

"On 28 March they killed two of our blood (cousins)," Avdurrahim said.

"March 28 he buried five people he picked up from the road," Matuka continued for him. "One was his nephew."

Adem took his family and fled that night, he said.

"They went up in the mountains for 10 days," Matuka related. "At night they went back into the village to get food. They walked 17 hours to get to the Macedonian border. The Macedonians turned them back into

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Kosovo.”

It was April 9 that 45 people were killed in Kactanik as they were fleeing to the mountains. Adem and his family saw some of the killing and burials.

“The Serbs put them in a tractor and put them in a Kosovar cemetery in a mass grave,” Adem said through Matuka.

The Associated Press has reported villagers left in Kactanik told British investigators up to 100 people lay in that mass grave. It had been described as a four-foot high mound of soil dumped by a bulldozer with 81 simple stakes.

“If it is a mass grave, we obviously need to do all the necessary investigation,” British Captain Vicky Wentworth told the AP. “It looks likely, but there is no evidence now.”

Adem and his family survived and made it to Macedonia by train.

“They (Serbs) were killing animals, horses and cows,” Matuka said for Adem. “He

was not too far from those people. They escaped and went to Macedonia and they let them in. The train was filling with people from Pristina.”

Adem and his family rode the train through Kactanik. It was a horrible sight for them.

“When he passed by on the train, 75 percent of the village was burned. He saw his house and it was burned. His house, they stole everything out of there.”

Adem said the Serb soldiers would raid houses and steal anything of value. Then they would torch the homes to cover the thefts.

The brothers said the attack on their homes and Kosovo is a fight over land between Serbs and ethnic Albanians of Kosovo that has become part of their country’s history.

Adem said Kosovo is rich in gold, chrome and coal, along with other natural resources. The Serbs wanted those resources and planned to move Serbian people into

Kosovo once it was “emptied” of ethnic Albanians.

“The population in Kosovo is 90 percent Albanian,” Avdurrahim said. “What he (Milosevic) was doing was to throw the Albanians out and put in Croatian Serbs,” Matuka finished for him.

As the Shala family, the first brought to Albion by the refugee project, decided to leave because of the condition of the refugee camps, so did the Belas.

“When they went into the camps, it was filthy there,” Matuka explained for the Belas. “It was for the kids they decided to leave there for wherever they could go. So they came to the United States.”

“We had a choice of Great Britain, U.S. or Sweden,” Avdurrahim said. “We were sleeping in tents on the ground. This time,” he said, motioning to the home the project prepared for them, “is good.”

“When they came to

Rochester they didn’t know where they were going and when they saw all the people waiting for them, they were so happy,” Matuka said.

The Orleans Ecumenical Refugee Project is headed by Wendy Kirby and composed of many people in the Albion area and supported by several local churches, including First Presbyterian Church of Albion, Barre Center Presbyterian and Christ Episcopal Church.

Kirby said the project is expected a third family and still needs donations of household items and cash. Cash donations can be sent to First Presbyterian Church of Albion, re: Orleans Ecumenical Refugee Project, 29 E. State St., Albion, N.Y. 14411. To donate furnishings, appliances or other items, contact Kirby at 589-7254 or Rob LaRocque at 589-9327.