

סאנסקי מוסט

SANSKI MOST

DERVENTA דרוונטה

TRAVNIK טראוויניק

BIJELJINA ביילינה

BRČKO זאווידוביצי' ברוציקו

DOBOJ דובוי

ZAVIDOVIC

ואגרב

TUZLA טוזלה

ZAGREB

VLASENICA ולאסניצה

ZENICA זניצה

VISOKO ויסוקו

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YUGOSLAV JEWS ON THE HOLOCAUST

סקופייה

SKOPLJE

Drita TUTUNOVIĆ

BORN IN THE CAMP



*D*rita Maloku Tutunović was born on 22 July 1944 in Vienna, of father Kemal Maloku and mother Matilda Bukić (Bahar). She completed her elementary and secondary school, and graduated from the Faculty of Philology in Belgrade.

Drita has two brothers – Agim and Ervin, and sister Merita.

She lives and works in Belgrade, at the Faculty of Philology, as lecturer. Her field of work is predominantly the Judeo-Espagnol, her mother tongue and the literary heritage and Sephardic Jews. Her published work includes the Ladino-Serbian Dictionary, published by „Nova“, Belgrade, 1992, collections of songs, stories and proverbs „Ya sponto la luna“ (The Moon is Coming Out), accompanied by a cassette with 20 recorded Sephardic songs, published by „Narodna knjiga“, Belgrade, 1997, „Kantikas del korason“, published by the Embassy of Spain in Belgrade, 2003.

From her marriage to Vladimir Tutunović she has the son Bojan.

I do not know who could speak of himself or herself without starting from the very beginning, from one's parents, where as a rule special emphasis is on the mother.

My mother Matilda Bukić (Bahar) Maloku was born in Thessalonica of father Avram Bukić (Bahar) and mother Rahela, née Beža, on 22 August 1923. She was about four years old when, with her mother, she joined the father Avram, who had opened a convenience store in Priština wishing to

establish his own independent business, because in Thessalonica he was working with his father in law, David. Until the beginning of World War Two my mother's family had lived the usual life of the Jewish Community of that time. They lived in Priština, in a house in Dečanska street. There were at that time in Priština 57 Jewish families, with a total of 383 family members. There was a synagogue in Priština, built at the end of the 19th century. The religious teacher and Rabbi, at the time when my mother Matilda and her sisters Bela and Ermoza were growing up, was Josef Levi, who was taken from Priština along with other Priština Jews to the Bergen-Belsen camp. Of course, they attended the public school. Matilda was taken to school by her cousin who also took her daughter. Asked about the name of her father, she answered „Buki“, and the person who was entering data in the records (I do not know if it was the teacher or someone else) put in Bukić. My grandfather Avram was the first child of the family Bohor or the first one, which is Buhor, Bukor, or abbreviated Buko or Buki, and thus they became Bukić.

When the World War Two started in 1941, my mother was among the first to join the resistance movement and there she met Kemal, her future husband. Priština was under the Italian Occupation Zone until the Italian capitulation in 1943. When the Germans took over that part of Kosovo they immediately started deporting Jews to the camps and ordered all Jews to wear the yellow armbands. My mother's family, her father, mother and



DRITA as a child

two younger sisters were taken to the Bergen Belsen concentration camp. My mother and two younger sisters survived. Matilda, who was part of the National Liberation Movement already from 1941 was hoping that the party would send her to the National Liberation Army, but out of the six Jews who joined the movement in 1941 only two, by the decision of the party, were sent to the National Liberation Army. Until the end of the war, fifteen Jews joined the NL Army, and fourteen joined the NL Movement. Seven did not live to see the end of the war. My mother was the head of the fourth region unit of the Alliance of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia in Priština, and in 1942 she became member of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and was elected

member of the District Committee in Priština. She married Kemal Maloku in 1943 and thus was saved from being taken with her family as a Jew to Bergen Belsen. Yet, she did end up in a camp. The Gestapo discovered the activity of the resistance group in Priština, and my mother and father were interned and taken to the labor camp KC – 16, in Vienna, although my mother was pregnant. I was born on 22 July 1944 in that camp. In her marriage to Kemal my mother also had my two brothers, Agim and Ervin, and my sister Merita.

I had never thought that it would be so difficult to write about my mother who was ready to go and be a soldier at the front, to face death without any doubts in her mind. Is that the same person as the one on the photograph that I am now looking at, the person holding a white pigeon in her hand? What do I know about it? Very little, so little that it seems incomprehensible to me. Truth be told, possibly she would have told us a bit more about herself had she lived longer, but she was not that lucky, and neither were we – thus, I know mostly what I heard from others, least of all from herself. Most of what I know I heard from her comrades from the resistance movement: Žika Spasić, Apostol Pršendić, Čeda Topalović, Nataša, Fetija, and others. When she spoke to us, her children, about what lays ahead for us in our lives, she always expressed her hope that we would never live to experience the proverb „man is a wolf to his fellow men“. That was why she spoke of pure goodness and empathy of people facing the same difficulties, of the readiness to sacrifice and help your fellow man. That was how it was, she told me, thinking that it was important for me to know, that was how it was when I was born at the worst possible place and time, on that Saturday evening of 22 July 1944.

The bombing by the Allies was underway, the planes were thundering above, the darkness was filled with a trace of hope that it would not come to the worst. She gave birth without anyone's assistance, it was only when the baby's crying was heard that she was approached by Marija, a midwife who came to assist. Although it was difficult to rejoice under such circumstances, still everyone was rejoicing over the birth of a new life at the time of death. She told me how the inmates did everything they could to sustain my life. Someone had, who knows how, some cubes of sugar and readily gave them to my mother to mix it with water and feed the just born baby. Of course, the fact that a baby was born could not remain a secret. I was taken away from my mother on 4 August and taken to hospital to recover, and if I survived I was to be given away for adoption. Again, there was unexpected fortune under dire circumstances, and it was embodied in a completely unknown woman. Mother told me: „We were coming back to the camp after a whole day's work, exhausted and hungry. I was among the last ones in the line, I could hardly drag my feet along, because I was tormented not only by fatigue and the ever present hunger, but also by despair such as I never thought

existed. My child was taken away from me, she would never know that she was mine, who knows what her destiny would be, and I, her mother, would know absolutely nothing about her. Such thoughts were constantly on my mind. It was also very difficult for your father, he hid it from me, but still I could see it. He was in another part of the camp, we saw each other at work and within the camp grounds, because the buildings were close to each other (the buildings used to be warehouses before the war). I took a look around me to judge how far we were still from the camp, and standing in front of an iron gate I saw a woman who was unsuccessfully trying to open the gate which was probably shut close by the wind as the catch was on the inner side. I stepped out of the line, approached the gate, pushed my hand inside, my hand so emaciated that it easily went inside the lace-like ornamental iron and I opened the gate. The woman ran into the house and came right back carrying a piece of bread and some more food trying to put it into my hand, saying: „Take it, take it!“ I just gestured no with my hand and said in the Serbian language: „No, thank you!“ Just listen to me saying „No, thank you“, as if I were at a tea-party and she was offering me cake! The woman was appalled, but the word I said in Serbian, this word „*hvala*“ seemed familiar and she asked me: “Are you Polish?”

„No, I am from Yugoslavia“. The following day she came to the camp and asked the wife of the camp capo to assign to her some women camp inmates to help her with some heavy work at her place which she could not do on her own. The wife of the capo granted her request, as it turned out that Veronika (that was her name) was a distinguished Viennese whose husband was a diplomat and used to work before the war in the embassy in Poland.

Thus, mother was to meet again the woman who was to do for her the greatest and the most noble thing in my mother's life, as it turned out. She asked my mother to explain why she rejected the food offered her. That was when my mother told her about her troubles that lay so heavy on her that she did not care. She could not care less what was to become of her. Mrs. Veronika made a promise to her that she would help. Mother thought that these were just words and that nothing would come out of these words. However, she was wrong. Mrs. Veronika went to the hospital and she found me, according to the detailed description and information provided by my mother about when I was taken to hospital. She asked to adopt me. When her application was finally approved, she went to look for my mother, told her what she managed to do, and asked my mother if she could escape the camp because the child could not possibly go back to the camp again. Mother was completely confused, she talked with my father about what to do. He said right away: „Do it!“ The war was already coming to an end. Some camp inmates that my parents trusted helped them and mother and father managed

to escape, carrying me along with them. They walked for full seventeen days and in April 1945 arrived to Milan.

This was the only account that my mother was ready to tell me on a number of occasions, always emphasizing the priceless goodness of the woman who was destined to help her.



The smiling mother of DRITA, holding a pigeon in her hand, ready to fight for freedom at the front

We stayed in Milan for some time and then, at my parent's request, we were transferred to Bari, and from Bari onwards to Yugoslavia. They decided to go to Prizren first, the place of origin of my father, as they wanted to find out about the destiny of their families, especially my mother did not know that her family was in camps. My father's family survived (with the exception of one of my father's brothers). They immediately contacted the Red Cross hoping that they would have some information about camp inmates, inquiring if any of my mother's family had survived. Soon they received information that her mother and two sisters survived, while her father Avram did not. They were in the transport which the Germans abandoned on the open railroad, fleeing before the approaching Soviet troops. Many people closed in livestock wagons died not living to see the Russian soldiers and the freedom they yearned for so much

and for so long. Nona Rahela told me that the people in the wagons where she was with her children survived thanks to the very fortunate coincidence that there was a hole on the roof of their wagon through which rain came down, so they did not die of thirst like the unfortunate ones in other wagons who had no possibility of getting water as the wagons were sealed from the outside. Thus, this hole for them was the source of life, and there was another one on the side, which also helped. Her youngest daughter Ermoza looked through that hole one morning when they had already lost any hope

of salvation and – she saw a soldier on horseback. She could see only one. He had a red star on his cap. They were liberated! Taken to the hospital to recover. In hospital, they learned from the Red Cross people who came to visit them every day that my mother, my father and their new baby survived and are looking for them. They were in Prizren.

E 1

Geburtsurkunde


(Standesamt Wien - Ottakring ----- Nr. 328/44)

 ----- Drita Maloku -----

 ist am 22. Juli 1944 -----
 in Wien 16, Kernstockplatz 1 ----- geboren.
 Vater: Gemal Maloku, mohammedanisch, Lager -
dolmetsch, Wien 16, Kernstockplatz 1 -----
 Mutter: Mathilde Maloku, geborene Bukitsch, --
mohammedanisch, Wien 16, Kernstockplatz 1 --


 Änderungen der Eintragung: -----

Wien den 26. September 1944



Der Standesbeamte

in Vertretung



A 51 Geburtsurkunde (eheliche Geburt). Nachdruck verboten!
 Verlag für Standesamtswesen G.m.b.H., Berlin SW 61, Gitschler Straße 109.
 A. W. 6 Q/1295

A 51

Birth certificate of DRITA TUTUNOVIĆ showing that she was born in a camp in the vicinity of Vienna on 22 July 1944 (issued on 26 September 1944)

As soon as they could, that started for Prizren. They stayed there for some months, my mother was sick. I also got sick and the Red Cross sent

another letter of information, regretfully with very unfortunate news that NOBODY, not a single member of my grandmothers family in Thessalonica had survived. Yet, it turned out that one had – Aron, the son of grandmother's sister Grasija, who was saved by Greek Partisans who took the boy with them, and after the war, searching for his brother in 1950 he found a part of his family in Belgrade.

Nona did not want to go back to the town of her birth, they had decided: they would all go together to Belgrade right after my mother's delivery.

Upon arriving in Belgrade we were accommodated in the apartment above the chapel on the Jewish cemetery. Soon we were joined by my mother's cousins, the sons of her uncles, uncle Jakov arriving from Albania, and Aron arriving from Bergen-Belsen. We stayed in that apartment for about a year, after which we were given a two bedroom apartment in the then Moskovska street 19, presently Krunska street. The post-war years were very difficult for the family. Yet, although there was not enough food, there was enthusiasm and hope of a better tomorrow, because the key thing was there – they lived to see the future. All the young ones worked hard, rebuilding the country, so grandmother, my younger sister and I would stay at home alone. Grandmother, my *Nona*, did not speak Serbian, so at home we spoke „el Judesmo“. Over time she acquired some Serbian so she could communicate. *Nona*, aunt Bela and Ermoza lived with us. The family was getting bigger, I got two more sisters (one died) and another brother. I was not even ten when *Nona* left us to go and live with her youngest daughter Ermoza and her family. I learned a lot from her, I was very close to her.

After the war, in 1951, father started working for the French company „Wagons-Lits Cook“, thanks to which he travelled a lot. He travelled among other places to Vienna and tried in every possible way to find Mrs. Veronika. He was not successful in this, so mother and he were searching for her through the Red Cross, the organization which at that time helped so many people. They received information that she was recorded as missing. They continued for a long time to try to find her, but unsuccessfully, and they never found out what actually happened to that woman to whom I shall remain indebted until the end of my life for the happiness that I spent my life with my parents. I inherited this debt from my parents who cherished the memory of her with deepest gratitude. I never have and never will forget this unknown woman.

My mother was sick already in the camp, and since she could not receive proper treatment, the impacts on her health were unavoidable. Rheumatic fever affected her heart valves. The difficult post-war years, worries and the living conditions of that time additionally deteriorated her health. She tried very hard not to burden us with her sickness in order not to frighten us. That

was why she was always ready to listen to us, to day dream with us about the future which was ahead. Her greatest wish was that we all get an education, and to live the life that she was dreaming of having herself; she did not live to see us having our children who would give us happiness like we gave her happiness, and to see us become successful and honest people ready to share our goodness with others at the right moment. She died forty years ago, not living to see the joy and pride of any parent which is to see her children „on their own feet“ fulfilling her hopes. We did fulfill her wish. We all completed schools and university studies, we have children who are an endless source of our joy, love and pride. Father did live to see us graduate, to see us getting married and having his grandchildren. He died in 1992.

Although my mother was decorated with the Partisans' Commemorative Medal and other orders for courage, she never talked about how she earned them. Father, also, never talked about his merits and decorations. We, her children, learned about it much later, from her comrades. She often talked about other people from the time of war, teaching us to respect those who are leaving behind them the legacy of goodness to the future generations as the ultimate value.

I was married in 1971 to Vladimir Tutunović, and we have a son Bojan, who is living in Barcelona. Maybe it is his turn to „put back the keys into the chest of our old home in Spain?“