
Tina FINCI

“IS THAT GOOD FOR JEWS?”



This memoir of Tina Finci is based on the notes of her daughter Zvezdana, Tina's testimony in the 1979 "My Family" questionnaire, her presentations at various Jewish events and the memories of her friends, associates and admirers.

Tina Finci, née Hajon, was born in Split on April 30, 1910, to father Isak and mother Ester Kajon.

She had two brothers. Following the capitulation of Italy and the German occupation of Split, the elder, Josef Bepo, was taken, along with other Split Jews, to the Sajmište camp in Belgrade in October 1943. At the time this was a transitional camp from which inmates marked for death were transferred to Auschwitz and other death camps where all trace of them was lost. Her younger brother, Marko Mordehajn, left for Palestine in 1939 and lived in the Gat kibbutz in Israel until his death in 1999.

Tina graduated from the Commercial Academy and immediately began working. she was employed in various companies and institutions as a bookkeeper. When she came to Belgrade from Kruševac in 1959 she was a bookkeeper for the Federation of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia until her retirement in July, 1967.

After the end of the war she married engineer Salamon Finci. Her daughter Zvezdana–Dankica was born of this marriage and is now a scientific associate of the Hadassah University Hospital in Jerusalem. Despite being a good mother to her exemplary daughter Zvezdana and

an excellent life companion and devoted wife to her husband Salomon, it always seemed that her family obligations were slightly in the shadow of her commitment to the Jewish community.

According to her daughter Zvezdana's memories of the family stories, Tina was raised in a patriarchal Sephardic family in which all festivals and the Jewish tradition were nurtured in the best sense of the word. There was a huge library in the house, with books in Italian, German, Serbo-Croatian, Hebrew and Ladino. Her mother and her uncles were brought up in the company of books.

From her early childhood she took part in various Jewish youth meetings and Hasharaha's, and was a regular member of the Zionist youth organisation, Hashomer Hatzair. Her life was divided between her job and participation in all events within the Jewish community of Split. This community had a very active cultural and social life, which was focused in the Jarden Association, for which Tina worked as a secretary. But a secretary with a heart and soul. She was famous for her struggle for women's rights, and her daughter Zvezdana comments on this battle of Tina's: "The management of the association was led strictly by male members. Tina, their secretary, was the only exception. She fought for the equality of women within the community and outside it all her life. On the day of the Trumpledor Commemoration, she had planned to speak in the Temple, but was prevented from doing so by the people of the Community. They disagreed with the idea of a woman speaking in the Temple."



Tina (R) at a Purim party on March 19, 1927 in Split

When the country was occupied, many refugees from all parts of the former Yugoslavia (almost 3,000) found refuge in Split which was under Italian occupation. Tina immediately joined in the operation of assisting Jewish refugees to manage in their new situation. An Émigré Board for assistance to refugees was also established in Split at that time, and Tina was active in this. The Jewish community in Split made the greatest possible effort to assist the refugees and it could easily be said that there was “no smaller community, and no greater activity” when it came to showing solidarity to compatriots who had to flee before the Nazi invasion. At the same time she established contact with the National Liberation Movement, because she believed that this was the only possible affiliation for Jews. Once the danger of the Germans entering Split was imminent, Tina left, on September 11, 1943, and joined the Twentieth Dalmatian Division, where she worked as a nurse. She was in Partisan units at the time of the liberation of Yugoslavia. Tina’s family remained in Split. Her mother Ester and her brother Jozef were taken, in October 1943, to a camp, along with other Split Jews, and there they perished. Her father Isak came to a tragic end. While saving sacred items from the Jewish Temple, which the Italian Black Shirts had set on fire in the main square of Split, Isak was beaten with rifle butts and died two days after Tina joined the resistance fighters.



*Group of young people on an outing at Marjan, near Split,
April 25, 1929 (Tina Finci sixth from left)*

The war ended and Tina moved to Belgrade with her family in August, 1959, continuing her activities in the Jewish community, deeply devoted to her Jewish affiliation.

She was well known for always asking the same question at various events throughout the world: "Is that good for Jews?" Tina devoted her activities to work in the Women's Division of the Jewish Community in Belgrade. The tea parties she organised were known for their excellent cultural programs, on which she insisted, and she persistently found lecturers and artists to adorn these events. There was no opposing Tina once she had a plan to implement some idea and to convince good speakers to take part in the Women's Division tea parties. Her persistence in reminding all members of the Women's Division to come to a tea party was well known, as was her hospitality when greeting guests. It was these characteristics of hers which made the tea parties very attractive, popular and pleasant for socialising and relaxing.

Friends, associates and admirers describe Tina as one of the most persistent and active figures of Jewish society.

She died in 1990, on her eightieth birthday, in the Dr Lavoslav Švarc Home in Zagreb.