

# THE STORIES: ELVISA



First name: **ELVISA**

Last name: **KANTAREVIC**

Age: **35**

Country of origin: **BOSNIA**

Living in **Germany** since: **1992/2000**

## SHORT SUMMARY

Elvisa Kantarevic was born in Bosnia, she has one sister and one brother. The family lived in Bosnia, and when the atrocities with Serbia came about in 1991, they had to flee the country immediately. They came to Germany and she lived in Germany for 5 years, and she felt like a German. But then they were threatened to be deported to Bosnia again, and that happened in 1997. But she was convinced that she would come back to Germany. In 2000 she got a student visa and started her time at the university, together with her sister. Since 2005 Elvisa is married, has 2 children, lives in Hamburg and is Head of the Department of Migration and Diversity in a well-known Education Agency.

## "I WAS A GERMAN WITH A SELL-BY-DATE."

### SUDDEN LEAVE

Elvisa was 10 years when the conflict between Bosnia and Serbia began. She did not really know what was going on, only that the adults always had some

secrets. One day, the mother of her best friend told her that she can't play with her daughter anymore, because she is Bosnian. The same day, she heard the first bombs. For weeks they bought food in a panic, otherwise stayed at home and slept in their clothes. Then one day, Elvisa and her sister were put into a car with her mother and they left Bosnia. The children did not know where they were headed to. Since her father already worked in Germany as a miner, they drove to Germany.

### FINDING HER PLACE IN THE NEW SOCIETY

Her father lived in Gladbeck, a small town in the mining area of Germany. He looked for a flat for the family, but all he found was a garage. They lived under these conditions for 6 months, but Elvisa was happy because she felt secure and there were many people in the neighborhood helping them with food, sweets and learning German.

Elvisa started school in 5. Grade at a special school, but very soon she could change to a "Gymnasium" because she learned the language and everything else very quickly. She found friends and excelled in school, as did her sister, who was one year behind her. She was adamant to learn the language as fast as possible. She had a key experience, when her sister was in hospital and could not tell what her troubles are. That was when she and her sister decided that they need to learn the language fast. They got a dictionary from her father and learned and learned. Very soon they had to translate all the official papers or accompany the family members to the doctor in order to do the translation. But they did not mind.

But all the time they only had a permit to stay in Germany on the basis of tolerance, securing their presence for no more than 6 months each. Elvisa felt like a German child, but only with a sell-by-date.

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And then came the horror: they got the order of deportation, when she was in 9.grade. But there was one woman in the neighborhood who did not accept that decision. She raised publicity and others joined her in the effort to change this decision. And they succeeded, but only partly. Elvisa and her sister could stay, for one year, until they had finished school – but only with one parent. So her mother and her younger brother left Germany and the sisters and the father stayed in Germany. For one more year.

## COMING BACK AND BELONGING, FINALLY

They went back to Bosnia, went to school for three more years and then her sister and she applied for a university visa and were very lucky to get one, both. They studied “German language und philosophy” at Bochum and finished in 2005 with a Bachelor degree.

All her vocational life Elvisa has tried to help those who have been in the same situation as she was: being a stranger in a country. She has been a counsellor for migrant youth, and then she changed into her place now, which is the Agency for Migration and Diversity. She is heading this agency now.

She is organizing events, works in projects and is networking in order to make the situation for migrants in the labor market a better one. At the same time she helps others who struggle and is still supporting her family back in Bosnia financially. The newest effort is a project to train mentors to help refugees who start a job in Germany.

In 2005 she married and has two children. She feels that she belongs now to Germany and the German society, finally. In 2008 she got the German

citizenship. Bosnia is still “home”, because of family and friends. But Germany is home, too. And she is proud to be a German.

You have to  
have the willpower  
of being part of your  
surroundings