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WE MOSTAR מוסטאר

SURVIVED...4

YUGOSLAV JEWS ON THE HOLOCAUST

סקופייה

SKOPLJE

*This book is dedicated to the memory  
of the Jews of Yugoslavia who perished  
in the Holocaust from 1941 to 1945*

**WE SURVIVED... 4**  
Jews on the Holocaust

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Detail from the monument to vanquished Jewish communities,  
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# **WE SURVIVED... 4**

Jews on the Holocaust

BELGRADE, 2023.



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Branka Bogdanov and Aleksander Bruner*

*The publication of this collection of testimonies of Jews, victims of persecution and survivors of World War Two, was made possible by a generous donation from Haim Mile Pinkas and his family.*







## FOREWORD

The first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was marked by two world wars. The first was a conflict between great powers while the second was the attempt by Germany, under the direction of the Nazi Party, to conquer and bring under its will most of Europe.

Germany came out of the First World War beaten. Frustrated by its defeat, the Nazi Party came to power in 1933 and established a dictatorship. To justify its aim of conquest, it embraced a racial doctrine. According to this doctrine, the Aryan race, in other words, Germans, was supreme while other races were inferior. In the latter category were also the Jews. To homogenize the German nation, it was necessary to create an enemy, that is, a guilty party that was responsible for all of Germany's misfortunes. Who was the more suitable than the Jews: a minority of another religion, closeted for a long time within its own community. With this type of rhetoric, what was unutterable could easily be sensed. Of course, it was not ever made public, but in Wannsee in 1942, in the veil of the turmoil of the war and in the utmost secrecy, the decision was made. The supreme Nazi command led by Hitler, Goering, Goebbels, Himmler, Heidrich and others decided on the greatest of all crimes: the total destruction of a people. Unfortunately, that intent was realized during the war. Six million Jews were wiped out and burned in crematoria with the criminal gang able to keep the fact an utmost secret. Jews were deported, even without resistance, supposedly, to work camps in the East. Concerning what would happen to them after that, very little was heard.

About this monstrous crime--which had no equal in human history—there is not even a mention in some not-so-old historical works. By that verdict, all those who had even one Jewish grandfather or grandmother could be potentially sentenced to death within the entire territory under the control of the Nazi military machinery. Every person who by the Nazi definition was Jewish required enormous luck or remarkable skill to escape falling into the hands of the excellently organized and efficient machinery of the criminal authorities.

The memories of Jews who under the most dangerous circumstances were able to save their lives or the lives of their family are included in this book.

It is critical for the present and the future that these authentic testimonies be preserved. Nothing must be forgotten. The publication of these truths about the crimes committed in the past is one of the effective measures that such wrongdoings never happen again.

It is for this reason that we are publishing this, the fourth volume which includes thirty-three testimonies.

Andreja Preger

*Foreword translated from the Serbian  
original by Alexander (Saša) Bruner*

## INTRODUCTION

Much time has passed since the end of the Second World War but many survivors did not speak about the horrors that they endured. Some suppressed their memories because they had to fight for a normal life. Others didn't want to burden those around them with stories about the horrors which they survived. A third group, when speaking about what they had survived, often met a lack of understanding and disbelief so they ceased recounting; thus much significant evidence has been lost forever.

It is with sorrow that one concludes that chronicling these stories started late; had we possessed the required resources earlier, there would have been many more testimonies. Among others, missing from the testimonies are our countrymen who are no longer among the living but significantly contributed to science, culture, and art of the country in which they lived. It should also be pointed out that there are also missing stories of those who after the war restarted the work of the Jewish community and raised it from the ruins, and to whom gratitude is owed by the entire Jewish community which even today is inspired by their work—Fredrick Pops, Albert Vajs and Lavoslav Kadelburg.

With the fourth book of the series “We Survived,” mostly encompasses already known path of death and survival of Jews on the territory of the former Kingdom of Yugoslavia in the 1941-1945 period. Such an extensive multi-year effort of the editorial staff could not have been possible without the close collaboration with the authors and their offspring who helped to record the testimonies. It was not easy for them! Many wished to bury even deeper the memories of the crimes committed against them, and others wished by remembering the horrors to leave a legacy to their offspring, a warning of the extent of the evils that people can commit.

Together with the difficult and painful memories, many of the authors evoked the warm atmosphere of the family in which they grew up with poignant descriptions. Those accounts are valuable evidence about the customs and traditions of Jewish families until the criminal times.

Especially meaningful are the mentions of the names of victims of the close and the more distant relatives. It would appear that the authors had the



need to leave a trace of them at least in these books as there are no graves or monuments.

To all the authors, the editors owe a significant debt of gratitude.

The series “We Survived” would not have been possible without supporters among whom this time we want to first mention Mileta Pinkas and his family who from the beginning believed in the work on these books and in the editorial staff who strove to carry out its work with which it was entrusted in the best possible manner. We are also grateful to the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture of JOINT and many individuals who believed in the significance and justice of this undertaking. This is especially the case since very little is known around the world about the Jewish victims of the former Yugoslavia because of the specific conditions during the Second World War in the then-occupied state. Therefore the publication of such a series also assumes importance for historical research.

During our work, we were faced with the knowledge that some authors died in the meantime, without having lived to see their stories published. That fact itself attests to the need to collect as many testimonies to leave as compelling as possible a picture of the crimes that took place during the war. The fact that even the last living witnesses of the most monstrous crime against the Jewish people are disappearing places on us the responsibility that we leave for history as an authentic picture of what evil a human can do when they have power in their hands and want to employ it.

More than sixty years since the end of the Second World War, those of us who have survived cannot evade the question: Why?

We ask ourselves how the world could have allowed this? It is not only a question of numbers—the six million Jewish victims—but also the way in which they were killed. They were destroyed both psychologically and physically, and their last traces disappeared in the crematoria. It is thus that the specific name for the genocide carried out against the Jews: the Holocaust.

The Editorial Staff

*Introduction translated from the Serbian  
original by Alexander (Saša) Bruner*



I

WITH THE PARTISANS





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**Cadik DANON**

## THE LIFE STORY OF A RABBI



**C**adik Danon was born in 1918 in Sarajevo in the family of Rabbi Danijel Isak Danon and Grasja Danon, *née* Levi, as one of their six children – four sons and two daughters. His father had wished that one of his sons would be a rabbi. At the time when Cadik Danon in 1932 completed his primary school, the Jewish Theological Institute was enrolling the second generation of student fellows, and his father enrolled him for the seminar. The same seminar was subsequently successfully completed by other well-known rabbis: Imanuel Bulc, the Chief Rabbi of Luxemburg; Solomon Gaon, the Chief

Sephardic Rabbi of the Commonwealth, after being previously a pupil of Rabbi Danijel Danon; Cvi Azarja, for a period the Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi in Germany; etc.

After completing the seminar in 1937 Cadik Danon was transferred to serve as employee of the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities in Kosovska Mitrovica and Priština in the capacity of rabbi, cantor and religious teacher. Through his school friend Josip Levi, born in Priština, he made connections with progressive people of the region. At the time of the outbreak of the war, he was serving as rabbi in Split.

After the war he served as rabbi (1947–1950) and subsequently as senior official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the FNR Yugoslavia, as head of Department for Nordic countries (1953–1970). Among other posts, he was the Yugoslav representative in the International Commission for Navigation on

*the Danube (1958–1962) and charge d'affaires of the Embassy of SFR Yugoslavia to Sweden (1968–1970).*

*After retirement he went back to being a priest and served as the Head Rabbi of Yugoslavia (1972–1998). For many years he was the author of the Jewish Religious Calendar and wrote the „Principle Concepts of Judaism“. In 1974 he organized the Hebrew language courses, which are still continually delivered until the present time.*

*Danon has been awarded numerous national, war-time and piece-time decorations: the Partisans Commemorative Order of 1941, the Order of Merits for the People with the Golden Star, the Order for Courage, the Order of Merits for the People with Silver Wreath, and the Plaque of the City of Belgrade. He was also awarded three outstanding international decorations: the Order of the President of Finland, the Order of the Finland Lion, and the Order of the Norwegian Saint Olaf. Danon is one of only two holders outside of Israel of the decoration awarded by the World Zionist Organization for the development of Jewish education in Diaspora. After the war he lived in Belgrade, where he passed away in 2005. In his marriage with Jelisaveta Danon he had two daughters, who gave him three grandchildren.*

After the arrival to Priština, it was necessary to reconcile two seemingly irreconcilable things: the duty of a priest and the ideas of a revolutionary. Reality proved that what is difficult is necessarily impossible. I saw my being a rabbi as my obligation to my parents, as a duty, while the revolutionary ideas were something mines and personal.

After the model of choral recitals performed by the Jewish Labor Society „Matatja“ of Sarajevo, on one occasion I performed with the choir the poem by Aleksa Šantić titled „O, klasje moje“, which had a strong impact on the young. Soon afterwards, in the then Fascist and anti-Semitic magazine „Balkan“, published by Cicvarić, a well-known supporter of Ljotić in Belgrade, an article was published titled „Jews are Waking up in Priština“ focusing on myself as the key target, stating that I was a „paid Russian consul“ who came to Priština to spread communist propaganda. Among the Jews and other progressive people in Priština this article echoed as warning and first signal of the forthcoming blood-stained developments.

Since the article terribly distressed the Priština Jews I decided that it was the best for all, them and myself, for me to leave Priština, and my decision was accelerated by the tragic event that had just recently occurred in Split. The Split rabbi and all members of his family lost their lives in an accident. Through the vacancy that was announced after his death, I was selected to take his place.

In Split I found Isidor Finci, who was the religious teacher there. This meeting of friends from Seminary and people with the same kind of thinking motivated us to jointly continue our revolutionary engagement.

The Jewish Community of Split had for a long time been well organized and offered great opportunities to work with the young. Lectures, spoken newsletters, choir recitals and other progressive performances were organized in the „Jarden“.

\* \* \*

I served during the brief April 1941 war as a conscript in the sanitation unit in Skopje. Already the second day the Germans took Skopje, entered the hospital, and I was taken as German prisoner of war. Just two weeks later, however, due to the great number of German soldiers who were filling up the hospital, the Germans transferred the Yugoslav wounded and ill, including prisoners of war, to the city hospital and handed over to the Bulgarian occupiers, who thus became our custodians and masters. Isolated from everything, we had no orientation. We were not even aware of the capitulation, the Ustaša, the Independent State of Croatia. Our whole world consisted of the wounded whom we treated and the Bulgarian guards who watched us.

Who knows how things would continue to develop for me if the Bulgarian authorities, at the order of the Germans, had not started to release home members of other nationalities – all except the Jews. I took this as a sign that the danger was imminent and that it was time to flee. I managed to get in contact with Jews from Skopje who took me in, assisted me in getting some kind of Bulgarian personal and travel documents and gave me some money to have at hand. So, I left Skopje and started on a long journey of uncertainty. The railroads were partly destroyed, the roads damaged. I travelled both by train, and on foot, on farmers' wagons, I moved slow and with uncertainty, but I did keep moving on, although I cannot recall for how long. Finally, one night, I arrived by narrow-gauge rail to Sarajevo and got out at the Bistrik station. The station was empty, there was only one automobile



*CADIK in 1932 in Sarajevo as student of the Theological Seminary*

with a driver, waiting for someone who had not arrived. Unaware of the police curfew, the yellow armbands or other anti-Jewish measures introduced by the Ustaša, I approached the driver and asked him to give me a ride. He agreed, I presume in a belief that I was some official of the Ustaša, and took me to my parents' home in Čadordžina Street 4.

Since the outbreak of the war my parents had no news of me and did not know if I was alive or not. My unexpected coming home was for them the best surprise they could imagine. That was also the last time that I was ever to see them. They both perished in the death camps.

Two days later I continued to Split, still with the Bulgarian documents. In Metković, the Italians would not let me on a ship, refusing to recognize Bulgarian documents. I had to get an Italian „lasciapassare“ and finally I arrived in Split in second half of May.

The Split that I arrived to was no longer the same peaceful seaside town of some months ago in which I spent the best days of my life. It was a town under occupation, one of the centers of the occupying Italian Army.

That year, 1941, Split breathed unitedly in a unique rhythm against violence.

As in every war, it was first the army that entered Split, followed by the police, agents, traders and everything else that comes with occupation in order to ensure for the occupier the safety of the occupied territory. Citizens of Split, as citizens across the whole of Dalmatia, were traditionally anti-Italian. Soon came the first signs of resistance, the first arrests and victims. The prisons were filling up, the resistance grew, the terror and repression got stronger. Life went on with one ambition only: disrupt the occupier as much as possible, and make him feel uncertain in the land not his own. The Jews of Split gave their contribution. Jewish youth on daily basis joined the national liberation struggle. The Zionist youth, especially members of „Hashomer Hatzair“, practically without exception, joined underground groups and were engaged in an organized manner. Their parents and other Jews made generous contributions in money and clothing for the National Aid. As I remember, and this is what I was working on together with my friend Šulc, almost all Jews from Split were involved in the campaign of National Aid.

The new political situation which followed the capitulation of Yugoslavia and the danger of physical extinction caused major migration of Jews to Dalmatia, the so-called Italian zone. Thanks to a somewhat more tolerant attitude of Italians towards Jews, Jews had a better chance to survive in the Italian zone. Thus, in summer 1941, a great number of Jews from Croatia, Bosnia and Serbia came to Split.



While at the wake of the war the Jewish Community of Split consisted of about 300 souls, the number at that time rose to several thousand. The small Jewish Community was under a huge burden – to organize the receipt of numerous refugees and ensure for them the minimum conditions for life.



*The DANON family (left to right): RAŠELA, HAIM, ERNA, ISAK (standing), JOSEF, father DANIJEL, mother GRASJA (sitting) and CADIK*

The residents of Split, and those who arrived in 1941, lived peacefully for a while. However, already in July 1941, new anti-Jewish measures were adopted. As ordered by the civilian commissioner Tacconi, posters were put up across the town notifying citizens that Jews and dogs were prohibited from entering public places and bathing spots.

In August 1941 a prohibition was introduced banning Jewish children to enroll primary and secondary schools, followed by a decision to displace Jewish families to Korčula, Vela Luka, and a number of locations in Italy, where they were to live in confinement. Thus, for many, Split became just a transit station.

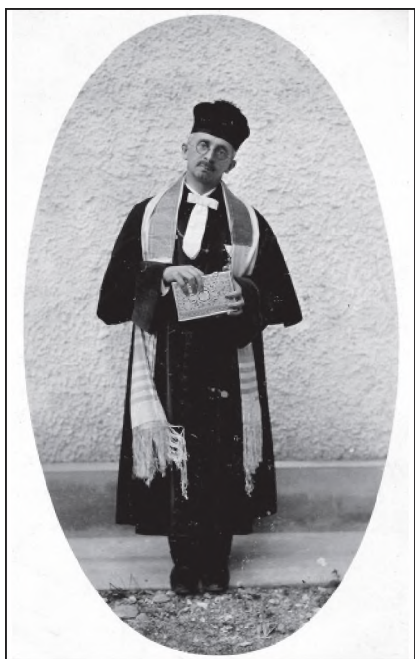
While in Split, I lived as a boarder with the family of Rikard Šulc, in a fine, two-floor house in Bačvice. At the end of summer I moved to Stedova Street, to the flat of Isidor Finci, and we were soon joined by Berto Altarac.

My sister Erna arrived from Sarajevo with her three-year old daughter Ria, after managing to flee Sarajevo with forged documents that I sent to her



from Split. There was an organization in Split that counterfeited documents and sold them at high prices.

The news that she brought with her about our family was very sad. Her husband Haim Samokovlija was among the first to be taken to Jasenovac. Our other sister's husband, Rudi Musafija, was arrested and later taken to Jasenovac. Our mother, with our second sister, was transferred to the women's camp in Đakovo. My brother Josef, together with the painter Danijel Ozmo, attempted to get to Romanija mountain, but they were both captured in the vicinity of Sarajevo, brought back to town, detained and tortured. My brother managed to get out of prison and get to the Romanija mountain.



*CADIK'S father DANIJEL ISAK  
DANON was a rabbi*

My father, who was known around Sarajevo as „ham Danijel“ was also detained, but at the intervention of the Jewish Community he was released as the only remaining rabbi in Sarajevo. It seems that my father could not for long be protected by the Jewish Community, so he went underground.

On 5 January I received a picture postcard from him in which he said:

„My dear Cadik! Are Erna and my sweet Riuška still with you? When I think of her, I start crying like a baby... I keep moving around from one place to another, spending more time crying than sleeping or eating, and no one can comfort me. May our dear God have mercy on us so that he may get us all together again and take us back to our homes. My dear, write to me and do not forget me. I re-

mained as the only rabbi, all the others have been taken away. Yesterday I did two Berit Mila. Today I wrote to mother, it is almost seven weeks since we are apart. Best of love and blessings from your father.“

He too was soon captured and taken to Jasenovac, never to return.

My sister was living with myself for some time, but later I found for her a room to which she moved with her daughter.

Many years have gone by since 1941/1942 for a person to be able to remember everything he did or went through. Still, there is one event that remains not forgotten.

In the winter of 1941/42 I was informed by Petar Šegvić that they had been looking for accommodation for a wounded person, but had not been successful. It was a heavily wounded person whom Partisans were keeping in hiding along the seaside, in a traditional fishing boat full of sand. The next day I was talking about it with Leo Geršković, who reprimanded me that this issue had not yet been resolved. I said that it was difficult to find a place.

„Difficult does not mean impossible“, replied Geršković.

I took this as criticism addressed against myself and decided to take the wounded person and accommodate him in my place. In the afternoon, when Berto, Izi and I were together, I told them about my proposal, which they accepted and we notified Šegvić. We decided that after we transfer him, Berto and Izi would temporarily move out, while I would be the only one who stayed.

The plan of action was there and it involved, apart from me, Berto and others, also four Partisans who came down from the Mosor mountain for this reason. The action was difficult to carry out because the wounded person could not walk and had to be carried. Besides, the Fascist M (Mussolini) patrols were permanently on guard along the coast in twos or threes, so it was possible to carry out the plan only after the police curfew.

According to plan, the following day at dawn, when moving around town was already allowed, Berto arrived to the coastline and was met there by comrades with an automobile. They waited for the Fascist patrol to leave, and once that it was some distance away and with their backs to the vehicle, the four Partisans, after the agreed signal, speedily got the wounded person from the boat into the car and started towards the Stedova street. I was waiting in front of the house. The windows of the surrounding houses were still closed and we were hoping to go unnoticed. However, just at the moment when the wounded person was taken out of the car, a window opened on the second floor. A woman put her head through the window and watched with surprise what was going on. There was no time to think. We got the wounded person through the gate, up the stairs and into the flat. Due to his purulent wounds he gave out a strong stench which was spreading along the corridor. As soon as we got him settled, the door bell rang. I looked through the spy-glass: standing in front of the door was the woman from the window. Thoughts passed through my head chaotically: who is she, what does she want, friend or enemy...

I opened the door and she came in hastily. She understood our unease and said right away:

„I came to tell you that I saw everything and everything is clear to me, but you need not be afraid of me. I want to help. My husband is a baker and I will bring you bread every day for the ill person.“

We were very much relieved. Firstly, because she would not report us, but her offer was just as welcome, since at that time bread was only distributed through ration coupons, one hundred grams per person a day.

It was the time now to think about the wounded person. Soon dr Silvio Altaras arrived, who treated ill refugees and the wounded when so needed. We also secured two nurses, my sister Erna Samokovlija, who fled Sarajevo with a small baby, and Suzika Bogdanić, who had to flee Zagreb because she was a Jew.

We did not ask the wounded person's name. We named him „Crni“ (Black), because of his dark complexion. We got him into a small room which we used to stock textile and medical stuff from the National Aid for Partisans.

Dr Silvio started treating his wounds. There were seventeen. All over his body, except on the right hand, which was protected by the machine gun handle from which he was firing while laying down. He told us calmly how it happened, as if it was the most natural thing. The HQ of Partisan units for Dalmatia was having a meeting for Croatia in a cave near Žrnovnica. The Ustaša and gendarmes found out about it and covertly surrounded them. The cave in which the HQ was staying was very difficult to defend. There was a risk that the Ustaša fire bomb shells and kill them all. There was need to respond quickly, get out of the cave and get into armed conflict. Crni got the machine gun, ran out of the cave and opened fire at the Ustašas. All the Ustaša fire was on him, but he enabled others to get out of the cave and take better position for combat. What followed was bitter combat that lasted until evening. The night made it possible for the Partisans to get out and retreat. They took care of the dead, and took those with lighter wounds with them. They could not decide what to do with Crni. Half dead and half alive, full of wounds and covered in blood, he was still giving signs of life, but was begging them to go and save themselves, since his time was up anyway. But it was not so. It was a cold winter with lots of snow. The cold froze the wounds and his strong body and will won over death. Crni started to crawl on the snow, supporting himself on his healthy arm. This took hours until he got to the first village houses. The village supported the Partisans and the villagers found him and hid him, deciding to get him to Split and heal him there. They were to act fast because it was certain that the Ustašas would be coming to the village by dawn. Crni was carried to the sea, put into a fishing boat loaded with sand. They made a hiding in the sand, so the fishing boat hiding the wounded man in the sand got to Split.

We were looking at that sun-tanned, emaciated face and body shattered by machine-gun bullets – he was truly a hero, and more than that for us: the ideal of a hero, exactly from our imagination, and therefore we gave him our

full attention. Erna and Suzika were healing him together or taking turns. They fed, washed and cleaned him. Dr Silvio came regularly, bringing the necessary medicines, cleaning the wounds and the man started to recover. We were all pleased.

One day, Crni complained that he felt his jaws getting stiff and experiencing difficulties to open his mouth. I thought that it was perhaps too cold, yet I called for the doctor. Dr Silvio came and examined him, then called me to the other room and said worriedly:

„The wounded maybe got tetanus and must urgently be taken to hospital, he cannot be treated here. Otherwise, he will die in a matter of days.“

Gloomy thoughts followed. The hospital was a Fascist hotspot with agents keeping guard day and night over our comrades, beaten by the police. Hospital meant being exposed to huge danger of inevitably being discovered. Keeping him at home meant letting him die. And what to do with a dead man? How to take him out of the house without being spotted? And where?

With Berto and Izi I was considering all options, we even talked of cutting him into pieces, if he died, taking him to the coast, out of town, and throwing him into the sea. But, we found it difficult to entertain the idea of letting him die without at least trying to save him. Finally, we decided to organize for him a transfer to the hospital, with the help of nurses and doctors who assisted the National Liberation Movement, and soon enough the plan was worked out.

I got the unpleasant duty to tell him about going to the hospital, without telling him what he is suffering from. I started cautiously, with a brief introduction, that he is severely ill, that it is our wish and duty to do everything possible to heal him, and so on and so forth. He listened patiently and replied without excitement:

„I completely trust you and accept your decision wholeheartedly.“

That day everything worked for us. The sky got dark; the clouds were low above the roofs bringing about a storm. Erna and Suzika washed him, put socks on his feet, without shoes. Berto was to arrive with a car. Izi and I were watching by the window. The weather worked for us. At the right moment, the storm came down and it was pouring rain, forcing everybody off the streets. Again, four friends got Crni out, got him in the car, and took him directly to hospital, to the admissions, where everything had been organized. The doctor, who was our contact, diagnosed a „severe contagious disease“ and ordered that he, being a threat to others, be urgently transferred to a single room of the department for infectious diseases, which was at the

outskirts of the town. Once there, he was cared for by our comrades, doctors and nurses who treated him for tetanus, nursed him and kept him safe from being discovered.

I followed his progress and, through a comrade, stayed in permanent contact with him. The patient was recovering and could again stand on his feet.



*CADIK DANON as rabbi initiated Hebrew learning courses in the Jewish Community of Belgrade which have been preserved until the present day*

Some weeks later I heard that Fascists are about to inspect the hospital which meant that it was urgent to transfer Crni to a safer place.

Again, troublesome search for adequate accommodation and the question how to move him.

After thinking hard about how to proceed, I went to the Jewish Community and filled in a document which we used to give to Jewish refugees and I gave it to Crni. Since that moment he was a Jewish refugee from an Ustaša camp, wounded while attempting to flee. The next morning, after curfew, I was carefully working my way to the hospital and I got to him. He was care-free, lying on his bed. With a smile on his face he was telling me that the night before agents came to see him. When they saw a frail patient instead of a dangerous Partisan, they treated him kindly.

That was the last time I saw him. Already the following day he was transferred to the liberated territory.



My work could not go unnoticed by the people in the Jewish Community. The community's shamash, Leon Altarac, lived with his family in the flat above the community office. He saw, but pretended not to have seen, the movements of unfamiliar persons and meetings, he found different materials and the like. One morning, opening the office windows, he saw in the street his pro-rabbi Izidor Finci writing anti-Fascist slogans in the Bosanska Street. He kept silent, helped, hid traces and was aware of the danger that this presented to his family and himself. (Leon Altarac survived the war, and after the war until his death served as hazan in Zagreb.)

Markus Finci was a tireless official of the Jewish Community and the temple *gabaj*. He was *talmid-chacham*, completed the Sarajevo yeshiva and had solid knowledge of Judaism. In his glass glazing shop, in the storage room, he arranged a little corner where he kept his Talmud, along with other Judaica books. Sometimes he would invite me and Izi to come over and would have us read „Masehet Rosh-Hashanah“ and thus check our knowledge.

In 1942, after the Partisans withdrew from Split and the Germans took the town, Markus Finci was taken with other Jews from Split to a concentration camp and he never returned.

The last task that we were given before our arrest was not completed. We were to re-write and copy the presentation of the president of the just established National Liberation Council for Dalmatia.

In the evening of 24 April 1942 Berto, Izi and I were arrested in the flat where we lived and we were taken to the infamous „Sveti Roko“ prison in Split. We were in separate rooms so for some time we had no news of each other. I was in room number 13.

At that time one of the prisoners in the „Sveti Roko“ prison was the political secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Croatia (CK KPH) Rade Končar, whom the Fascist Italian police tortured with all means available in order to get his confession. Končar withstood the torture heroically and, since he did not give them any information, the Fascists handed him over to the special court for Dalmatia, which was sitting in Šibenik. I saw Končar the day when, all beaten up and in bandages, he was being transferred with a group of his comrades to the trial in Šibenik. I watched him behind the bars of our cell as he limped, supporting himself against two comrades. The special Italian court sentenced him to death and executed him on 22 May 1942 with 25 other prisoners.

Life in the „Sveti Roko“ prison was abundant in events and unusual destinies. I met prisoners completely physically broken by beating and torture, but morally strong and unbreakable, with unwavering faith in the collapse of Fascism. It was not easy to take all the torture to which the Italian Fascists

put these captured underground activists. But the thought which tortured them most, and this was also true for myself, was not the fear of death, but whether they would be able to sustain the torture without breaking down.

While in prison, I myself now and then got my share of beating but, fortunately, not much, and I did not face overwhelming temptations. On several occasions I was sent to solitary confinement, as punishment. Those were very small and completely dark concrete cages. Being sent there was always a part of some ceremony or beating.

Once, at the end of November, gendarmes stormed into our cell and like crazy hyenas threw themselves on me and some of my comrades, threw us into the cordon of guards, lined up on both sides, who practically carried us to the solitary confinement with their blows. There they took everything off us, gave us beating, spilled some buckets of cold water into the cell and squeezed us in. Naked and frozen cold, we were shivering all night long. In the morning they took us to the prison manager who gave us a “moral lesson“.

When I was taken for hearing, I received beating and psychological pressure. They threatened that, unless I confess, they would transfer the accusations against me to Croatia and give me over to the Ustaša.

In prison I had contact with Berto. He was a member of the prison committee. The guards kept an eye on him because of the hunger strike. He was caught in an attempt to send a coded message to his friends in prison. He was thrown into the prison and suffered beastly torture.

At that time I had reason for concern because if he had spoken my turn would have come. But Berto persevered heroically and did not betray anyone. He was brought before the court and sentenced to twelve years in prison, only to be liberated by Partisans in 1943. He was killed the same year, in combat with the Germans, in the vicinity of Split.

A few words about Izidor Finci. In the cell he was beaten and tortured and, despite his poor physical condition and frail health, he stood up to it like a hero. Subsequently, in prison, he was exposed by some criminal. He was brought before the court and sentenced to twenty years in prison and taken to Italy to serve the sentence. After Italy capitulated, Izi was given to the Germans and taken to Auschwitz, where he ended up in the crematorium.

One night we were ordered to get ready. Under strict guard we were taken out of the prison and towards the coast. For the first time after seven months we were walking the deserted streets of Split, we saw the sky above it and breathed the fresh sea air. We were crammed on a ship which took us to Rijeka, where we were again put in prison for several days. With a number of other prisoners, I was transferred from the Rijeka prison to Trieste. We

were chained together in pairs and watched by carabinieri and transferred in this manner from one place to another towards the south. Along the way, we would stop and stay overnight in different Italian prisons until we finally made it to our destination: the concentration camp Albero-Bello, in Calabria, southern Italy.

In the camp I found Leon Pinto, from Travnik, and Drago Pinto, from Turbe. I knew both of them. They were first detained in Cavaso del Tomba and afterwards, as punishment, transferred to the Albero-Bello camp.

I met there two Russian Jews, one of whom was religious and tried under the prevailing conditions, to eat kosher. Somehow he got chickens and came to me to slaughter them. In my possessions I had a shechita knife.

On 10 July 1943 the Allies landed on Sicily, and onwards to Calabria and in making progress to the north, arrived close to our camp. In their haste, the Fascists disassembled the camp and transferred the inmates in sealed railway carriages to camps in central Italy. For unknown reasons, Mrakovčić, Leon, myself, Drago Pinto and a number of other inmates were separated from the others and taken to Fara-Sabina, in Rieta province, near Rome.

The Allied invasion of Sicily led to the collapse of the Benito Mussolini government, and the government of Marshal Badoglio in September signed the capitulation and declared war against Germany. Mussolini was arrested and detained. Simultaneously, new German forces entered northern Italy and facing no resistance kept moving towards the south. German parachuters liberated Mussolini and transferred him to northern Italy. Mussolini established a new Republican Fascist Party and formed the so-called Italian Social Republic.

Some days after arrival to Fara Sabina, the first German motorized lines appeared on the roads and we were aware what awaited us if we were to be captured by the Germans, and this called for a decisive and quick action. We exerted pressure on the camp guard which, under the circumstances, was not clear about what to do, we broke through the camp's gates and we dispersed individually or in small groups to our different sides. Some towards the south, some towards the Allies, or towards Yugoslavia. Mrakovčić, Leon, Drago, myself and a number of others started towards the north, with the ambition to get to Yugoslav mountains.

The last days before the escape from the camp I was not feeling well. I had a stomach infection, ate nothing and was completely exhausted. In these conditions I started my journey. I moved with difficulty and my friends helped me as much as they could, and our movement was becoming increasingly precarious. In a number of days, without any resistance,



the Germans had managed to occupy the country of their former ally. Many fugitives from Fascist camps were wandering around. Most of them could not speak Italian and the Germans, like hunting dogs, were searching for them and hunting them down. We moved on with caution, slept secretly in stables and shacks, the villagers giving us information about the roads to take in order to avoid contact with the Germans. Although willing to assist, they did not hide their fear and wish for us to get away as soon as possible.



*In a mission of cooperation and international trust: a meeting of CADIK DANON with the Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church, PAVLE*

Due to my limited ability to move there was a risk that others may suffer due to myself and that was why we decided to split. Mrakovčić with the others continued on their way, while Drago, Leon, and I hid temporarily in a sanatorium near Cavaso del Tomba, in the Monte Grappa mountains. The sanatorium was owned by dr Gino Dalla Favera, of whom Leon and Drago were saying that he was a convinced anti-Fascist. Drago and Leon knew him from the time when they were briefly confined in Cavaso.

Dr Gino took us in kindly, got us accommodated, provided me with medical care, so I quickly recovered.

Even before the capitulation of Italy, dr Gino Dalla Favera and his whole family were providing moral and material assistance to confined Jews. After the Italian capitulation, when the new pro-German government was formed and when the prosecution and sending of Jews to camps began, he saved and hid many Jewish families, in the sanatorium and in his houses in the mountains. This included the family Poljokan from Banja Luka, Koen from Sarajevo, Švabenic from Zagreb, Romanin-Koen from Venice, and others. He regularly provided food for all of them, which was brought to them by villagers from his estates. Finally, he himself had to flee and live in hiding until the end of the war.

The new Fascist Government issued a Proclamation conscripting returning Italian soldiers and other generations of men to the Army. Italian young men, who had just exited one pointless war, were not ready to go to slaughter again and did not respond. To avoid repercussions, they went into the mountains to wait and see what the reaction of the Fascist authorities would be.

When the proclamation was soon withdrawn, they returned to their homes.

At the same time, Italian patriots were meeting in the estate of dr Gino considering a resistance movement. Invited by dr Gino, I attended these meetings and presented my experience.

Soon, new Italian national liberation units were formed. With the first such unit I moved to the mount Maser, on Monte Grappa, accompanied by Drago and Leon. Not long afterwards we learned of Garibaldi brigades „Antonio Gramsci“ on the other side of the mountain and joined them. The „Antonio Gramsci“ command welcomed us, especially due to the fact that we were Yugoslavs. The struggle of Yugoslav Partisans was well known and they thought that every Yugoslav was an experienced fighter. They were unaware that I never shot from a gun or any other weapon, even as conscript in former Yugoslavia because, as a priest, I served my term in a sanitation unit. I am mentioning this because already during the first days of my Partisan life something comic happened which could easily have turned tragic. The command received information that the Germans are preparing to retaliate against a town on the slopes of the Monte Grappa mountain after one of our actions. A detachment was formed tasked to set up an ambush and prevent the passage and approach of Germans to the small town, and it was exactly myself who was appointed commander of this detachment. I suggested that they should appoint someone else, while I should go as a regular fighter, but this did not change anything and I had to take on the

assignment. When we got to the specific location we were to take adequate position and wait for the Germans to appear. I took a long time distributing fighters to the left and to the right because no position seemed to be good, and a day went by. Luckily, the Germans did not come. If they had, who knows what would have happened. That is how my first action with the Partisans ended.

That is how it was at the beginning. Over time, I acquired some fighting experience. Using a Partisan name Koljka, I performed the duties of a political commissioner of a troop, battalion and groups of battalions. I also used the conspiracy names Dante and Guisto (the Italian equivalent to my name Cadik), as needed. Of course, those closest to me were aware that all these names referred to the same person.

The victories scored by Allied Forces and the defeats of Germans across all fronts perpetuated hopes that the war would soon come to an end. This gave rise to the spreading of the Partisan movement. Brigades of different political affiliations were being established in the Monte Grappa mountains: „Italia Libera“, „Mataoti“ and „Garibaldi“.

It is common knowledge that the „Garibaldi“ brigades were the armed detachments of the Communist Party of Italy and they continually carried out armed and other actions against the Fascist strongholds. Germans and Fascists retaliated and our brigades were under a heavy burden.

In the fall of 1944, under Allied pressure, the positions of German armies were weakening and they were withdrawing to the north in an attempt to withdraw to Germany. In order to ensure smooth withdrawal they had to liquidate the Partisans of Monte Grappa, who threatened the key communications to Germany and for this reason they prepared a major offensive against Partisans involving more than twenty thousand German troops and a great number of Italian Fascists who sieged Monte Grappa, sending fire from cannons and other heavy weapons to our positions and moved into an offensive. They soon dispersed the Partisan brigades and were executing the Partisans and civilians who were taken prisoners by hanging them on trees and power poles along roads connecting settlements around Monte Grappa, all the way to Felisa. Some months later I learned that I was also declared dead because, allegedly, residents of Cavaso recognized me hanging from the balcony of dr Gino's house. There was actually someone resembling me hanging there.

The only way out of this dire situation was to break through the siege and get out of it. With the detachment which, apart from me, had three other Yugoslavs – Leon Pinto, Drago Pinto and Boža Martinović, the pre-war communist youth activist from Peć – and with the assistance of an escort with good knowledge of the local scenery, without food or water,

we were making our way day and night and running into the Germans, crossing mountain highs and crawling along narrow mountain paths with great ravines underneath. Exhausted, hungry and thirsty we finally came to a meadow on a little plateau, believing to be out of the reach of the Germans and in a position to finally take a rest. There were some hazelnut trees there and we hungrily ate the hazelnuts to pacify our hunger. In doing so we were so careless that we did not even set up guards, and we were surprised by a girl who, out of breath, ran to us to warn us of the Germans approaching. And really, on the slopes of the hills we saw swarms of Germans climbing the hill towards us. We took position and opened fire at the Germans who were still quite some distance from us, and we managed to hold them back for a while.

I looked around and saw behind us first a clearing, then a forest, and behind it huge mountain stone rocks. We needed to run across that space and get into the woods. I gave out an order that we should one by one try to do so, and this was what we did and we got to the woods. Boža and I were the last ones remaining. Our situation was practically hopeless. That is when Boža said something that I will never forget:

„If we are to die, let them see how a Serb dies.“

I, too, was thinking about death. I was not afraid, others have died in combat, and that is the easiest death of all. But I was afraid that I could be taken prisoner or wounded and tortured. I was quite well known and they could easily get to know who I was. And that is why I did the only thing I could do: I got a hand granate out of my pocket and decided that they will not get me alive, so I would activate it at the last moment and lie down on it. I was sad that I would be dying there, in a land unknown to me, far away from home, and that all trace of me would be lost.

So, at the same moment, Boža and I were struck by the same thought. We looked at each other and understood each other without a word. Why not try? We jumped and ran at great speed. Bullets were shooting above our heads, without touching us. At one moment we got to the woods and climbed uphill to our comrades who were hiding behind the rocks, above the forest.

The Germans were sending mortars at us until the evening, and then everything calmed down. We waited for a while, for the darkness to really settle and we were on our way. Our legs and our bodies were fatigued, the eyes wanted sleep. We arrived to a village, terrifyingly quiet, went around it, crossed some streams and came to a clearing by the road. We assumed that we needed to cross the road to come out of the siege.

Just when we thought that we could relax, there were mortars again shining so bright that they turned the night into daytime. Deadly fire-

works started during which bullets were flying over our heads, and machine-gun fire like fire snakes tried to get us and end us. We were helpless, not knowing who was firing, nor where from. I was lying on the ground watching the movement of bullets sliding towards me. I moved my head behind the gun, in an attempt to protect myself. I cannot say how long it lasted as time is not measurable in situations of that sort. But, finally, everything went calm.

Once again, it was all peaceful and quiet, the night set in again. I was looking for my friends, but they were nowhere to be found. I was there alone in the middle of the night, in an unknown place and the only thing I could do was go back in the direction that I came from. It started to rain and the rain was getting heavy. Again, I crossed the brook and came to some trees. Completely soaked, I lied down under a tree, put my bag under my head and fell asleep.

I must have slept for a long time, as I slept the rest of the night and a good part of the day. The sun was already setting on the horizon when I got up, wet and frozen. I looked down the slope and at the distance of some hundred meters I saw a village house and some people in the yard. I started towards them, it was my comrades, who had already written me off. I must have looked miserable, because they got me into the house, laid me down on a sofa and treated me with the kindness usually given to someone who is ill.

At dawn the next day, with the assistance of locals who gave us ladders for this purpose, we crossed the Piave river, settled ourselves on a farm and managed to get in contact with the „Montagna“, the political commissioner of the Mazzini brigade. Their situation was critical. It seemed that the German offensive had covered a much bigger area than we had thought. Partisans were dispersed, retaliation and terror followed, and the local population was in panic. A decision was needed on how to proceed. We were not to stay long at the farm in order to avoid being discovered and in order not to get the local people at threat. Therefore we could not act jointly as a detachment, but individually. In coordination with „Montagna“, I took the task of going back to the Monte Grappa zone, which I knew best, and try to gather and organize the surviving Partisans who were ready to continue the struggle. I tried to persuade Boža to come along, but he refused. I was not to see him again, as he was killed in February 1945. „Montagna“ was also caught and hanged soon after our parting.

Bordering the woods, above Posagno, there was a poor village house of the old man Giacinto de Paoli and his wife Luisa, honest people who did us great favors. They would go down to Posagno and Cavaso, pass on messages and bring information. Their house was conveniently located and served as



a hiding place for Partisans and a base for many of our actions. Partisans named it symbolically „Piccolo Stalingrado“ (the Little Stalingrad). From this house some weeks earlier we were having covert negotiations with the Fascists for the release of Drago Pinto. In doing one of his individual assignments he fell into a Fascist trap above Cavaso and was to be executed. We reached an agreement on Drago's release in exchange for two German prisoners.

After all that I had been through, I returned to my dear and faithful „Piccolo Stalingrado“. I was walking cautiously around the house, came close to the window and peeked in, where I saw Giacinto, Luisa, Drago and Leon. They, too, managed to be saved. I went in and surprised them, as if I was coming from another world. There was no end to our joy.



*Attending the Bar-mitzvah of grandson IVAN-DANIJEL, 1995.*

I took a few days' break and started towards Monte Grappa. I was trying to persuade Drago and Leon to come along, it would make things easier for me, but they would not go. I wandered around the mountain and nowhere did I find a living soul. Monte Grappa was deserted, although only a while earlier it was so full of life and youthful energy. What I saw was burnt down places and homes, dead livestock, everywhere. I felt fear of this emptiness and loneliness.

Darkness came and I hid in a partly burnt shack and went deep into thinking.

I had come to love this mountain which still bore the living scars of battle from World War One. I came to love Italian fighters with whom for some months I was together through thick and thin. I was thinking of these young people, raised under Fascism who, disillusioned, turned their backs to it and took up arms. How pleasant were the evenings that in our free time we spent singing Italian Partisan songs.

I loved those songs which breathed tenderness and warmth, as if they were romantic songs. Even today, so many years on, when I try to recall those melodies, the words spontaneously pour from me, as if linked by silver threads to each other. I am singing:

„T'amo amo con tutto 'l cuore...“ – I love you with all my heart ... You are the passionate love of the deserted who are hoping ... I will love you with sincere love.“

That was their nature. They put their soul into their songs. I remember once in the „Sveti Roko“ prison in Split, singing the aria of Rudolfo from the Puccini's „La Boheme“. The guard stormed in, breathless, and shouted:

„Chi e il tenore, chi e il tenore?“ (Who is the tenor?)

For him it was unthinkable that one of us “bandits” in this cruel prison reality is singing Puccini.

I returned saddened from Monte Grappa, but there was no time for sadness, as events kept pushing us to new tasks.

The Allies were making progress through Italy, step by step. Too slow for us, too quick for the Fascists. Local Fascists were getting increasingly nervy, aware of the unavoidable defeat. Their chief concern was how to hide the traces and remove them from those who could threaten them after their capitulation. I was certainly among those. The news of my death proved not to be true, as villagers saw me and met me. The imagination of the people was awake and there were rumors that, fully armed, I was walking the woods, on skis, carrying a radio-station and talking with Churchill, every day.

The Fascists did everything they could to get a hold of me, burst into villagers' houses, raided them, and finally put a high price on my head. I, on my side, tried to escape it – I changed my locations, slept in stables or on straw, in sheppards' shelters, without the owners aware of it. There were other Jewish families living in hiding in the area who were also under risk, as there were rumors that they will be targets of retaliation.

At the beginning of 1945 we established a Garibaldi detachment „Velo gastone“, which became part of the „Beluno“ division. The detachment was active in the region of Cavaso, Posagno and around Monte Grappa. The di-

vision command appointed me the political commissioner, and the Partisan name of the Garibaldi unit commander was Tito.

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During the last weeks of the war, the Germans were withdrawing, in groups and individually. Italians in great numbers took to arms which they had snatched from the Germans. It was no longer about detachments and brigades, it was a national movement. A great number of Germans were taken prisoners, which made things difficult for us, as we were to house them, feed and keep them. There was a need to appoint a person with sufficient energy to keep discipline in the camp and it was not a simple issues since the Germans were unwilling to accept the status of being prisoners of war taken by Partisans and they requested certain rights. The proposal was to have a Garibaldi fighter appointed and I proposed Drago, who accepted. He was young and ambitious, along with being sufficiently brave and committed.

I came with Drago and the interpreter to the German PoW camp, where order was to be established. On purpose we tied a red ribbon – the Garibaldi symbol – around our necks. We were standing face to face with the crumbles of what used to be the powerful army that the whole world had feared. I was thinking of how the roles had changed. At the outset of the war I was their prisoner, a man of no notice, member of the „inferior race“, a double sinner: Yugoslav and Jewish. And now, this unbeatable “superior race“, these „ubermensch“, were standing humbly before us, members of the „inferior race“ and listening to us and our rules of good conduct.

An incident happened. An officer with large binoculars on his breasts was protesting and demanding his rights, referring to international conventions which they themselves practically never obeyed. While he was getting all worked up, I was looking at his binoculars. What is the use of them? I wondered. For him the binoculars are no longer of any use, while for us they might come in handy. I asked him to come closer, moved the binoculars from his breasts to mine and said assertively:

„Do not forget that you are the prisoner here, therefore act as one. We know quite well, you taught us, how to treat the disobedient.“

Some days later the war was over.



## ABOUT THE FAMILY

DANIEL ISAK DANON, his father, was born in Sarajevo in 888, completed the yeshiva in Sarajevo and served as religious teacher. From 1918 to 1926 he was the Rabbi of the mixed Ashkenazi-Sephardic religious community in Tuzla, and from 1928 to 1932 in Travnik. He was decorated with the Order of Saint Sava. Since 1932 he was living in Sarajevo and serving in the temple on Bjelave. Member of Bet-Din which was chaired by the High Rabbi dr Moric Levi.

The family tradition has it that he originates from the well-known Rabbi Moša Danon, buried in Stolac. In 1942 he was the last living rabbi in Sarajevo. From Sarajevo he was taken to Jasenovac where he was executed.



*Rabbi DANON'S family: CADIK with wife Jelisaveta and daughters GRACIJELA and DANIJELA*

GRACIJA DANON, the mother, was born in Zenica in 1889. In 1941 she was taken, along with other Jewish women, to Đakovo, where all trace of her is lost. The place of her death is unknown.

ISAK DANON, the eldest brother, was born in Sarajevo in 1908. In 1941 the Ustaša took him to the island of Pag, where he was killed.

HAIM DANON, his elder brother, was born in Sarajevo in 1910 and was taken to Jasenovac, which he managed to flee in 1942, after which all trace of him is lost.

ERNA DANON, married Samakov, his elder sister, was born in Sarajevo in 1913. She actively assisted the National Liberation Movement in Sarajevo. After her husband's arrest she fled to Split, where she nursed the wounded. After the Italian capitulation in 1943 she fled to Bari. After the liberation she worked with the late Glunčić and Nevenka Skunac, from Split, on tasks processing the enemy emigration. She went to Venice and worked for an Englishman for a year. In this job, she did many favors to Yugoslavia. Due to doubts that she was working for Yugoslavia, she was arrested in 1946. A month later, due to lack of evidence she was released and was withdrawn to her country in 1947.

Her husband, HAIM SAMOKOVLJA, a printing worker, was a member of the Communist Party since the beginning of 1941. Their flat was used for Party meetings, hiding of underground activists, and a base for hiding materials intended for the front. He was among the first to be taken to the Jasenovac camp, where he was executed.

RAŠELA DANON, the sister, married Musafija, was born in 1915 in Zenica. Before the war she was linked with the progressive labor movement, especially active in the trade union of private clerks and employees, the secretary of which was Nisim Albahari. She also carried out other tasks which were led as of 1940 by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ), such as raising National Aid, working with women, distributing Party leaflets, and so on. Thanks to such activity, she was proposed at the beginning of 1941 as candidate for KPJ membership, which did not happen due to the occupation of the country at the time. She was arrested and taken to the Đakovo camp. Rašela was transferred from the camp to the Osijek hospital to give birth, where she had a still-birth. Her escape was organized from the hospital and she fled to Split where the Fascist Italian authorities put her in prison and, after a while, to the concentration camp on the island of Rab. In the camp, she joined the underground activists run by the camp Party organization. After the capitulation of Italy she joined the Partisans and became a clerk in the battalion sanitation unit. After a battle near the end of 1943 she was taken prisoner and transferred to Auschwitz, subsequently to Bergen-Belsen. She survived a severe typhoid fever, lived to see the liberation and in 1945 returned to Sarajevo.

RUDI MUSAFIJA, Rašela's husband, was born in 1915 in Sarajevo. He was member of the KPJ since before the war. Due to his underground activity he was repeatedly arrested. He joined the National Liberation Movement before the uprising. In 1941 the Ustašas arrested him and put him to beastly torture. During the hearing he was heroic. He was taken to Jasenovac, where he was murdered in 1945.

JOSEF DANON, the youngest brother, was born in Tuzla in 1921. He was a student of electrical engineering. Before the war he became member of the KPJ. Since July 1941 he was with the National Liberation Army, first as fighter of the Romanija Partisan detachment, then as secretary of the District Committee of the Yugoslav Communist Youth Alliance. At the end of 1942 he attended the meeting near Srednje, with Tito present there. He was killed in April 1942 while working as a political activist in the background near Borovčan (Romanija mountain) in a battle with the Chetniks. He was buried in a mass grave in Sokolac (Romanija).

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*Bjanka AUSLENDER*

DESTINY'S CHILD



*Bjanka Auslender was born on 10 December 1929, to father Izidor Levi and mother Flora, née Levi. Although the parents had the same family name, they were not related.*

*In the Holocaust she lost forty-four members of her direct family, including her mother's brother and eight sisters with their children. Her father, mother, grandmother, her mother's sisters with children perished in the Đakovo camp, while her six years younger sister Sarina was taken along with other children from Osijek to Auschwitz, where she was killed.*

*Her father was the only child. His father's name was Avram, his maternal grandfather was Cadik, and the grandmother that she was named after was Blanka. They had all lived in Sarajevo.*

*She matriculated in Zagreb in 1949, enrolled at the Faculty of Philosophy and graduated in time. In Zagreb she married Drago Auslender (whose memories are also included in this volume), with whom she has a daughter and two grandchildren.*

*From her graduation from university until her retirement she worked as librarian in the Zagreb City Library.*

My parents lived with my *Nona* and my father's parents. This community, which has been with me since I was born, is the most precious memory of my childhood. I also had a baby sister Sarina who was born in 1936, also in Sarajevo. Our father was the only child, whereas our mother had a big

family. My *Nona*, Bjanka Levi, had eight daughters and a son. My mother's family was a patriarchal Sephardic family and lived in number 8 in Velika avlija street, in the close vicinity of *Kal Grande* (the Big Temple). Thus, these traditions and everything about the patriarchal Sephardic life is related to my family.

When I say that the family was patriarchal I mean the great respect for the elders. We lived with my *Nono* (grandfather) and *Nona* (grandmother), my father's parents, and this home imprinted in me the feeling of „*bizar la manu*“ (kiss the hand of your *Nona* or *Nono*). And this meant every time when they came from the Temple, when we were sitting at the table, before prayer. This tradition was not so much upheld by my parents, since they considered themselves to be more modern, but it was passed on to myself and my sister by my grandmother and grandfather.

My *Nona* wore the *tukada*, a hat embellished sometimes by gold coins or other decorations. My maternal grandmother wore Sephardic clothes with *tukada*, while her eight daughters no longer did so as it was not fashionable. They wore regular civic clothes.

We were a middle class family, neither rich nor poor, living a decent life. Grandfather was a bank clerk, I remember him as an elderly gentleman, and my father had a pasta factory “Union”. It was not a big industry, more like a small business. Thus, there was always pasta, flour and other food-stuffs at home.

My mother did not work. She stayed at home, with her mother in law and my grandfather who was already retired. I remember that practically every Friday with my *Nona* and my mother we would be greeting and seeing off a group of poor Jews for whom we had small packages made, containing some flour, oil, sugar, pasta. It was always the same people who came, people I otherwise did not know. And I also remember that *Nona* made these packages on Fridays and always saying:

„*Pardona mi!*“, meaning: forgive me.

I asked her:

„*Nona*, why do you say forgive me when you are giving?“

And I clearly remember her saying:

„Dear child, I have to say so because I have and I do not take from others, while they are in a dire situation and it is more difficult for them to take.“

This *pardona mi* left a deep impression in my childhood. Otherwise, we mostly lived within the family. The holidays were the best time: Passover, Purim, the whole family getting together. There would be thirty or forty in our home. Doors of all three rooms would be open, for everyone to be seat-

ed, we sang songs, wore costumes. We, the children, would be especially lively when we were getting money – „*papilikus di Purim*“ (small coins for Purim). We had some kind of little bags, tied around our necks, and we would go to each of our aunts, and there were many, and get from them some coins. The elders, I remember, would be taking the „*platus di Purim*“ (offers for the Purim). They would bake a variety of sweets, sweet and salty cookies, and take them to friends and persons dear to them.

I can still very vividly remember those days, it usually happened on Friday evenings, and my sister and I would be sitting in our Nono's lap. I on the one leg and my six years younger sister Sarina on the other. Nono would tell us Bible stories. I could have been about ten and Sarina about four. This was so until 1941, when everything was suddenly and unpredictably interrupted.

Grandfather would always tell us in advance what he would be telling us about: of the seven hungry and seven rich years, of Abraham, Isaak, Jakob. He had so many Bible stories. He also told us about our old traditions, about how Jews used to live, and he was very much engaged with us, his little grandchildren, Bjanka and Sarina. And it was from them that I acquired and inherited most of these customs and traditions. Afterwards, life changed and everything was turned upside down. Never again was I in a family that would resemble what we had back then.



*BJANKA as a four-year old girl*

At home we spoke Judeo-Espagnol. My grandmother hardly spoke anything else. They would especially speak Judeo-Espagnol when they wanted children not to understand them. But, they were wrong in assuming so because it did not take long for us to understand the language. Judeo-Espagnol was the

language of my parents, my predecessors, and I understand it even now, although my contact with it had stopped when I was about ten or eleven years old. But it still resonates in my ears, in my head, and I am always very pleased to meet people who know the language. My aunt Batševa, the seventh daughter of my grandmother and grandfather, spoke Judeo-Espagnol and with her I could understand the words. My parents, however, were more modern and they motivated us to learn other languages as well.



We were children, we understood whatever was happening in our own way and through our own language. But it was mostly in the form of story-telling and fairy-tales. I still carry with me a feeling that it was all a fairy-tale. Grandfather told us his stories in a very vivid manner, accompanied by movements. He devoted most time to us, and wanted to pass on to us something of what he knew.

When we got together for holidays we would be singing Sephardic romance songs in Judeo-Espagnol. Even now when I occasionally hear these songs I come to life. I had an aunt who sang wonderfully and had a musical instrument *def* (daire, tambourine), so she would sing along and play it. There was always singing in our family when we got together, thirty or forty of us! All my aunts were married and uncle Jozef as well and he was living in Belgrade.

Everyone in the family was religious, but not excessively. We strictly observed the kosher rules. Lights were not lit on Saturdays. After prayer on Saturday, there would be girls coming to heat the food for Saturday. After coming back from the Temple, we would usually eat *pastel*. This girl was a Muslim, we loved her very much and she loved us. She was the one who would get the food warm. Grandmother always went to the Temple, morning and night, while the rest of us would sometimes go and sometimes not.

Near to our home was the *Kal Grande*, but we also went to the Great Temple, which was destroyed in 1941. I cannot recall the name of the street. It was a well known temple in Sarajevo, built after the design of Spanish synagogues, in oriental style.

Before World War Two there were about 10,000 Jews living in Sarajevo. In the neighborhood of Vrace, the names of all these people are engraved in stone plates. On these plates I found the names of all the members of my family, because after the war we were to report all those who had perished and never came back. Of about 10,000 Sarajevo Jews, only 1,000–1,500 came back. After the war I did not live in Sarajevo. I had neither the strength nor the wish to continue living there.



*FLORA and IZIDOR, BJANKA'S mother and father, while engaged*

We learned to read and write Hebrew in religious classes. Our religious teacher was professor Jakob Maestro, who ended up in the Jasenovac camp in an atrocious manner – he was beheaded because he said he was a Judaic theologian. There are documents testifying to this. Learning Hebrew was the most difficult thing for me – it was something I knew nothing about, practically like hieroglyphs, but I had to learn. As a primary school pupil I could read, I am not sure how well I could write Hebrew.

Everyone in the family had his or her obligations. Including children. I often wondered why, I protested, even cried when other girls would go out to play and I had to do my chores. And these chores were: to clean shoes (the girl who helped around the house did not do that), dry and put away dishes, to spend some time at home sitting, reading and just being at home, to help set and clean the table, to pick up the left-overs, regularly visit my aunts, and always be of assistance if there is need to for instance go quickly and buy something at the shop. It was a practice to install in children since very early age some habits, duties, chores which were very much respected.

It was my Nona, not my mother, who always had the final say in this respect. She was the one who decided who was to do what, what to eat, who and when is to do certain chores. I could never tell my mother that I would not do something. Because she would say:

„Nona is here. Ask her.“

The most ordinary food was *pastel*, *zelenika* ... *Pastel* was a dish cooked before the Shabbat, on Friday morning, and was eaten on Saturday, at about ten o'clock, after the temple. It was made of a layer of pastry at the bottom and at the top with minced meet in between. It was baked at high temperature. *Zelenika* was also pastry on top and at the bottom, but filled with a mixture of fresh cheese, eggs and spinach. We would also cook okra with lamb. Okra was sold in the markets dried and on a string. We would make oriental dishes like baklava and “urmasica” and other desserts in sugar syrup. Muslims would invite us for their holiday *Bajram*.

Until 1941 life was mostly about living with the family and a broad circle of friends, not all of whom were Jewish. There were among them also Muslims or Christian Orthodox, and others.

The year 1941 unexpectedly changed our life. The bombing of Sarajevo, the fear, the terror. We were living in the centre of town, and had to flee our house because a bomb had hit the neighborhood. We were fleeing towards Bjelave. We would be spending the days there and returning at night. Those were the first signs that everything had changed. Our uncle, the husband of my mother's sister, was killed in the bombing.



The Germans bombed Sarajevo, right after the bombing of Belgrade. They hit the buildings of the Post Office, Theatre, the then Aleksandrova Street (we lived close by). There was even a whole family which died in a small house. It was children that I played with. The bombing of Sarajevo was for me the end of all that my childhood represented to me, it was an ominous tiding of what was to come.



*The numerous families together in Sarajevo for Hamishoser. BJANKA is in her mother's lap, in the carrying pillow, behind her is father IZIDOR*

After the bombing, some members of our greater family were in detention. Two of my uncles were taken prisoners by the Germans. Others who were mobilized managed somehow to return home from the Yugoslav Army. Subsequently, the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) was declared, and that was the moment when detention of Jews began. Jews were first being collected and taken for forced labor in Sarajevo itself. Already in May we often saw announcements that Jewish men are to report for forced labor. Father was still going to his factory. However, at that time the Ustaša commissioner of the NDH had been appointed, so father was something like a worker in his factory, helping to keep the factory working. But, every now and then we would hear: Izidor has been taken for forced labor, Isidor has been taken ... He would come home exhausted.

We, the children, were not to know everything. I heard many times my mother crying, or my grandmother or grandfather. And then, one day, we heard that my father Izidor and my grandfather Avram, who was more than 75 years of age, were taken to Jasenovac; we were never again to hear a single word from them, they were never to return. We heard from some people who were there that father lived for a very short period (I think he suffered from his intestinal tract) and he lost his life in the camp. We never got a single word from him or from grandfather.

My mother stayed with my Nona, an old lady of seventy-five. And while others were trying to save themselves and were fleeing in the direction of Mostar, mother did not want to leave my Nona. Her only sister who went to Mostar was my aunt Batševa, we called her Ševa, a teacher in the Jewish kindergarten in Sarajevo. She arrived to Mostar and managed to find some hiding. Her husband Eliezar Levi, a well-known writer, professor of Greek and Latin from Sarajevo, followed her. However, he was recognized at the so-called "Malta", the border, and he was detained and taken to the camp, never to return. He was taken to Jasenovac.

We stayed on in Sarajevo, hiding practically every night, with some of our aunts who lived on the outskirts of the city. There were rumors that they are first taking the people from the center of the city and only then from the outskirts. The hiding and the fear lasted until November 1941.

We always had everything readily packed and I was already beginning to wish that they would take us somewhere so we do not have to flee and hide. The house was overtaken by sadness and silence. My mother overnight looked as if she was ten or twenty years older. My parents had the perfect marriage, the whole family spoke about it, it was filled with true love.

Friends permanently urged my mother:

„Flora, go with the children, hide with them!“

And my mother would say:

„We cannot. I cannot leave my old mother, my mother-in-law.“

So, November of 1941 came. One afternoon we were just getting ready for a sleepover somewhere. Our aunts lived in Bjelave, and even further away in Bembaša and near the Tobacco Factory. We would usually go there in the afternoon and come back in daytime. That day three men came, one was SS and two were Ustaša, with big U on their caps. I think I will never forget those faces. They ordered us to quickly get ready, that we were going, that they are taking us for labor somewhere.

It was two of my mother's sisters and their children at home, as their husbands were already taken to Jasenovac. So we took with us what we already had packed – some bags, suitcases, I do not recall specifically, with

some food. There was my little sister of six and myself of eleven, my mother and my Nona. They pushed us into trucks. Neither my sister nor I could climb up. Somehow they got us in, pushing us from below, while others were helping from the truck pulling us up. The trucks were packed full; one could not even stand up. We were crammed up tightly as a book. It was all Jews from our neighborhood: from Baš čaršija, Aleksandrova street. They took us to a big barracks building and put us in big empty rooms, with nothing on the bare floors.

The barrack building was near the railway station, so wagons were close by. We stayed at the barracks for two or three days, without getting any food. We had already eaten what we had taken with us, even what we got from others. After two or three days, on a cold November night, very late, they got us up (and we were in fact happy to leave those barrack rooms) and got us into livestock wagons. Again weeping, calling for help. The fog was thick, like it sometimes gets in Sarajevo. At one moment my little sister and I had lost our mother, and our Nona. Then we all found each other again. And somehow we got into those wagons, with sixty or seventy people perhaps, small children, sick elderly women. The train started into the unknown.

We had no idea where we were going.

Hygiene was terrible. There were no bedpans or toileting utensils and one corner of the wagon was said to be for such needs. I know that we travelled for a long time. It was dark, everything was dark, the wagons were sealed. Listening to all the noises was horrible; I think I shall never forget the crying, wailing, sobbing, but also the singing of the younger ones. The words of the songs were saying: „we are now leaving our town, our bed is hard, but freedom is close at hand, and we rejoice at it – baramba“. I can still hear it resonate in my ears.

However, we were not taken to the camp right away. This train, not listed in the railway timetable, with wagons packed with women, children and the old, took several days to get us to Loborgrad, Croatia. The first stop after some days was Zagreb. That is when the doors of the wagon opened for the first time. It must have been after three or four days in the suffocating wagon. We had to take care of all our physiological needs in the wagon itself. When we stopped in Zagreb, we were met by women of the Zagreb Jewish Community who had brought tea, water and some warm food and bread. All I know is that that was the first time we had some food. I was twelve at the time; my sister was six years younger. Our hands were outstretched to get some food. The thirst was horrible; there was no water, nothing to drink whatsoever. The stench was unbearable. And the door closed again, and again we were heading somewhere, stopping somewhere, and after some

time we were again in Sarajevo. Lobargrad was full to its capacity and could not take any more inmates.

We returned to Sarajevo and settled down in a school in Marindvor. It was December of 1941. The train trip there and back took seven days, and we were now in this school building. It seemed like heaven. The school was clean, with wooden floors, there was straw to sleep on in the rooms. We could take visits, so my mother's non-Jewish friends came to visit us and bring some food. We were dirty, some had lice, some were stinking, sick, not human any more. My mother's friend Milena asked my mother to let my sister and myself go with her, although she was a Serb and at that time also at risk. First she took my little sister to wash and feed her, and then she took me. She gave me a bath and fed me. She managed to get us out as her children. However, my mother had not expected our onward journey to be as tragic as it turned out to be and she decided to keep her children with herself. So, we went back, to the school in Marindvor and soon afterwards we were again put on a train. Into sealed wagons. Ustašas kept the guard. While we were travelling in the wagons someone said we were going to Slavonski Brod. Then we heard through the window that in fact we were going to Đakovo, where we were taken into a mill, where wagons could approach. The doors opened. There were dead bodies already inside. My Nona was still half alive, she and my mother had to take care of us, the children, and of the elders, the mother-in-law.

We were said to be the first shipment to arrive in Đakovo. The first sight of Đakovo was the mill, huge, three floors. A cold and foggy December day. I cannot know how much below zero, but blood was freezing in our veins. The coldest, however, were our souls.

The camp had already been arranged, with thick barbed wire around, dogs, guard houses, and watch towers. They were pushing us and shouting: „Faster! Faster!“

The children would fall and stand up. It was snowing. We were terrified, because they had said we would be going to a labor camp. First, before we entered the camp, there were barracks where we were to wash and shower. We were dirty, smelling badly, we travelled for so long. Everything gave out a pungent stench. They stripped us naked. There were only women, children and old ladies there. The few men rounded up in Sarajevo with the women and children (my relatives were not with us, as they had already been taken away) were separated already at the Marindvor school and were taken away separately. This camp was intended exclusively for women and children. So, we were waiting in the freezing cold to take our shower. And in fact they were showers, not gas chambers.

We took our clothes off, threw them away, burnt them and were given other old clothes, or clothes some managed to keep. After the shower we were met by a group of smiling women right there in the camp! They were women from Osijek who, for some time, could come to the camp, they were members of the Osijek Jewish Community. They welcomed us with warm tea, some food and smiles. It was healing for our cold and sad hearts. It was like being reborn.

We got tea and some food, and took our places on the first floor of the mill. The first floor was for the first detainees. There was straw on the floor and it was December of 1941. That transport consisted of about 1,200 women and children. The mill was enormous. I later learnt that the mill belonged to the diocese which temporarily lended it to the Đakovo camp for this purpose.

We settled ourselves in a corner: my mother, my little sister, I, my Nona, my mother's sisters with their children, so we were somehow together. It was terribly cold with no heating, we were exhausted, overwhelmed with sadness and misery.

My mother put her arms around myself and my little sister and told us happy stories. This possibly put a smile or two on our faces. She was promising that we would be staying there for a while and returning home again to find our daddy and Nono and that everything would go back to how it used to be. And we trusted her completely. She sang lullabies to us. I was crying for my coco-milk, which I always had after dinner. So mother told me that after we go back home I would be getting a double portion of it or however much I wanted. The coco-milk was of special significance for me. Nothing else seemed to matter as much before going to bed.

At that time the Osijek Jewish Community was still allowed to bring food to the Đakovo camp. Women would come to visit, giving us a piece of bread, cheese, some food. Later I found out that at that time the Jewish Community of Osijek took on itself the obligation for our food and care. There were some women doctors who came and took turns in the Đakovo camp. The citizens of Osijek at that time still had not been rounded up and taken to camps. It was after the infamous Tolj arrived that this function of the Osijek Jewish Community was abolished in the Đakovo camp, and after that we only irregularly received some food. There was also a kind of an infirmary, a tailor's shop, some work was being done in the kitchen, and we were given very small portions, but they were there. The horrible fact was that we were surrounded by barbed wire, dogs, and we children had nowhere to move around.

So in the camp it was us and these good women who managed somehow covertly to take away small children from the camp to Osijek. One of



them liked me, her name was Ela Guter. She was a tailor and she lived with her mother, an old lady, in Osijek at number 2 Rajznerova street. She took me and begged my mother to let her take me, promising to take good care of me. She came often with a permit to Đakovo bringing food and assistance collected in Osijek. It was mostly uncooked food, cooked eggs and some other foods. Probably 70 percent of what got there went to the Ustašas, and only a small part to the camp inmates.

My mother made a decision and – she gave me away! Aunt Ela one day took me out as her child, I do not know how she managed to pull that off. I can still remember how my mother embraced me tightly before I left.

„We will go back. We will be together again“, she told me.

After that time the Osijek Jewish Community managed to organize for children up to 10 years of age to be accommodated with Jewish families in Osijek, Vinkovci, and other places around the region of Slavonia. That is when my little sister Sarina got out. She was placed with a wealthy family in Osijek. I do not know their name. Aunty Ela Guter was a tailor. She dressed me from top to toe. Apart from me she had taken in another small child, two years old, the little boy Drago, or Dragan. This is how in February I got out of the Đakovo camp and my sister did the same in March and we both ended up with Jewish families in Osijek. However, I suffered so much and was so ill (I had a very bad case of dysentery, aunty Ela just barely managed to save me), that one day a woman activist of the Jewish Community of Osijek took me back to the camp. Thus, after having left the Đakovo camp, I went back. I could hardly recognize my mother. During that month that I had not seen her she had become an old woman. My grandmother Sara had in the meantime passed away. I could stay with my mother for only as long as aunty Ela was staying, as I was coming as her daughter. One night, I think we stayed overnight, I was clutching very tight to my mother, her tears keeping me warm. I think she felt that we shall never see each other again. At that time my mother was twenty-nine. That was the last time that I ever saw her. She died in Đakovo, of typhoid, and I had not known this until after the war. I trusted that I would see her again, because she had promised me so, and I trusted my mother unconditionally.

In Osijek, aunty Ela took care of me, caressed me, as if I was her own. It was the same with the little boy Dragan. Things were also very good for my little sister Sarina. They loved and cared for her, and tried to make up for being without her mom at such an early age. However, these illusions failed.

Difficult and hard times came for all people of Osijek, noble and good families who tried to save the children. I was not alone, there were my two nieces in Osijek as well, also with a family.

On a sad and most awful of days the worst happened. How I managed to avoid it, only God knows.

Aunty Ela sent me to her nephew in Bjelišće. He was married to a German woman. There was a big timber industry there. She sent me there for a few days knowing that I would have a good time with the Bihler family. While I was there for some days, I think during Easter holidays, aunty Ela was taken away, together with her eighty-years old mother, as well as my little sister with the family that took her in (the lady's name I think was Olika) – to the Tenja road, which was a collection centre for Jews of Osijek.

The Bihler family, from Bjelišće, kept me. Since he was a Jew, they fled from Bjelišće to Osijek, where they lived in the Reisnerova Street, I cannot remember the number. They had their own little house, they saved me.

And my little sister did not even go together with the people who took her in, the people she called her uncle and aunt, her second mother, but all the eight and ten year old children were rounded in separate wagons. They never got anywhere. Allegedly, on the way to Auschwitz, all children were executed.

My aunt Batševa Levi, one of my mother's eight sisters, the one who was the teacher in the Jewish kindergarten in Sarajevo, was the only one who managed to save herself by going to Mostar, a town under Italian occupation. She sold everything that she had, everything that she managed to have with her, and she sent a Muslim woman, who was supposedly doing such things, to take me and bring me to my aunt in Mostar. The Bihler family could not guarantee that they would be able to keep me.

So, one day in the summer of 1942, a woman came to take me. After a lot of all kinds of difficulties, as it was all in the middle of the war, I arrived to Mostar to be with my aunt Batševa. She lived with her nephew, from Mostar, in a small room, by that time completely empty, as she had sold everything to pay for me to be brought to her. Thus, truly by magic, I was saved from Đakovo. My little sister, my cousins, who were also small children, or my mother or grandmother, no one of that big family, nobody was alive, except for my aunt Batševa Levi and my oldest cousin, who was a prisoner of war.

We lived in Mostar for some months. In 1942 Mostar was divided: Ustaša administration and Italian administration. The Italians protected us.

There was a Jewish soup-kitchen in Mostar and that is where we ate. I was even doing apprenticeship for tailor, so as to be qualified for some work. At that time I was twelve and a half. However, Mostar was soon to become part of the Independent State of Croatia. The Jewish Community together with the Italians organized for the Jews to move and be saved. And this was



not only for Jews from Mostar, but from other regions as well from which Italians were withdrawing in 1942.

Sometimes in June we started from Mostar to the island of Lopud, where the Italians put us up in a hotel. It was very good. We were under guard, hungry, but nicely accommodated. Life was organized. We were starving, but there was no torture. We, the children, even attended some school. The teacher, Ms Kon and other teachers from Sarajevo, organized our lives and got the children together. We assisted in the kitchen. For me, compared to Đakovo, this was like being in a sanatorium. How my children's soul felt, knowing nothing of my mother, my parents, sister, one can only imagine. I went to sleep in tears and woke up in tears. But somehow, we all had a shared destiny, everyone had someone who was taken away. We lived in hope that, in the end, we would be reunited. No one could have imagined that we were never again to see those most dear to us.

While in Lopud, the Italians got all of us who were in different collection centers together and in small ships transferred us to the island of Rab. There were several thousands of people collected there. From the „Grand“ hotel we arrived to barracks full of bed-bugs, hundreds crammed in every barrack building. The good luck for our group was that we were put into a solid constructed barrack building. Those who were transferred to Kraljevica were put into wooden barracks, like tents. We were separated from them by a road only. So, across the road, it was plain tents, detaining Slovenians. In the island of Rab we lived as true camp inmates. Separated by thick barbed wire, guards, hungry, hungry for food but also for everything else, but still alive. There was no torture.

We somehow managed to get life organized. The older inmates took care that we were busy with something. School was set up. I remember that the Sarajevo teacher Ms Kon was teaching us some subjects. Gatherings were organized, as well as working in the kitchen, cleaning, washing. We even had Italian lessons. Every day, every one of us, children and adults equally, were given one *pagnoca* (bread, weighing about 100 grams). Children above 12 years of age were even taken to the beach for swimming. In this way we could even wash ourselves.

We stayed in Rab until the capitulation of Italy on 8 September 1943. Older youth was organized, training courses for nurses were organized. I would guess they were getting ready to join the Partisans. We were eavesdropping on everything. After the capitulation of Italy, the Jewish detachment was established. Together with my aunt who saved me and with a group of Jews from the camp I was transferred to the town Rab. The camp was abolished, abandoned. We were put in hotels and boarding homes and were given better food. However, this was short lived. The Italians were with-

drawing from the island and Germans and Ustaša were coming. We had urgently to leave the island of Rab and move to the liberated territory.

Already by the end of September, we joined the Partisans. It was thirteen of us. We were scattered in small groups. We moved on to Senj. From Senj, long lines of Jews from the island of Rab were moving to liberated territories. With my aunt I got to Moslavina. All on foot. Of course, there was shooting as we were moving, there was hiding in mud-huts. Winter was soon to come, it was already October. It was an endless journey. We started towards Moslavina and my aunt, being a teacher, was right away engaged to work in a children's home. I came to that home. Subsequently, children were being distributed to different accommodations. The children up to 10 years of age were sent to a village called Dišnik, or maybe Bršljanica, something like that; we were sent to another village. For the children without parents, either due to them being with the Partisans or being dead, boarding schools and children's homes were set up. I got into a children's home. We were collecting food for the wounded and for the Partisans and we attended classes.

Until the Sixth Offensive we were in different accommodations in the territory of Moslavina and subsequently, via Hungary, we moved on to Bajmok. In the wider liberated territory, where there were Partisans and the National Liberation Army, there were some twelve, maybe more, such children's homes. That is where I completed my first year of grammar school, living in the children's home in Bajmok.

And the war was over.

Happiness, shouting, enthusiasm. We were all going to find our families. We were transferred from Bajmok to Zagreb. Right away, already in 1945, a Partisan children's home was established in Habelićeva street number 1. I came to Zagreb, my aunt as well. However, there was an order that we were all to go back to where we came from. My aunt returned to Sarajevo, and I went along. Those were possibly the worst days of my life, because I realized that nobody of this big family had returned: eight sisters and a brother, forty-four close family members, my mother's sisters and their children – this for me was the terrible truth. That is when I first thought of suicide. I no longer wanted to live. All hope had been lost, all illusions and expectations came to nothing. I was in puberty. Life to me did not make sense. I was invited to go back to Zagreb, despite the fact that I was born in Sarajevo and belong there. The boarding school in Habelićeva 1, the Partisan boarding home and grammar school instilled in me new strength and trust in life. My aunt remained in Sarajevo until 1948, after which she immigrated to Israel. In Zagreb I completed two years of grammar school curriculum during one year, thus matriculating in academic year 1948/49. Until that time I was per-

manently in the boarding school. After matriculation, I received scholarship and I was practically for the first time out in the street. At the age of nineteen I was alone, not ready for life outside the boarding school. Luckily, I found a good friend from the time of the camp in Lopud and Rab – Drago Auslender – my present day husband. He asked me:

„What are you doing? Why are you wandering around?“

I told him that I had been given a scholarship and had enrolled to study at the Faculty of Philosophy, but had no place to stay, that I am in the street. And he said:



*BJANKA by the monument to her dearest family in Đakovo*

„Listen, let us try. I am living as a boarder with a very nice lady, Rikica Kajon, the sister of Mr. Levi, secretary of the Jewish Community of Zagreb, who has taken me in. Maybe she will take you in as well. I will ask her.“

He told her about me.

„Is she related to Batševa Levi, teacher from Sarajevo?“, she asked.

„Yes, that is her aunt.“

„Get her here right away; she will share my room with me. I will make in my room another bed and she can come“, she said.

So, my destiny changed overnight. Not only that I had found another mother, Rikica Kajon, but I had also found my future husband, Drago Auslender. My life

once again made sense. I became optimistic, regained my trust in life and my destiny. Getting out of the close vicinity of death does not happen too often. And I also found my good, dear, noble husband, had a daughter who became a master of veterinary science and gave me two wonderful grandsons. In fact, I was born again. I am a happy woman.

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*Drago AUSLENDER*

WE WERE UNAWARE OF WHAT WAS COMING



*Drago Auslander was born on 4 May 1929 in Vinkovci, Croatia, of father Mavro and mother Erna, née Deitelbaum. Until World War Two he lived in the village of Ivankovo, close to Vinkovci, and there was another Jewish family there. His grandfather probably had origins in Hungary. Father Mavro was engaged in wholesale of grains and was working about 100 acres of his land and land of his brother Jakša and sisters Herma, Irma and Ružica, the land inherited from their father.*

*Until World War Two he completed his primary school in Ivankovo and two years of grammar school in Vinkovci. During the war, in the period 1941–1945, he did not attend school. After the war he continued his education in the Osijek Partisan Grammar School, matriculating in 1948. Subsequently he enrolled to study at the Faculty of Agriculture in Zagreb and was subsequently employed as engineer of agriculture at the Croatian Livestock Selection Centre in Zagreb, working there continually until his retirement in 1993.*

I would first like to say a few words about my direct and greater family. My father had a brother, Jakša, who was a doctor in Vinkovci. He had a wife Greta and daughter Elizabeta, nicknamed Liza, born in 1930. They all survived the Holocaust. The uncle and aunt died after the war and their daughter, my cousin, is living in New York. My father's oldest sister, Herma, was married to the Belgrade attorney dr Hercog. During the war they fled to Hungary and survived the Holocaust.

My father's second sister Irma, married Kraus, lived in Osijek. She was married to Emil Kraus who ran the Osijek swimming grounds „Dijanabad“. They had two children. Son Zdenko was taken in 1941 from Zagreb to the Jadovno camp, where he perished. Daughter Mira was married to an active army officer. They were living in Belgrade and they survived the war. Aunt Irma was at the concentration camp on the island of Rab and that is how she was saved, while her husband Emil was taken in 1941 to Jasenovac, not to return. The third sister, Ružica, married Binder, lived in Zemun, where they had a wood and timber trading business. They had two children: son Paul and daughter Anica. At that time Paul was thirteen and Anica eighteen. They all perished at the Sajmište camp in Belgrade (the Zemlin Fair Grounds concentration camp).

My mother's father Josip Deitelbaum was about 82 when he was liquidated in 1942, during the liquidation of Jews from Vinkovci. He was raised in the strict patriarchal spirit, very religious. In his old age he was mostly preoccupied with his garden. While younger, he had a textile trading business, first in Bošnjaci, and subsequently in Vinkovci. My grandmother Gize-la was about 78 when she was taken to the camp and perished. My mother had a brother, Hugo Deitelbaum, married to Giza. They had a son, born in 1927. All three of them were taken in 1942 to Jasenovac where they perished.

My mother's oldest sister Olga, married Brihta, lived in Belgrade. She perished during the Holocaust, suffocated in the infamous suffocation trucks locally known as „dušegupka“. Her son Zdenko survived the Holocaust and after the war went to Israel where he subsequently died. The other sister, Helena, married Jung, lived in Osijek. Her husband was a well-known horse tradesman. They had three children. Their oldest daughter Lilika managed with the last such transport in 1940 to immigrate to the Palestine, while the two sons stayed in Yugoslavia. The older of the two, Leo, ended up in Hungary and was taken in 1944 to Bergen-Belsen. He survived the horrors of the camp and went to Switzerland and after the war was over he returned to Croatia. The younger one was with the parents. They initially fled to Mostar, after which they were transferred to the island of Lopud, and subsequently to the island of Rab. That is how they survived.

My mother had a third sister Ema, married Grin, whose husband died before the war. She lived in Vinkovci with her parents and had two sons. The older son Oto had just matriculated, while the younger Egon was in secondary school, he was sixteen. In 1941 they were taken to concentration camps in Croatia, where they perished.

From those days I remember that we had house servants and three coachmen who worked at the estate. We had another man who was engaged in farming and assisting my father in the grain trading business. Our house was big and prosperous, full of life and located in the centre of the village.



Farming produce was traded in the yard every day. There were wage workers who worked for my father. Mother also helped. We had about ten horses. There were two maids. The family was well off.

My mother's father went to the temple in Vinkovci every day. The rest of the family was not religious, but for holidays we regularly went to the synagogue. My father's parents had died in 1932 or 1933 of consequences of being attacked by Čaruga, a well known bandit, who attacked the house one night. Brandy was made in our house. As he was not satisfied with what he got, he beat up my grandparents so that they never recovered and died.

I actually felt anti-Semitism for the first time in 1941 when the Germans entered Ivankov. It happened at around 1 o'clock at night, when the army stormed the place on motorcycles. The population of Ivankovo at that time consisted of about 50 percent Croats and the same share of native Germans, locally known as "folksdojčer". They were enthusiastic about the German arrival, and our neighbors who were native Germans welcomed them with „Heil, heil!“. My mother, father and I were watching this from behind window shades and listening. It was then that we realized that hard times had come for us.

As far as I can remember, prior to this my mother and father had not thought about fleeing our place and house. There was an overwhelming sense of fear, but still I think we were not sufficiently aware of what was in store. Since father was living in good relations with everyone in the community, people naively believed that father would be saved. Ivankovo was a big village and Croat neighbors collected about two thousand signatures appealing that no one should touch my father. But in 1942 the infamous Ustaša Ivan Tolj came to Vinkovci and an overall hunt for the Jews began. About a month later there were no Jews left in the area. He managed to exterminate all Jews from Vinkovci and the wider region. Ivan Tolj was arrested in 1945, tried and publicly executed in Vinkovci.

Yes, in those days of general turmoil we were not aware of what was in store for us. It was only after the mass arrests of Jews by Tolj that our eyes were wide open! I remember the Sunday, 3 May 1942, when a friend of the family came to our home around midnight, knocking at our window. He told us:

„I am coming from Vinkovci. I saw it, they have taken everyone away! I saw your relatives. Try to save yourselves!“

The next day, 4 May, was my birthday. My Bar Mitzvah. Mother and I packed, took with us some food, and at four in the morning with a horse wagon, fled to hide with our friend Ilija Zelić at his farm. Father had not come with us. I do not know what he was thinking, but he said that he would be coming after us, in the evening. However, around seven, as I later found out, they came to get him and took him to the collection site in Vinkovci,

from which he was taken to Jasenovac. He never came back. Ilija Zelić was arrested, as they supposed that we were hiding in his farm. The next day, however, we moved on to the village Tordince. That was where his daughter in law had parents. We stayed for eight days with them, in hiding. However, since Ilija was arrested, his son came and said that they could no longer hide us and that we had to leave. Dressed as farmers, my mother and I started on foot towards Vinkovci.

We arrived to Vinkovci, and living in Vinkovci there were my father's brother, his wife and child. The uncle was a doctor, at that time mobilized in Bosnia, where many Jewish doctors were engaged in fighting endemic syphilis. We could not stay with them, since they were in great fear that we could get them at risk. In the meantime, my mother went to her parents' house. There was nobody there. She came back and said:

„I have no way out of this. I can see no way for us to save ourselves. We will go and report ourselves for a camp!“

I refused this idea which offered no hope whatsoever, saying that we will not surrender ourselves and that we would keep on fleeing. That is how we decided to go to Osijek. It was about five o'clock. In the meantime we were trying to persuade some carriage drivers to take us to Osijek, but none of them dared to do it.

Since we left without any money and without passes, we headed for Nuštar, on the road Gaboš-Ostrovo. At about seven in the evening we came to a village – I cannot recall exactly, but possibly it was the village Tenjski Antunovac. There was curfew and we could not keep moving on. We spent the night in a house there, and at four in the morning we continued, afraid that the owners could report us. We got out without saying goodbye or thank you. We continued going by carriage and on foot, whichever was possible. In any case we managed despite the Ustaša guards to get into Osijek. Once in Osijek, out in the street, my mother ran into one of her sisters living there whose family had not yet been taken away. Somehow we got to her home, but since Jews in Osijek were at risk we had to keep moving.

We stayed in Osijek until 1 June 1942. That is when my uncle Marcel Jung, at that time working for a company trading in horses, took me to Đakovo. There was an animal fair in Đakovo on that day. He took me to his friends, family Surovi. They had a metal-working shop and a “locomobile”, which in previous years used to provide energy for our corn drying plant. In autumn that machine would be working for my father's business and that is how this friendship started.

The Surovi family took me on as apprentice in their metalworking shop. Of course it was a great risk for them. In Đakovo, about 35 kilometers from Ivankovo, hiding me was a great risk for them. I feared that someone from Ivankovo could see me, report me, and I would be taken away. My mother, in



the meantime, went from Osijek with her nephew, son of her sister Helena, to Mostar. Aunt Helena and her husband followed them afterwards.

Until June 1942 we went every day to the location Tinjska Road, where we were building a camp. The day before the camp was closed (meaning that those who were there at the time building the camp could no longer get out), I went to Đakovo and thus saved myself. I stayed in Đakovo until September 1942. Since there was risk for me to stay there I sent a message to my mother, then in Mostar, to send someone for me as my stay in Đakovo was a danger. It was not so only for myself but also for the Surovi family. At that time Đakovo was a collection camp for Jewish women and children, mostly from Bosnia.

For work reasons I used to pass every day by that infamous mill, where on daily basis dozens of women died. The camp was in the Đakovo mill, which was adjusted for that purpose, although the conditions in it were abominable. Typhoid was widespread there. Victims were buried in the Šakovo cemetery which is still there. Each grave is known individually. At that time, while still a child, my wife Bjanka was detained there. Her mother, grandmother and aunts perished there. But she, as a child, was saved. We did not know each other at that time. We knew where the women inmates came from, because already in 1941 we provided assistance to them from the Vinkovci and Osijek Jewish Community.

One September day a woman came from Mostar to take me back to Mostar with her. Under the pretence that I was her son, doing apprenticeship in Đakovo, I moved with her to Mostar. The journey was difficult. At that time there were already Partisan diversions on the railway, and there were constant controls. To make things more difficult – in Slavonski Brod – the woman who came for me and I had lost each other! Out of the great fear which I felt, I had not even remembered what she looked like. And she had the tickets for both of us. It happened in a single moment: as the place was very crowded, she sent me ahead, to take a palce for us, and she would follow. And in that crowd we lost each other. The train patrol asked me on a number of occasions to present my documents, which were with her. I walked through the train, from one compartment to another, looking for my alleged mother. Luckily, she recognized me and we could present our documents.

We arrived to Mostar. My mother did not dare meet me at the station, but waited for me in a nearby alley. Mostar was under dual administration, by Italians and Ustaša. My mother had also come to Mostar illegally, with a counterfeit personal document and a pass. She herself was not safe there – after eight days she was arrested by Ustaša. Fortunately, thanks to the intervention by the president of the Mostar Jewish Community, Mr. Hajon, who had strong links with the Italians, she was saved.

When the Italians started their withdrawal from Mostar, they took the Jews with them. So, we ended up in Dalmatian settlements: some in Kupari, or Mlini, or the island of Lopud... We got to Lopud and were put up in the then closed hotels, surrounded by barbed wire. We were not to get out but we were allowed, under guard, even to swim. I still remember that we children would often go through the wire and take a swim on our own.

We stayed in Lopud until March 1943, the time when the Italians collected all the Jews and transferred them to the island of Rab. It was a true concentration camp, surrounded by barbed wire. The discipline and regime was much stricter, the food much worse, the treatment was stricter too – but there was no killing. The situation was much more difficult for the inmates in the island of Rab. Many perished there, as in the autumn of 1942 there was flooding, and they were accommodated in tents. Many people died due to those storms and floods.

We knew what had happened to our father, although we were never in direct contact with him. He only intermittently communicated with his brother in Vinkovci. From what I heard, he perished in Jasenovac in 1944.

We were in Rab at the time of the capitulation of Italy, on 8 September 1943. We were all rejoicing, even Italian soldiers, not knowing what was yet in store for us until the end of the war. Partisans came from the mainland and the Italians laid their arms down. The Slovenian and our administration took over the camp and we were free. The transfer to the mainland began, every night, in small boats. We were mostly heading towards Senj and Jablanac, to the liberated territory of Lika, Kordun, and Banija. This transfer was organized by the Partisans. Regretfully, not all managed to be transferred. I think that in Rab there was a total of between 3,000 to 3,200 Jews. The majority was saved, but a number of them remained at the island. On 19 March 1944 the Germans landed on Rab and about 95% of those who had not left the island were transferred to German concentration camps. It was mostly the elderly inmates.

We walked on foot to the liberated territory, from Jablanac, via Otočac, Kladaša, Topusko and Banija, all the way to Slavonia. Farmers' wagons would be carrying people's belongings, back-packs, possibly a suitcase if some people had one, while we mostly went on foot. German planes circled above us, so moving during the day was practically impossible. My aunt Irma Kraus, my father's sister, stayed in Rab all the time: she was not discovered and she survived. She remained to stay with a family there. After the war her daughter went to get her in Rab and found her in very poor health. She moved her first to Zagreb and then to Osijek, where she recovered.

The majority of the young people went with the Rab brigade into combat. We were aware that the National Liberation Movement was headed by the Communist Party. We were equally aware that the Germans would

sooner or later invade the island, as it actually happened. All those who had doubts paid dearly for it with their lives. My mother's sister even went to Slavonia, to Papuk, while we stayed in Topusko, Glina, Buzeta, Klasnić.

There were many people in the vicinity of Topusko. Selling what they still had in their back-packs, they on their own managed for food. My mother and I were with a group from Sarajevo, with the Finci family. We moved together: Senj, Otočac, Babin potok, Kladuša, towards Topusko. From Topusko we continued to the village Buzeta, in the region of Banija. We were there with the Finci family in December 1943, at the time of the VI offensive.

It was at that time that my mother got ill, she had joint inflammation. So, one day, when the Ustaša from Glina launched an attack against the Serbian village Buzeta, the whole village took refuge in the woods. I had to carry both my mother's and my back-pack. My mother stayed behind with a woman and survived the slaughter by the Ustaša. She was not able to move. Fortunately, a Partisan unit came and stopped the Ustaša. At night we returned to Buzeta. Finally, in January 1944 mother was transferred to the neighboring village Klasnić which, supposedly, had a doctor.

The Partisan administration arranged for accommodation for us. There was a schedule made and local villagers had to take in refugees into their homes. School buildings were also used for this purpose. We slept on the floors, on the ground.

We were hoping that the doctor would be able to help my mother. However, since there were no medicines available, nothing could help. Mother died on 15 January 1944. She felt that she would not be getting well and she asked Jahiel Finci, in case that she does not live, to take care of me. Thus, after 15 January 1944 I was with the Finci family until my arrival in Zagreb in May 1945. They were very good and caring for me.

After our stay in Buzeta (Banija) we moved to Topusko, where Jahiel Finci was working in the administration of ZAVNOH, and I was the courier. In autumn 1944, after the liberation of Split, we went with ZAVNOH to Split, where we stayed until the end of the war. In Split I was working in the State Supplies Enterprise and I continued working for them after moving to Zagreb. I parted with the Finci family in Split, because they were returning to Sarajevo.

I stayed in Zagreb until the autumn of 1945, at which time I went to Osijek, because my aunt Helena Jung, my mother's sister, with her sons Vlada and Leo had at that time returned to Osijek. In Osijek and subsequently again in Zagreb I continued to study and work.

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*Josip ELAZAR*

## WITH A RIFLE AND A GUITAR THROUGH THE STORM OF THE WAR



*Josip Elazar was born in Dobož (Bosnia and Herzegovina) on 16 April 1916, of father Salamon, trader, and mother Estera (Erna, Zlata) Nahmijas, also born in a trader's family from Banja Luka. She came from an old family Elazar which had moved five centuries earlier to Bosnia after the Jews were expelled from Spain at the time of the Inquisition. Father Salamon perished in the Jasenovac concentration camp. His mother Erna took her life during the attempt by Ustaša in 1942 in Dobož to arrest her. The eldest brother Mordo (Bukus), a trader, was taken with wife Flora and daughter Sida to the Banjica camp in*

*1943, and they all perished there. Sister Berta, married Danon, was taken in 1944 to Jasenovac. Brother Moša with his wife and two children were taken to Jasenovac, where they were killed. Brother David, watchmaker, died while in a Partisan unit in 1943. Of the ten children by Salamon, only Josip, his sister Sida (Ida), a teacher, and the sister Klara, a tailor, had survived the Holocaust.*

*Josip completed his elementary school in Dobož, and the public Leather Processing School in Visoko in 1937, supported financially by his uncle and the scholarship from the Jewish society „La Benevolencia“. He was engaged in arts from his early youth, especially painting and music. He played the violin and sang well. Throughout his life his guitar was always with him, even during wartime years. He was very active in sports, specifically gymnastics, within the youth sports movement “Sokol”. After he completed his education*

he lived and worked in Belgrade and Split. At the beginning of the war he was in Dobož, fleeing to Split, and subsequently, in 1943 he joined the fighters of the National Liberation. After the liberation he pursued the career of a professional soldier, and was promoted to the rank of lieutenant colonel. He received outstanding military decorations, including the Order for Courage. After the war he matriculated and in 1952 completed the quartermaster-financial school for officers in Trebinje. He was subsequently employed in the Logistics Administration of the Yugoslav National Army (JNA). He worked for many years as quartermaster of the regional Military Hospital in Belgrade, until his retirement in 1965.

In Belgrade he was an active member of the Jewish Community. For two consecutive years he was manager of the Jewish summer camp in Zaton Mali, near Dubrovnik.

He was very enthusiastic about painting, especially water-colors and gouache paint technique. He started learning painting in 1950 with teacher Đorđe Ilić, a Belgrade academic painter. He was among the founders of the Painting Group of the Army Hall, with which he exhibited his works in more than a hundred exhibitions. His first independent exhibition was staged with Rafajlo Talvi in 1971, organized by the Jewish Historical Museum in Belgrade. His paintings were also exhibited in exhibitions on Jewish topics. He was member of the „Painting Club Đuro Salaj“ from Belgrade with which he exhibited in the country and abroad, individually and as a group. He had 12 individual exhibitions and won numerous painting awards and prizes, the most important being the Grand Prize of the „May Encounters Đorđe Andrejević-Kun“ in 1990.

In 1948 he married Milka Ratković, with whom he had a daughter Vesna, Ph.D. and professor of the University of Belgrade, married Radoman, who gave him two grandchildren, Dina and Đorđe. He also had an adopted son Radoje Tatić, translator and journalist, and grandchildren Sava and Jova. He passed away in Belgrade after a brief illness in 1994.

*Fleeing Ustaša-administered Dobož and illegal work in Split.\**

When the war began in 1941, I was living in the town of my birth, Dobož, working on the construction of the Sarajevo–Dobož railway, in the accounting department, as accountant. I was under the influence of communist and socialist ideas along with some of my friends, especially Vlado Kalezić, land surveyor (later to become a general in the JNA), as well as Josip Jovanović, Uzunović, and Eraković. In the “Sokol” youth sports

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\*The author wrote this text on 21 April 1982 in Belgrade, and his daughter Vesna made some additions to it

society, where I was a member from age of 6 until the age of 20, I made many friends of all religions and nationalities. At that time, the country was under the influence of Fascist ideas, especially Hitler's national-socialism, advocated by some individuals also in Doboj. I remember Jovica Savić, son of the Doboj baker, who gave every penny to provide for his son who was studying in Prague to be an architect, and who instead came back to Doboj with his head full of Hitler's ideas. I got into a fight with him once over a hearty dispute that we had, in which I was advocating the independence of our country and confronting the ideology of Fascism.

The arrival of Ustaša and the Germans meant the arrival of lawlessness, murder, forced conversion of people to Catholicism, denunciations, and rounding people up to concentration camps. The relations among people and neighbors changed overnight. The "Cross" organization gathered around the Catholic Church was becoming increasingly active and aggressive. Jews were taken by force to work for the German army behind what used to be the "Sokol" home, and were also taken away to camps. The tragedy of those hard-working petty traders, doctors, shoemakers, carriage drivers and so on was only that they were Jews. Under such circumstances a trader in construction materials Renert and his wife, and old couple, in order not to be taken to a concentration camp, consciously took their lives by poisoning themselves in their room. The most high profile Ustaša that I remember was Glavanić, from the barber shop at the old railway station, and Mahnić, who was the key person in charge of distributing yellow Star of David armbands to Jews, and also an old man from Doboj whose name I have forgotten. An outstanding organizer of the Ustaša administration was a bank clerk Dusper, experienced Ustaša activist. He stopped me one day in the street and instructed me that I have to report every day at 11 o'clock to the Ustaša commissioner's office. Once he moved to a new post, I had to keep on reporting to the new Ustaša camp master, the Catholic priest with two Ph.D.'s, the perfidious dr Kamber. While reporting to the two of them I was subject to brutal interrogation, I was spit on and humiliated in different ways; this made me understand the bitterness of being tortured. When the yellow Star of David armband was attached to my arm, I went to the old railway station and in front of the „Maks Griza“ hotel, with many people assembled there, I was slapped by a German with such a blow that I will never forget it. That was the last drop. I made a resolute and irreversible decision to leave Doboj and fight against Fascism.

It was not at all easy to leave Doboj. Under a false name, with counterfeited documents, together with my sister Ida, I set out on an uncertain journey. In the train I was approached by a soldier wearing a uniform of the former air force. I did not recognize him right away, but he reminded me



of who he was. He said: „I realize that you are in a difficult situation, but do not think that I have forgotten that some years back you saved my life when I was drowning in the river Bosna. If I can help you, I am willing to do so“.

Seeing that I am facing a courageous young man I proposed to him, instead of leaving the train as intended in Rajlovac, to continue with us to Sarajevo and to escort my sister and me through the military exit of the railway station, which was the place where Ustaša agents were waiting for suspicious passengers and taking them to camps. Mustafa, that was his name, safely escorted my sister and me by the guards and thus most likely saved our lives.

The same day we continued by train to Mostar and, after many difficulties, arrived to Split on 12 September 1941, where the Italian authorities put us in prison. We were released from prison so that we could, supposedly, continue our trip to Klis, in the Independent State of Croatia, although in fact we stayed on illegally in Split. Our sister Klara was living there, married to Mento Altaras, a trader from Split. They took us in and helped us settle down. I got a job as trade assistant in Mento's shop in Bosanska street number 6.

I was under the impression that the Italians were much less consistent in enforcing Fascist ideas than the Germans. This impression, however, was dissipated by the acting of local Fascists led by A. Hofman and Đ. Sava. I remember the anti-Semitic posters by Italian Fascists which were posted one morning along the Bačvice beach during the year 1941. That year the occupier expelled all Jewish pupils from primary and secondary schools in Split. The situation was similar with clerks and traders. I witnessed crimes committed by a "Black Shirts" group led by the notorious Split Fascist Giovanni Sava. They stormed the Split Temple in the middle of prayer, beating up people, injuring them, destroying sacred objects and temple property. They threw out all prayer books, old books and documents through the window and set them on fire. At the same time they broke the windows of the Morpurg bookstore and used the books from it to keep alive the burning fire.

I immediately made contacts with the National Liberation Movement through Jozef Danon, watchmaker's assistant, Cadik Danon, and Izidor Finčić. One day they told me that I was tasked to take a package of bombs to a conspirational person. At the set time, on the top of the Bosanska Street, I received the package and on the coast I handed it to the said person. After the war, when I once told my then commander, Đorđe Lisica, about it, he told me: „Dear friend, that is how we tested people for the National Liberation Movement (NLM). What you were carrying was not bombs, but stones“. Once I won the trust of my comrades by my attitude and my actions, at the beginning of 1943, I became part of the NLM of trade assistants and clerks and subsequently became the chief of three underground groups which I



led until I joined the Partisans. The groups included Jozef Pesah, Jure Radić, David Memez, Albert Eškenazi, Fanika Grof and others. I met many underground activists, exceptional people, such as my superior Šime Krstulović, active, conspirational, with deep faith in our ultimate victory, and from my side I passed on these features to my associates; there was also dr Silvije Altaras, a physician from Split, great humanist, knowledgeable in Marxism, an outstanding speaker. Many times I encountered him at the warehouse of his brother Mento, and in his “infirmery” treating and healing wounded Partisans. My older brother David and sister Ida, with whom I lived together in the center of Split, were also involved in underground work, but we kept this secret from each other due to high level of conspiracy and risk, although we assumed it. For the first time I was sure of this when I saw David moving about hastily and throwing some papers down the toilet while the police was in front of our apartment. Subsequently, they both joined the Partisans, but only Ida came back alive. David was killed in combat near the village Jabuka, in the vicinity of Sinj, as fighter of the Mosor Partisan detachment. He was an excellent watchmaker, diligent and committed worker. He was also a dear, patient, peaceful and tolerant man.



*JOSIP ELAZAR attended the officer's logistics – financial school in Trebinje.  
The photograph was taken in June 1952*

By the end of 1941 Ida, Klara, David and I were very much concerned for the destiny of our parents who stayed alone in Doboj. We did not know

much about our other brothers and sisters. My sister and I at that time decided to engage a woman from Split, a Catholic, and pay her to go to Dobož and try to help us in some way, possibly by getting them out of Dobož and saving them. When she came back to Split she told us the following: „Your father Salamon has been taken to Jasenovac. An Ustaša captain has moved into your apartment at the old fair grounds. Your mother had to be his servant and she was subject to harassment. When I arrived in Dobož, your mother had already died“. She took her life before being arrested by the Ustaša. Her funeral and burial was organized by Muslims from Dobož. Later on Branko Popović, a survivor from Jasenovac, also from Dobož, told me that he witnessed the moment when my father was killed in Jasenovac, with a blow to his head. I was desperate and I cannot find words to express that sadness in words. I let my beard grow in mourning and wore it for a long time. My guitar at that difficult time was a source of comfort and spiritual healing.

Split played a big role in accepting numerous refugees, especially Jews, and strongly supported the underground activists, the Communist Party, and the National Liberation Movement. I am deeply convinced that very few towns had such a patriotic, heroic, exceptional and well organized population as was the case with Split. This was mostly so among the young. The illegal work was very dynamic despite the presence of many Italian agents. At the meetings of illegal activists actions were planned and tasks assigned: writing slogans with oily paint, desecrating Fascist symbols, spilling ink on tables with street names written in the Italian language, distributing leaflets, collecting clothes, shoes, bandages, bottles (for tanks) for Partisans, collecting weapons and information regarding enemy warehouses. I will never forget how very welcome, confident and trusting we felt, as illegal youth activists, regarding the success of the national liberation struggle on 1 May 1942 when the red flag was put up on the church of St Dujo, or when the Italian music was played on the Split waterfront with the accompanying chaos which is difficult to describe, after which the music did not parade around town for months.

### *So, I put on an army uniform and took a rifle into my hand*

When life in Split became too risky because arrests happened on daily basis I decided to join the Partisans. In September 1943 I left the town with a group of illegal activists. We went to Žernovica with our weapons, intending to get in contact with the 18th unit of the Mosor detachment in Dubrave, which we then joined.

I always had with me, along with my backpack and my rifle, also my guitar which pacified myself equally as it pacified the tired and hungry souls of my comrades in arms during intermissions and rest. One evening, by the

fire in the forest, I was playing and singing everything that I knew, starting from Bosnian traditional melancholy songs to Sephardic ballads. The fighters appreciated the music, many shed a tear. One of them came to me with tears in his eyes and from his shabby military coat took a cube of sugar, wiped it carefully with his sleeve, and gave it to me as a present. That present I will never forget.

*During the war, along  
with his rucksack  
and gun, he carried  
with him his guitar, to  
relieve his soul and the  
souls of his exhausted  
and hungry comrades.  
Even later, when  
freedom came, he was  
always inseparable  
from his guitar.*

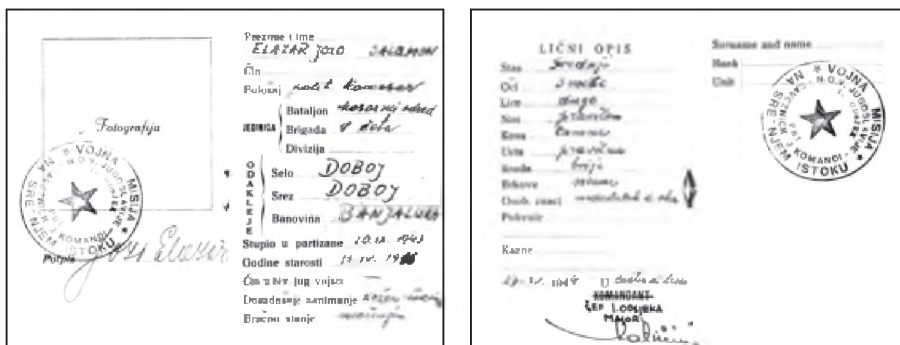


I was later transferred to Stari Grad on the island of Hvar, in the Fourth Operational Zone. Subsequently I went to Italy, to be political commissioner of the operational unit in the Partisan camp Castro di Lece. My task was to gather our confined comrades and establish a cross-border brigade in Castro di Lece.

Later I was transferred to Gravina, as commander of the logistics unit. The arrival to Italy meant that life became much easier, no more fear of hunger or death. Mussolini capitulated, the Allies arrived, and freedom was not too far away. I was also engaged in cultural activities (as secretary of the committee for culture), I painted and designed posters, organized ceremonies, played the guitar and sang. I also successfully completed the automobile driving course.

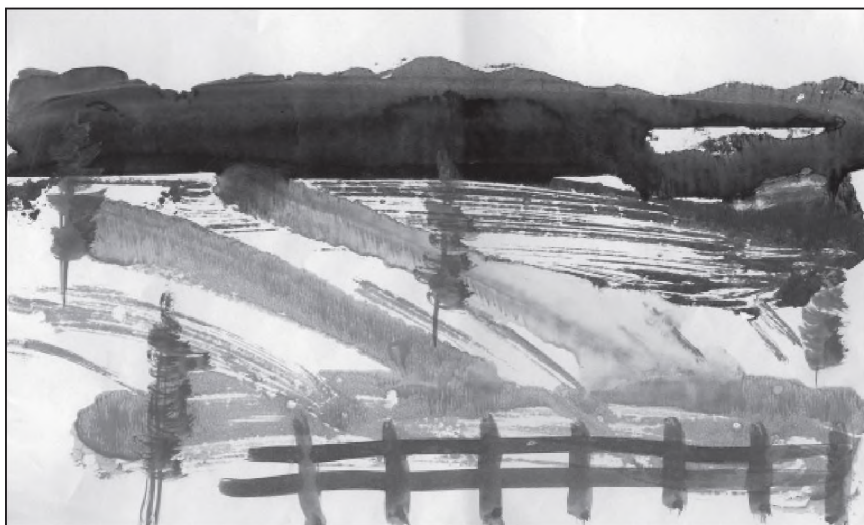
The road that I had taken was leading me to membership in the Communist Party in 1944. I was admitted to the party by Nikola Dotlić and Mate Raos, within the party unit of the auto school Gravina (Italy). In Gravina I was in charge of many responsible tasks: assistant chief logistics officer and deputy commander of the fourth auto-school. In February 1945 I was appointed commander of the transport auto-line consisting of 36 trucks, the then popular „Dodge“ trucks, and military equipment, as well as medically treated veterans who were to be transferred from the port in Bari to Belgrade. We started on our journey on 9 February from Bari, via Dubrovnik, Montenegro, Tirana, Ohrid, Skopje, all the way to Belgrade. The section through Albania was the most difficult one. We were attacked by gangs, es-

pecially at night, which disrupted our progress. Finally, after great efforts, without heavy losses, we happily arrived in Belgrade at the end of March.



*The Partisan ID of JOSIP ELAZAR, issued in November 1943*

When I arrived to the liberated Belgrade, I was made part of the III battalion of the motorized formation, as political commissioner of the accompanying detachment to the head-quarters of the motorized command. I was happy to once again be back in this town, I had friends and relatives in it. I decided to stay and work for the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA).



*Painting by JOSIP ELAZAR „The Gloomy Scenery“, gwash*

I started a new life in liberated Belgrade, happy to be alive and with great hopes for the future. Of course, the sorrow for my lost parents and many relatives never stopped and could never be forgotten.

So, even after the liberation, the rifle and the guitar remained always with me.

## U MOJIM SLIKAMA I CVETOVIMA

Još u meni živi uspomena  
u slikama i cvatovima  
na mrtve drugove...

Sretnem njihove  
oči, lica, grč, osmeh  
u pupoljcima i vrbama,  
ja živ, a oni mrtvi  
razgovaramo...

Koliko je rasuto grobova  
zemljom,

koliko hrabrih i nevinih...  
ko će na sve humke staviti  
belu hrizantemu...

Lutam cvetnim poljima,  
razgovaram sa drugovima  
i kolonama,

koje mi se vraćaju  
u slikama i pupoljcima.

Josip Elazar

## ATTACHMENT BY JOSIP ELAZAR

Population, victims of Fascism, and fighters of  
the National Liberation War of Jewish origin from Dobož, 1941.

Red. broj	Prezime i ime	Srodstvo	Zanimanje	Žrtva fašizma	Učesnik NOR	Primedba
1.	<b>Levi Boja</b>	supruga pok. Isaka (Kuče)	domaćica	logor	-	-
2.	Levi Donka	kći	domaćica	-	-	udata Skutari
3.	Levi Rifka	kći	domaćica	logor	-	
4.	Levi Jakica	sin	trg. polj. ?	-	-	umro
5.	Levi Binjo	sin	krojač	ubijen	-	-
6.	Levi Moni	sin	trg. polj.	-	učesnik NOR	živ
7.	Elazar Salamon		trgovac	ubijen u Jasenovcu		
8.	Elazar Ema (Zlata)	supruga	domaćica	nađena obešena u kući		
9.	Elazar David	sin	urar	-	poginuo 1943. u selu Jabuka kod Sinja	
10.	Elazar Ida	kći	učiteljica	-	učesnik NOR	živa
11.	Elazar Josip (Joža)	sin	kožar. tehn. p. puk. JNA	učesnik NOR	živ	
12.	<b>Pesah Simha</b>	udova pok. Davida	domaćica	-	-	-



13.	Pesah Majer (Buki)	sin Davida	trgovac	logor	-	-
14.	Pcsah Angclina	supruga	domaćica	logor	-	-
15.	?	kći	dete	logor	-	-
16.	Pcsah Jozef	sin Davida	trgovac	-	-	-
17.	Pcsah Sida	supruga	domaćica	ubijen	-	-
18.	Pcsah Rita	kći	dete	-	-	-
19.	Pesah Albct	sin Davida	trgovac	-	-	-
20.	Pesah Sofija	supruga	domaćica	-	-	-
21.	Pcsah Cita	kći	dete	-	-	-
22.	Pesah David	sin	dete	-	-	-
23.	<b>Trinki Moric</b>		štampar	logor	-	-
24.	Trinki Aneta (rođ. Pesah)	supruga	domaćica	logor	-	-
25.	<b>Atijas Blanka</b>	udova Salamona	domaćica	logor		
26.	Atijas Berta	kći Blanke	krojačica	logor		
27.	Atijas Mordo	sin	fijakerist	logor		
28.	Atijas Micika	supr. Morde	domaćica	logor		
29.	Atijas Mikica	sin Blanke	obučar	-	-	umro
30.	Atijas Mirta	kći Blanke	domaćica	logor		ud. Flajšer
31.	Atijas Mošo	sin	urar	-	poginuo 1943.	
32.	<b>Flajšer Jakob</b>		gostioničar	logor		imao dva sina
33.	Flajšer	?????	hotelijer	logor		imao sina i kćerku
34.	Flajšer Elza	kći Maksa	domaćica	logor		ud. Ščeta
35.	Flajšer Josip (Joži)	sin Maksa	knjigovođa	?		
36.	<b>Abesberg Emil</b>		dir. banke	logor		
37.	Abesberg Julka	supruga	domaćica	logor		
38.	Abesberg Anita	kći	bank. čin.			
39.	<b>Isković Adolf</b>		gostioničar	logor		



40.	?	supruga	domaćica			
41.	Isković Joži	sin	porez. čin.			
42.	Dr Ileš Vojislav		veletrg. drv.	logor		
43.	Ileš Ilona	supruga	domaćica			živa
44.	Ileš Stjepan (Pišta)	sin	zubar			živ
45.	Ing. Levi Mojsije		šef sekcije	Jasenovac		
46.	Levi Flora	supruga	domaćica	logor		
47.	Levi Mario	sin	učenik			živ
48.	<b>Altarac Majer</b>		trg. pomoćn.		poginuo u borbi	ud. Ščeta
49.	Altarac Lorica	supruga	domaćica		učesnik NOB	
50.	Altarac Lonika	kći	dete		učesnik NOB	
51.	<b>Altarac Santo</b>		trg. pomoćn.	logor		imao dvoje dece
52.	?	supruga	domaćica	logor		
53.	<b>Lesić Zvonko</b>		činovnik	Jasenovac		
54.	Lesić Rahela (Micika)	supruga	domaćica			živa
55.	Angelus Puba		veletrgovac			umro
56.	Skutecki Greta		domaćica			udata Ick- ović (živa)
57.	<b>Renert Leopold</b>		trgovac građev. mat.	otrovaio se		
58.	?	supruga	domaćica	otrovala se		
59.	<b>Renert Etelka</b>	kći	domaćica			udata Saračević (živa)

*Primedba:* – Prezime i ime štampano masnim slovima znači daje reč o glavi porodice ili samcu.

- Menahem (Davida) Elazar („Mento“) rođen je u Doboju. Činovnik ureda za osiguranje radnika u Sarajevu. Upućen u Jasenovac. Iz logora pobjegao i stupio u Četvrti krajiški odred NOV. Poginuo maja 1942. godine kod Čememice. U Doboju nije bio 1941. godine.

Beograd, septembra

Sastavio  
Josip Elazar  
p. pukovnik JNA u penziji (S.R.)

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*Livia BABIĆ*

## A LIFE BETWEEN JEWERY AND SOCIALISM



*Livia-Lili Babić was born on 15 February 1920 in Kecskemet, Hungary, of father Geza and mother Ana Brajder, née Špicer. She was the only child in an Ashkenazi family. The family moved to Osijek in 1927 and that was where Livia completed her primary school, the real grammar school and the secondary school of music. In Belgrade, where the family moved in 1938, she started her medical studies. She became active with the Communist Youth League of Yugoslavia (SKOJ) and after the demonstrations of 27 March 1941 followed by the occupation of Yugoslavia she went to Dalmatia where, along with the hus-*

*band Mato Babić, she joined the Partisan units. She is decorated by the Partisans Commemorative Medal of 1941.*

*A total of 57 members of her immediate and greater family perished in the Holocaust, including her parents.*

*After the war, she lived with her family in Zagreb, where she graduated from the Faculty of Law in 1949. Until 1951 she worked for the State Prosecution Office in Zagreb, after which she moved with her family to Mostar and worked first in the personnel department in the aviation factory „Soko“ and later, until her retirement, as deputy director of the Social Insurance Fund for the Mostar District.*

*She died on 13 May 2001 in Belgrade. Her husband Mato died on 1 January 1964 in Mostar.*

*She had a son, Goran Babić, and twin daughters Branka Džidić and Zora Itković Zuckerman, eight grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.*

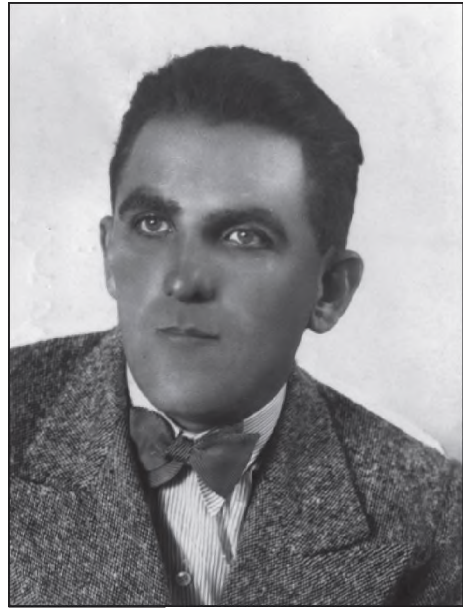
I was born in Kecskemet, Hungary, on 15 February 1920. My father Geza Brajder, a construction worker and trader, was born on 1 April 1895 in Velika Kikinda. During World War One he served for four years as officer in the Austria-Hungarian Army. He was decorated for his merits on the front with the highest decoration for courage – the „The Cross of Iron“, while his personal assistant received the order of „Knight“ (equivalent to our national hero), which my father did not receive due to his Jewish religion, although he was the commanding officer in that battle. On one out of the total of seven occasions in which he received injuries, he lost all of his teeth, so subsequently he had a prosthesis made of gold. After World War One in Pest he completed the High Commerce Academy and in 1927 the family moved to Osijek. In the period between the two wars he worked as representative of a German factory of construction machinery, including among others also the porcelain factory „Rosenthal“. That is why he travelled on business across Europe, North Africa and the Middle East, always bringing home different valuables. One of such things were the notes for piano for my mother. I remember that he once brought for me as a surprise a whole branch of bananas, while I was still a child.

In September 1941 he bribed a member of the Gestapo to get a pass to leave town, and travelled with an automobile towards Zemun, taking with him a significant amount of money. He was arrested near the Belgrade Sava Bridge by Gestapo, who received prior intelligence. He was taken to the Banjica camp, and already the following day he was taken out of his prison cell and beaten to death by blows with the back of the gun, at the age of 46. While he was being beaten, his golden prosthesis fell out of his mouth. Subsequently, a plumber from Belgrade who was with him in the same cell and was subsequently released, provided testimony regarding the manner of my father's death. Father's lifeless body was thrown into the pit in Jajinci, in the vicinity of Belgrade.

My mother Ana Brajder, born in 1902, came from a very affluent Jewish family. She graduated the piano, violin and solo singing from the Music Conservatory in Pest. She was very religious, observing all Jewish holidays and regularly attending the synagogue. Right after the entry of the German Army in the destroyed Belgrade, many Belgrade Jews already in April 1941 were organized into groups to clear the debris in the city. Jews were the last to stand in lines for food in shops, when there was practically nothing to buy. My mother was sent to the group tasked with cleaning the city public toilets. In just one week her hair turned completely gray, she was wearing the yellow Star of David armband, respecting also numerous other anti-Jewish orders. A German collaborator moved into our house, who forced my mother to leave and move into a concrete laundry shed in the yard. Our house

contained a big library, my mother's concert piano, many valuable objects, wardrobe and jewelry. In the spring of 1942, after being first taken to the Zemlin concentration camp, she was suffocated at the age of 42 in the gas suffocation truck used for that purpose, a special German vehicle made for the purpose of suffocating Jews by means of carbon-monoxide poisoning. I learned about my mother's destiny in 1945 from our neighbor Nata Jovanović. My mother's body was also thrown into the Jajinci pit. Both my grandmothers had died before World War Two. My paternal grandmother, Julija Brajder, née Cukerman, died in 1926; while my maternal grandmother, Sidi Špicer, née Singer, died in 1937. My two grandfathers were killed during the Holocaust – my paternal grandfather Henrik Brajder at the age of 75, right after the arrival of Fascists to power in the prison in Velika Kikinda in 1941, and my maternal grandfather Mikša Špicer at the age of 78, after deportation from Hungary to Dachau in 1944.

From Hungary, where I started my primary school, we moved to Osijek in 1927, and we became Yugoslav nationals. I stayed in Osijek until 1938, when I matriculated in the girls' real grammar school. My best friend was a Jewess, Nada Njemirovski, and the two of us were the only two Jewish girls from our class to survive the Holocaust. Nada survived the Holocaust by fleeing Zagreb for Delnice, where she was at the end of the war. In 1945 Nada married a Jew, Tibor Prajs, a chemist, later to receive his Ph.D. in technological sciences. He survived the war as officer of the defeated pre-war Yugoslav Army who was taken as prisoner of war from 1941 to 1945,



*GEZA BRAJDER, father of LIVIA BABIĆ*

in a German PoW camp Furstenberg, near Berlin. I had known Tibor already from Osijek, and I met him after the war, after being surprised to see on post boxes in the house in which he had lived before the war the name Prajs written on one of the mail boxes. When we saw each other, we could not say a word; we just embraced each other and cried. Nada and I stayed best friends our whole life until 1987, when she died in Zagreb. Tibor died some months afterwards.

In 1938 with my parents I moved to Belgrade, where I enrolled to study at the Medical Faculty. My parents had planned for me to first complete my studies and then to marry a Jew, my father's business associate Arpad, but in any case a Jew. The following year the World War Two broke out. My parents were aware that this meant uncertainty and lack of safety for the Jews. I shared this feeling, so on 3 July 1940 I married my colleague from my medical studies Mato Babić, a Croat from Dalmatia. He came from an affluent Dalmatian family, his father Boško had been to Johannesburg in the South African mines where he found a gold lode.

Until April 1941 I had no idea what poverty meant. But I still remember today with sadness my school friend with whom I shared a desk at school, Adolf Vajs from Osijek. He was pro-communist, well read, intelligent and proud. He came from a poor Jewish family, and being the oldest of the seven children of a poor tailor, he had to help his father in his shop. During the long break between classes we were often sitting in our desk, I always had a good breakfast, while his was very meager. Being aware that I would offend him if I offered to share what I had I would pretend that I disliked some of the food that was packed for me adding that my mother is very strict and I must not return any of it home. Thus we shared the food and I was happy that he was not hungry. He was killed by the Nazis. Many years later I understood that life brought us together but due to the then prevailing circumstances we did not appreciate it enough. I still keep Adolf Vajs in my memory as a pure, honest and unfortunate person.

Some days after taking part in the massive demonstrations in Belgrade against Yugoslavia joining the Tripartite Pact on 25 March and the event after the Pact was broken on 27 and 28 March 1941, together with my husband and my mother I took a train from Belgrade to Metković and further to Slivno, the birth place of my husband. While going through Sarajevo I saw a hand written notice saying: „No entry allowed for Serbs, Jews, Gypsies and dogs“. Upon arrival to Metković we went to the nearby Slivno, and my father also arrived there in the meantime. He planned to go to Split with my mother, but she insisted that they should return to Belgrade to try and protect their house and property. I never saw them again.

The proclamation of the so-called Independent State of Croatia on 10 April 1941 found me with my husband in Slivno. I found myself in a place where I did not know the people, or the mentality, I was never before in such rocky scenery. In that region women had no role in public life, and from a politically active woman I became like all the other women whose names were not even mentioned, rather they were referred to as the wife of Jure, of the wife of Marko. The district of Metković had very few Jews, but they were prominent, like for instance the Hajmer couple, who were doctors, and

also doctor Papo and some others. I do not know what happened with them afterwards.



*LIVIA with her parents in Split in 1935*

Since my arrival in Slivno until the time I joined the Partisans there were two favorable circumstances: others were not aware that I was Jewish, and besides I was a woman. I must say that Mato's family never made a single comment or allusion regarding my Jewish origin. The Ustaša commissioner in charge of the region, don Petar Antić, did not attach any significance to women, he neglected them and belittled them as politically dangerous, in contrast with men. With the Ustaša coming to power, news began to arrive regarding the persecution of Serbs by the Ustaša in Hercegovina. We heard of property being hoarded; there were numerous murders; men, women and children were thrown into pits or the Neretva river, either individually or jointly tied by wire. There was news that many Serbs fled the killing and the persecution by going into the woods. The then directive for communists was to be ready at the moment when the Party calls them to join the fight; only those who were well known communists and at risk were to go underground; and others were to stay at home until further notice.

Just one day after the German attack on the USSR, on 23 June 1941, some young men informed us that an Ustaša patrol from Opuzen is arriving to Slivno to arrest certain individuals. Mato right away went under-



ground. I was concerned that the Ustaša would kill me immediately if they arrested me. Early in the morning on 24 June 1941, Ante Juračić "Mali" came from Duboka with a message that I should come and join the anti-Fascists. Right away I packed a bag and left home. Excited and fearful I arrived in Duboka, where I was met by some relatives of fled anti-Fascists. They gave me some food for our comrades and in a boat, along with Petar Juračić, I moved to the Pelješac peninsula, to the place „Bezzemlje“. Thus, we were the first illegal activists in that region of Neretva, and every day we were joined by new anti-Fascists. It is a fact that I was among the first women in Dalmatia in the woods as an illegal activist in a military camp run by the Communist party. We used the name guerilla for the camp, and only after consultations of the Army HQ under the command of Josip Broz Tito in Stolice on 26 September 1941, the names of partisan formations were officially introduced. Our camp was a core of future units. The Partisan military camps in the region run by the Communist Party were located in the vicinity of Dančani and Bristava, but all camps were constantly on guard and often changed locations.

Our camp consisted of about twenty individuals. I cooked and darned clothes, and I learned to use a rifle, I kept guard like the others. At the beginning of autumn 1941 our Partisan camp was disbanded due to difficulties in getting food and weapons. We returned to Mato's house in Slivna. At that time, at the beginning of October 1941, don Petar Antić denounced me and Mato to the Ustaša authorities. We were accused of listening to Radio-Moscow, advocating communism and the Soviet Union. We were arrested in the house of Mato's parents and taken to the prison first in Mostar and subsequently in Dubrovnik. Although the Ustaša laws stipulated that all detainees from such groups would be handed over to regular courts, certain local Ustaša specifically asked that we be handed over to the court-martial in Sarajevo. I remember the day when a group of our comrades from Ljubuški was acquitted how happy they were there in the corridor of the Mostar prison. While in Mostar prison I maintained contact with Mato by means of food portions. Due to conflicts over jurisdiction between Italian and Ustaša authorities (since the region was declared the Italian occupation zone), a whole group of about thirty communists from all over Dalmatia and Herzegovina was handed over to district courts. There was, however, an order from Zagreb to the Mostar District Court that all prisoners be handed over to regular district courts, meaning that for the two of us it would be the District Court in Dubrovnik. Dr Zlatar, the president of the Mostar District Court, made an order giving jurisdiction over us to the Dubrovnik District Court, meaning not granting the local Ustaša their ambition to send us before the court-martial. After

the liberation, dr Zlatar was not convicted, but he died several months after being released from remand prison.



*Fighting Fascism together: husband MATE, in the photograph of 1939,  
and LIVIA in the photograph of 1945*

Thus, in May 1942, Mato and I were transferred to the Dubrovnik prison. Since don Petar Antić, as the key witness, did not appear before the court, I was acquitted and released after the first hearing. My husband was also released soon afterwards, since don Antić, coming to Mato's hearing, withdrew his allegations. At the end of the hearing don Antić told Mato that all ended well and that Mato should not forget this. Mato briefly responded: „Neither this, nor anything else“.

Right after leaving prison we wanted to join the Partisans again, but the links needed for this were interrupted and we had to wait. Soon, Mato was transferred; there was no place for me. The situation in Dubrovnik was becoming increasingly difficult and there were some inquiries about me in the house where I lived alone. As a young woman of only 22, I remember one awful and terrifying day. I was going down towards the main street Stradun to meet my contact person, and I ran into a cordon of Italian Army around the street on which trucks were driving. We passers-by were told to leave and take another road to town. Yet, a crowd of people gathered before the cordon formed by Italian soldiers. Italians were rounding up Jews in several trucks: men, women, children, the old. I saw families with children, all

calling each other; men were loaded on the trucks separately; the elderly women had difficulties getting on; the children were crying; the trucks were packed full. The Italian soldiers were shouting, the children were crying, and I – a Jew – stood there outside the cordon watching! Everything within me was breaking up, the trucks were driving off, the cordon was disbanded, the passers-by continued on with what they were doing. I was thinking of my family of whom I knew nothing. Then I went to the square, and there was Italian music playing, the Italian flag was being displayed. All those present raised their hand to the Fascist salute and I, devastated, with my hands down, waited for the music to stop. That was when an Italian soldier came up to me and caught me by the hand trying to demonstrate what I needed to do. I understood him only too well, but I was just blankly staring at my hand, so he angrily turned around, mumbled „imbecile“ and left. Although it was not wise of me to do this, still I could not help it, I just could not raise my hand into the Fascist salute.

In autumn 1942 I came by ship to Trpanj on the Pelješac peninsula, where the Italians had a garrison and guards at all exit points from the town. I got through with fake documents as Nikica Brajković, from the island of Mljet, born in 1918, single. Leaving the Italian guard behind us, a few of us came to Partisan positions close to settlement Donja Vručica. There I asked a partisan to briefly give me his Partisan hat, he was surprised and did as asked, and I gently caressed the Partisan star on it and I started to sob. All that I had been through came out in this sobbing of joy, because I was again among people of the same mind, in the liberated territory. Men stood in silence; they certainly would not react as I just did, but they understood. A partisan put his arm around my shoulder and calmed me down.

As I was fluent in foreign languages, including German, French, Latin, Hungarian and Yiddish, Ivo Mordin-Crni, the political secretary of the District Committee for Southern Dalmatia seconded me to work for the logistics of the district committee for that region. We were printing leaflets and other propaganda materials, our newsletter titled „Our Weekly“. At night, under the light given out by the radio station, I would be listening at different news stations and writing information that I would re-type on a copying matrix and publish. The machines on one occasion were located above the town of Trpanj in a cave on the highest point of the peninsula. I would sit up through the night by the radio and write, while wolves would come to the entry to the cave, I could see their burning eyes in the dark, and hear their terrifying wailing. I had a pistol, but I could not even think of shooting because of the Italian positions nearby. We had orders that we were liable with our lives for the machines, as such machines were more difficult to come

by than people. Very few people knew where the machines were located. I repeatedly expressed my wish to join combat units, but Mordin would not allow this, as I was more useful where I was.

In spring of 1943 I was admitted to be a member of the Communist Party. That happened at the time of deplorable terror by Italians including killing, arrests, and burning down of villages. The majority of the Partisan army was moved to the mountain Biokovo. I abandoned the machinery and left Pelješac in May 1943 and was never back there. That also meant saying goodbye to Mordin, whom I never saw again, as he was killed in 1944 in Pelješac. The Committee sent me to the Metković district to work for the AFŽ (the Anti-Fascist Women's Front), taking over the task of secretary of district AFŽ committee. My husband Mato was in the Biokovo-Neretva region and after a long while hearing that I have moved, he came to see me. He seemed changed, dressed in a semi-military fashion and carrying a rifle, Tito-style hat and the red Partisan star on it. In the period that followed Mato was working along the Party lines; we seldom met, and spent very little time together.



*One of the favorite portraits: LIVIA in a Partisan uniform, as seen by the artist*

On one occasion we arrested a number of Germans. They were terrified and young, like us. I translated while they were interrogated. They said that they are not Fascists and are not in the Army on voluntary basis. They were sentenced to be executed before a shooting range, and commander Prpić named me as the person to execute it. I rejected. He was furious and I am sure that it was a man doing what I did he would shoot him right there. I was very much upset and told him all kinds of things, primarily that I do not see executing tied up Germans as heroic.

When the Biokovo-Neretva region was under the risk during the Sixth Offensive, the regional management decided to transfer by ship the local women, children and the sick to take refuge on the island of Hvar, from where they were moved on to Italy and subsequently El Shatt refugee camps in Sinai. This transfer started near the end of 1943. About ten of us women

comrades were sent along to assist these refugees. I had two bombs and a revolver that I received in Hvar from the navy commander Josip Černi, whom I met earlier in Dubrovnik. Soon the group of refugees was shipped to the island of Vis. Some of my friends, among them Paula Zon, went along with them, while some of us returned to Biokovo.

Very soon it was 1944. Resistance to fascism became widespread.

I was afraid that Mato might be killed in these last years of the war. Already then I had fears that my parents might have been killed. I wanted to have a child so that, in case I would survive, I would not be all alone. It was soon decided that I am to be sent to the island of Vis, where I arrived at the beginning of spring 1944. I was seconded to work in the hospital and had the duty of deputy political commissioner. It was the military hospital of the VIII Corps. Once the combined British-Partisan hospital was established in the village Pothumlje, between Komiža and Vis, I was appointed deputy commissioner of the hospital and secretary of the party unit. Already at that time I started feeling that I was pregnant. While in advanced pregnancy, I was transferred to Vis, to the post of commissioner of the regional hospital. I worked until my labor started. My joy about having a baby was immense. I gave birth to my son Goran on 18 October 1944 in Vis. I was soon given a pass to travel freely with my son from Vis to Makarska, to be closer to Mato and his family. The child was not thriving; I had serious difficulties in getting milk for him. At the beginning of 1945 I was appointed commissioner of the regional hospital in Makarska, while Mato was in the Neretva region engaged at founding the national liberation committee there.

Subsequently I moved to work in Metković. Within the District National Liberation Committee I was initially in charge of health care, later education, and was secretary of the district committee of AFŽ. I was soon appointed member of the District Committee of the Communist Party of Croatia for Metković.

In 1946 we moved to Zagreb and I enrolled to study at the Faculty of Law, where I graduated in 1949. In Zagreb we had two daughters, twins Branka and Zora.

It was only after the war was over that we faced the fact that of our numerous direct and greater family a total of 57 members had perished, while only seven of us survived, living all over the world. Two of my relatives are living in Budapest, one relative in Buenos Aires, her brother in Paris, my grandmother's youngest brother in Netanya, and my uncle and myself in Yugoslavia.



## MY MEMORY IS THE ONLY MONUMENT TO MY FAMILY



*Olivera Đurđić, née Gutman, comes from a well-known family of Partisan Jews from Užice, a town in western Serbia. Her mother Frida, a doctor, and sister Vita died while with the Partisans. Father Iro, also a doctor, died on his return from German PoW camp. Olivera, still very young, was the only one of the family who survived.*

*After their studies in Vienna, the parents of Olivera Đurđić, Jews from Poland, came to work as doctors in Čajetina. They were accepted warmly and with respect. That is where they had and raised their children. An almost idyllic life among the Serbs was interrupted with the beginning of the war. The expansion of Fascism sent members of this peaceful family to different corners and made the family practically disappear: the father ended up in Germany, the mother in Bosnia, one daughter was killed as a Partisan.*

*After the war Olivera married Dušan Đurđić, with whom she had a daughter Zorica, doctor, professor at the Medical Faculty in Belgrade and son Veljko, an attorney at law. She also has grandchildren Vita and Goran.*

*She worked in the judiciary, and in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Afterwards, until her retirement, she worked for the Ministry of Interior.*

*She has been decorated with the Partisan Commemorative Medal of 1941 and a number of other decorations and prizes.*

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\*Oliver Đurđić died in March 2007 during the preparation of her testimony for Press.



And here I am, eighty years of age, surrounded by my children and grandchildren ... What else could I want?

The time does its work. Whether we want it or not, our memories are here. Memories of the past, of our childhood – as much as we had it – of the beginning of things.

With this, the feeling of injustice, even if not solicited, comes over us. The overall injustice of the twentieth century which hit most strongly those who were born as Jews.

For me, in my microcosm, it is the injustice that hit my family. A stable, honest family, practically at its beginnings. Of the four of us, of everything that we dreamed, wanted or believed, I was the only one that survived.

The beginnings here in this beautiful country called Yugoslavia were marked by enthusiasm, humanity and human solidarity.

Here is how it started:

My father Iro was born in 1888 and my mother Frida in 1893 in what used to be Austria-Hungary, in a place Podhajce. They lived in houses next to each other. However, my father came from a very poor family, while my mother from an affluent, aristocratic family.

After graduating from grammar school (father in Tarnopolje, mother partly in Vienna), they both studied medicine and graduated in Vienna. With one major difference: my father studied while working as physical laborer, and my mother lived an affluent life in her own apartment in Vienna.

However, the love that was born while they were still at school had persisted.

After completing their studies – and this was the time of the World War One – mother worked as a clinical doctor in Vienna and father was mobilized as doctor – officer of the Austrian Army, and ended up in the mountain of Zlatibor.

Using his position of doctor my father in Zlatibor did not only heal people but saved many of them from mobilization and detention, and the people of the Zlatibor region for this reason saw him and declared him their benefactor. In the end he made them a promise that after the war he would return and they, with hundreds of their signatures, wrote to the Yugoslav Government asking it to grant him citizenship.

After the war, he withdrew with the Army, returned to Vienna, and heard the news that his citizenship had been granted.

In September 1921 Iro and Frida were married in Vienna, and for this reason my mother's wealthy family disowned her (the family came to terms with this marriage only after their second daughter was born). That was

when her mother and grandmother came to Užice and brought her dowry: jewelry, fur-coat, silverware).

Right after the wedding they moved to Čajetina which at that time consisted of only a small number of houses. They were, of course, the only Jewish family in the region.

Soon afterwards, at the end of 1922, they moved to Užice, where father as specialist of veneric diseases worked for the District Insurance Office and mother, as specialist of internal medicine, worked in the school polyclinic. They both also lectured relevant subject in the grammar school and at the teacher training college.

When they moved to Užice they were joined by my father's mother who stayed there until the end of her life and was buried at the Užice cemetery. Children were born: in 1923 Vita, and in 1927 I was born.

We were the only Jewish family living in Užice, although there were Jews who stayed there intermittently: Rašela Hagon Kulišić from Bjeljina, who for a time worked as professor of French; Josip Fenje, veterinary, with his wife and two daughters, Magda and Ilonka, who stayed there in the wake of the war. And there was also Martin Špicer, a dental technician from Sombor, who came and married a woman from Užice and stayed there. We were very close with them.

The language used at home was German, although my sister and I mostly spoke Serbian with our father. Father and mother spoke Yiddish but, fearing that this would damage our German, did not allow us to speak it. We did not observe Jewish or any other holidays.

Since at that time Orthodox Christian course was mandatory in schools, both my sister and I attended it, with our father's written consent. There was nothing Jewish in Užice and we were brought up in the spirit of the place in



*The GUTMAN family in Užice in the 1930's*

which we lived. This was possibly best illustrated by the testimony of Blažo Savičević, professor of the Užice grammar school, arrested together with Vita Gutman in June 1941. When asked by the investigator about his nationality, Vita responded: „Serbian“. Irritated, the investigator, emphasized: „Vita Gutman is clearly a Jewish name and therefore you are Jewish, not Serbian“. To this Vita calmly responded: „I speak Serbian, write Serbian, think and feel like it. I completed Serbian primary school and Serbian grammar school in Užice and was member of the choir of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Therefore, I am Serbian, and put it down like that, otherwise I refuse to sign the interrogation protocol“.

Equally, the way that the people there treated us was so natural and good that we felt at home.

At that time father did not travel anywhere, while mother, my sister and I did from time to time travel to visit our grandmother, grandfather and uncle in Podhajce, Vienna and Lviv. Podhajce, near Lviv, was a small town, like Užice. Before World War Two it had a population of 8,000. We went there for the last time in 1935.

By the nature of his work and also by his character my father became very much appreciated among his patients – workers. In his private practice he did medical examinations for the poor without charging them, issued medical certificates and often also bought medicines for them, and was soon known as the „doctor of the poor“. Thus, his professional activity was also getting a political meaning. More so since he often used his physician's right to make referrals for specialized examinations thus enabling many emancipated people not only to get treatment but also performing their political tasks in Belgrade.

Understandably, this did not go unnoticed. In the increasingly Fascist environment, which was manifested in many different ways, the newspaper „Užički glas“, within its seven-months long debate regarding Jews, in December 1935, in a deplorable manner attached the Gutman “Chifuti” couple (derogatory local term for Jews). Encouraged by his friends from Užice, father filed a lawsuit against the author, who was a teacher in the teacher training college. The author was sentenced with conditional sentence and a fine for defamation. The fine, at my father's request, was paid in favor of the widow Vida Penezić and Radojko Vidić, worker of armaments factory.

The well known political atmosphere was becoming increasingly complex and the Gutman home became a meeting place for many emancipated people and ideas, more so since the older daughter Vita was already involved in the illegal communist youth organization.

After 27 March 1941, my father was mobilized as reserve officer of the Yugoslav Army and sent to the region of Timočka Krajina. As his unit,

during its withdrawal to Bosnia, was passing through Užice, he used that opportunity and told us to get packed. He intended to have the three of us go via Sarajevo to Italy and onwards to America. We had all the necessary documents which were secured for us already in 1940 by my father's step brother. Initially, father rejected this offer for us to come to New York, not wanting to „desert his homeland“. But, as everything around us and for us was becoming increasingly risky, he made an irrevocable decision to save his family. It happened, however, that the Germans entered Užice that very night, and our departure failed.

With his unit my father went to Rogatica, where the whole unit was taken prisoners. The Germans soon released the sanitation staff, so he returned to Užice already in April, for Easter.

Of the total of four doctors in Užice at that time (population of 8,000) father and mother were the only ones fluent in German, others were mostly French oriented or studied in France. That was why, at the meeting of the German authorities with all the doctors, the head doctor recommended my father (who in all his administrative documents declared himself as Serbian) to take the post of hospital manager. The hospital surgeon reacted to this with a question: „Should we have a Chifut to be a hospital manager?“ The situation was very unpleasant and the head doctor then addressed my father, saying that Führer's ideology does not allow cooperation with Jews and that for this reason he would as of that day have to report three times a day to the local command.

After this, again following the advice of his friends, my father went to the camp for Yugoslav officers' prisoners of war to Germany. While in Germany, he was all the time a prisoner of war and, as doctor, he was moved from one camp to another.



*IRO GUTMAN, doctor, reserve officer of the Yugoslav Army, in the wake of the war*

Užice was completely overwhelmed by the atmosphere of war. Although the citizens of Užice, irrespective of their political beliefs, were mostly protective of us, we are anyway very much concerned. Father and mother had already earlier removed from the house exterior the table indicating their private medical practice with their names on it. The whole town was preparing for the time of absolute shortage of everything, so we also had at home huge stocks of everything. Aware of our Jewishness, father (briefly, until leaving as PoW) and mother stopped working. We lived on those stocks and some savings that my parents had.

Mother, Vita and I stayed in Užice and Vita finally managed to matriculate, as one of only eight pupils who matriculated with excellent marks, with huge support of some of her grammar school professors, despite the difficulties caused by other anti-Semitic and Ljotić-supporting pupils and professors. She was repeatedly arrested, contested, but she was committed to her activity as member of SKOJ (Communist Youth League of Yugoslavia).

In June 1941 we were evicted from the apartment that we lived in, with only some bundled-up things to carry with us. The apartment was seized for the needs of the armed forces. We were told to go to the collection center for Jews, which was used for deporting Jews to concentration camps.

We were saved thanks to the appeals made by friends and guarantees given by teacher Dragi Đoković. That man, father of five children, aware of the risk he was taking, and with the support of some other citizens of Užice, managed to save us and take us to his home.

The war reached us.

Father was in PoW camp, the three of us in Užice.

The courageous, committed, dynamic Vita was becoming increasingly active. Through her, mother made contacts and treated wounded and sick partisans of the newly established Užice detachment. When Partisans liberated Užice on 24 September 1941, mother started volunteering in the Partisan hospital. There she met and treated the heavily wounded Joža Baruh who, unfortunately, died of consequences of the severe wounds. Vita joined a Partisan detachment, and I got engaged in the unit for culture and arts.

Užice was bombed in October 1941, and in November the same year there was an explosion in the armaments factory. There were casualties and injured people all over the place. Next came the order to withdraw from Užice and my mother, together with me, accompanied the withdrawing line of injured people who could move, via Zlatibor, towards Sandžak.

That is how our wartime Calvary started. Zlatibor, Sandžak, Montenegro, Bosnia, and more. Kilometer after kilometer of moving on foot in the rain, snow and ice. Mostly along hilly areas without roads. We were moving



sometimes on our own, sometimes in chance encounters. Each of us always wondering – where are the others. And the news that we got was uncertain, often cruel: „Vita was executed... No, she is with her unit at such and such place.“

For the first time we were all three together in wartime in February-March 1942. Mother and I with the group of refugees and the field hospital were crossing the river Lim, we met Vita there and continued together towards the hospital in Žabljak. Soon afterwards mother was seconded to be manager of the hospital in Čajniče, Vita joined her brigade, the hospital from Čajniče withdrew to Rudine, and I went to the Zlatar battalion as a nurse.

There was another encounter with Vita, in June 1942, but only a brief one in passing.

At the time mother was managing a number of hospitals in the surroundings of Bosanski Petrovac. By that time she was a respected Partisan doctor who, despite advanced years (she was already fifty) and her origin which was quite different than those around her, was closely integrated in her environment. Thus, in May 1943 she was awarded an impressive recognition for the time: with the first decree regulating ranks in the National Liberation Army she was made a major.

With my unit I was part of the Fourth (Neretva) and Fifth (Sutjeska) offensives. At the time of the Neretva offensive, in Jablanica, I met my mother. We were in a house that was hit directly by a bomb. The house collapsed on us, but luckily the bomb did not explode. All along the river Neretva I saw dead fighters of the Seventh Banija Brigade, killed by aviation machine guns. With my unit I crossed the river Neretva and went into combat with the Chetniks who, together with Germans, had us under siege.

I am trying very hard to resist the natural tendency to say only the best about my family, therefore I must note that what I am saying here is just a small part of the testimonies by many people recorded in the document: „Užice Compendium“, published in 1979 in Užice. For the most part I relied on the contents of this document, and less on my personal memories which always pose a risk of letting our emotions lead us.

In their memory, many people whom my mother treated as doctor emphasize her professionalism, and especially her human approach and empathy which, in improvised Partisan hospitals sometimes was more valuable than medical therapy. Even in situations when her own daughters were among the sick and the wounded, she always treated everyone equally. She was very demanding of herself and this was, obviously, what won her the general respect of others.



In my present situation and age I cannot but mention one detail: while treating the Partisan Kosovka Tus – and I am quoting here the memories of Kosovka – she became quite attached to this young girl. By coincidence, Vita and I happened to be there at the time. She introduced us to each other and she divided one ampoule of glucose to the three of us, saying: „Children, if you survive this war, think of each other as sisters!“ I cannot but wonder how it feels for a mother to tell her children, with good reason, „if you survive“?



*VITA, OLIVERA'S older sister, killed in battle in 1943 at Sutjeska*

In June 1943 there was another brief encounter of Vita and me and our mother. In May I contracted spotted typhoid fever and was again in mother's hospital. That was the time when the Fifth offensive was at its peak. One and the same bomb wounded both my mother (in her head) and myself (lungs). During the break-through across the river Sutjeska, as we were passing, we saw Vita. I crossed the river Sutjeska with the group led by Sava Kovačević. The following night we continued breaking through the German siege. I was in a line with some ten Partisans ahead of me when the rumor spread – „Sava has fell“. I moved on trying to get closer and I slipped, plunged down the hill all the way to the river Hračvka and stayed there.

Soon afterwards Vita was killed, and I remained in the siege alone. Exhausted, lost, hungry. Some of us who had lagged behind started to get together in village Vrbnica and organized a search for our Partisan units. As this seemed impossible, I had no choice but to find any unit. In Vrbnica I met dr Sima Milošević and Ivan Goran Kovačić, who were also killed there.

By coincidence I ran into a local Chetnik unit, whose head of HQ was in fact collaborating with partisans. To cut the long story short, after many complications, I came to my mother who at that time was a doctor of the Banija Division.

In June 1944 it was decided that mother should go to Bari, as doctor of the partisan hospital. She rejected, wishing to be at home at the time of liberation.

She was repeatedly moved from one hospital to another and finally in September 1944 she was with the mobile division hospital caring for the wounded. My last encounter with my mother happened at the time when the

hospital was on its way to Banja Luka. She accompanied my unit as it was leaving town, and then she helplessly started to cry.

Some days later, leading a group of wounded fighters to the corps hospital and having received the order to take the task of hospital manager – my mother was killed at the end of September 1944, the details of this being unknown.

There are several versions of how it happened: that she was arrested, that she was murdered by her throat being cut, that she fought until the last moment, protecting the wounded from about 2,000 Chetniks, knowing how hopeless the situation was she, together with another woman, threw a bomb in front of her.

And what about the father?

Throughout the war he was in the prisoner of war camp, maintaining correspondence with his patients and friends from the past. From the letters that have been preserved it can be seen that they practically regularly sent packages to him, gave him information about us, as much as possible. This information is valuable for him, especially since the newspapers that he could get hold of often included different malicious and misleading articles regarding the fate of Jews, and our own.

He lived until the end of the war and then, returning home, on 29 April 1945, he met an acquaintance – a Chetnik, who intentionally misled him, telling him that his whole family had been executed already in 1941. His weak heart could not sustain this. (That man was in Užice all the time until 1943 and knew too well that Gutman's wife and both daughters were with the Partisans. But, he was exercising his task of discouraging every Yugoslav officer returning home.)



*With her mother, in an intermission between fighting for liberation that they both took part in from the very beginning of the war*

I do not know the exact burial site either for my mother or my sister. Still, some marks do exist. Mother's name is inscribed on the commemorative plate of fallen Partisan doctors in the building of the Military Medical Academy in Belgrade, and my sister's name is inscribed in the commemorative plate of fallen pupils of the Užice grammar school.

The war was over. None of my family was there. I was seventeen and a half. Without anything or anyone, without a home or an apartment. But I was not alone. In the post-war enthusiasm which to present day generations may be unthinkable, on the wings of youth, with friends and brothers in arms, it seemed as if I was not without a family. I felt as if it was one big family.

Subsequently I married a man from Užice, Dušan Đurđić. And a new, young family was thus created.

Today, my daughter Zorica is a doctor, professor at the Medical Faculty in Belgrade, and my son Veljko is an attorney at law. I also have grandchildren Vita and Goran. They are my new youth and a strong motivation for me to live even in my advanced age.

Right after the war I was employed in the Prosecution Service, subsequently in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I was to be sent abroad, but my husband Dušan was scheduled to work in Užice and I naturally joined him. At the end of the 1950's we moved to Belgrade, and I worked until retirement in the Ministry of Interior.

I was decorated with the Partisans Commemorative Medal of 1941 and a number of Partisan orders. Due to the lungs injury (a piece of exploded bomb is still in the tissue) I am disabled with 40 percent disability. I live with my children and grandchildren. Despite the burden of age I am still well.

Finally, I wish to underline that I have always been – during the war, after the war, and still today – proud of the fact that I was a soldier of the National Liberation Army which fought the occupiers and quislings in my country. My parents, who came here as foreigners – Jews from Poland – loved this country and called it their own. And I, when I speak of this country, I am speaking of my only country – Yugoslavia. That is where I was born, where I lived and where I will end my life.

I proudly remember my parents and my sister who died fighting against the Fascism. I remember and this memory of mine is the only monument to them. They do not have other monuments. This memory will continue to live through my children and grandchildren. Who could say that this is too little?

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*Dr Jaša ROMANO*

## THROUGH LIFE – HONESTLY AND LOVINGLY



*Dr Jaša Romano was born in 1908 in Banja Luka, of father Rabbi Menahem Romano and mother Rašela, née Kamhi; he had two brothers and two sisters. His sister Rikica perished in the concentration camp Sajmište (Old Fair Grounds) near Belgrade.*

*Romano graduated from the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine in Zagreb in 1932, and two years later defended his Ph.D. thesis.*

*He worked in different places across Serbia, and in 1941 the outbreak of the war found him in Loznica. Upon the arrival of German troops he joined the Liberation Movement, taking high military positions. Romano was*

*decorated with the Partisan Commemorative Medal of 1941 and numerous other outstanding military decorations.*

*He was the author of numerous scientific and history books, publications and articles. Among other works, he wrote a book of great documentary importance regarding the persecution of Jews during the Holocaust in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia: „Yugoslav Jews 1941–1945: victims of genocide and members of the National Liberation War“.*

*Right after the war, in 1945, he married Nada, née Marčinković, with whom he had two sons and three grandchildren.*

*The testimonies about this outstanding man were written by his wife Nada, dr Eta Najfeld, and sons Nenad and Predrag.*

# Nada Romano

## *PART ONE*

My husband was a very good life partner and father. He was sensitive. He loved his Jewish people and, much as he could, he observed the habits and traditions of his people.

Jaša was born in a patriarchal family, of father Rabbi Menahem Romano and mother Rašela, née Kamhi. He had two brothers and two sisters. His sister Rikica perished in the concentration camp Sajmište (Old Fair Grounds) near Belgrade. Her husband, dr Krishobci, perished in the concentration camp Šabac.

We were married for almost 50 years. We had two sons, both of whom are married and completed advanced studies. We have three grandchildren, good and hard working girls: Nina, Maja, and Sara. All three graduated from university.

I cherish the many years and fond memories with my husband Jaša. Although he had many work-related obligations, he devoted much care and love to his family. He loved his grandchildren endlessly. As much as he could he provided for everyone a good and honorable life.

Whenever we would be traveling for vacations we would do so via Sarajevo so that we could visit his parents. His parents strictly observed all Jewish traditions. The food was always Kosher. The usual prayers before and after meals were never skipped. On all high holidays they would have the usual holiday appropriate food prepared. On Saturdays, grandmother Rahele would put on her best clothes. She was already elderly when I met her as my husband's mother. We all had immense respect for them. We would kiss her hand, on Saturdays Jaša would not smoke, the lunch was always accompanied by prayer, and we would all have our heads covered.

When I married Jaša, I used to take very good care that his uniform is in the best possible state (at that time uniform was all that he wore). I wondered why in his pocket there was always a piece of bread, and once I asked him about it. He told me that during the war it made him feel that he has bread although he was hungry more often than not in those times.

I also once asked him why he had not married earlier, and he said:

„I did not want my future wife and children to suffer, therefore if I had to suffer persecution, I better do it alone“. He added that he saw what was happening to Jews in neighboring countries and could not have a piece of mind.

Jaša was very religious. He prayed to God; any time the children were travelling for vacation he would see them off with a prayer, even after they

were grown up. We often went to the temple, to commemorate his father and mother. I watched him in the Temple from the side assigned for women. He prayed with great religious fervor.

I could go on and say many great things about Jaša because he was an exceptional man, loving, serious and hard-working, never doing anyone any harm, no matter what. On the contrary, he helped everyone he met, as best he could.

I still vividly remember one occasion when he was to travel with his colleagues to visit one of the units. He said that he would be back late at night. However, he came back in the afternoon. I was surprised and asked: „How come? Have all your friends returned?“ „No, they finished the work and went somewhere for lunch“, he replied. I asked again: „Why didn't you go along?“ he said nothing but from his pocket uniform he took out some money that he did not spend and said: „Here is the allowance that I did not spend, get something for the children.“

These are just some of the many memories. He sacrificed a lot in order to make things better for us. In a word, he was honest and hard-working. He worked during the night, retyping his works and performed other tasks to make life better for us. I learned a lot about life from him. He told me about the persecution of the Jewish people, and I knew quite a lot about it myself. Living with him and getting to know better the people that he came from, I came to love Jews and saw them as a wonderful, hard-working and honest people.

## PART TWO

I am writing this from my memory, out of what I kept for myself from the stories told by my late husband.

When the war started in 1941 Jaša was working in Serbia, the town of Loznica. As soon as German troops entered Loznica, they introduced orders and decrees affecting the Jews. Jaša lost his job. Somehow, by hiding, he managed to get to Sarajevo to see what was happening with his parents. Once there, he agreed with his parents that he should after two or three days return to Loznica, as there he would have better chances to arrange where and how to find hiding. That same day in Sarajevo the Germans issued orders that all Jews were to report at a certain place. Initially, Jews were sent to do hard and dirty physical work. They would report in the morning and be released in the evening to return home. Thus, Jaša was scheduled to carry coal for heating all day long at the hotel „Evropa“. Finally, he decided not to go and report for work and decided to return to Loznica, and from there to



join the Mačva Partisan detachment and the National Liberation Movement. The priest Vlado Zečević sent him a message to get in contact with him, and join the Loznica detachment. So, he became a fighter of the National Liberation Movement. In March 1942 he was with the general staff of the national Liberation Army.



*JAŠA and NADA with the children in  
Skopje in 1953*

Although he was by qualification a doctor of veterinary science, in 1943 he was transferred to the sanitation service of the Sixth Krajina brigade, and in 1944 he was appointed head of sanitation services of 39th Division. Soon after coming to this post he was appointed the head of the Fifth Corps and stayed in this post until the end of the war.

He mostly took part in military operations across Bosnia. As far as I know, for some time while in the sanitation service he worked together with dr Eta Najfeld and her husband dr Alfred Najfeld. He told me about them on several occasions and he respected them as sincere friends and good people. He was happy that they joined the

Partisan units and thus saved themselves.

At the time of liberation of Sarajevo Jaša went to his parent's apartment to find out something about them. He rang the bell on the door which was opened by a woman who asked him what he wanted and he just said: „I only want to ask since when are you living here?“, to which she replied: „Since 1941.“ „Until that time my parents lived here“, he said. While standing at the door he could recognize the well-known furniture that belonged to his parents: the carpet, the hanging closet, and other things. He asked: „Whose are these things?“, and at that moment a young man came out from one of the rooms and said: „This is all ours“. And Jaša recognized on him his pajama top: „Is that yours, too? What you are wearing is my pijamas, it stayed with my parents when I was visiting. I am the son of those Jews, as you named them“. That is how the conversation ended, and Jaša moved on with his unit, towards Karlovac and Zagreb, as it was still not the end of the war.

## PART THREE

I am writing this from my memory ...

Jaša's older brother, dr Samuel Romano, was seconded in 1941, like other Jewish doctors, to work in Slavonija on suppression of endemic syphilis. It was in the so-called Independent State of Croatia (NDH). One of the people in the village where Samuel was at the time who had influence over the then authorities once told him: „Doctor, my mother is ill, if you get her well, we will not touch you“. Of course, he did get his mother well. To repay for this, the man got his parents from Sarajevo to the same village. They came by train, with an Ustaša soldier, allegedly taking these elderly Jews to the concentration camp in Gradiška.

Thus, this man saved the parents of the Romano brothers. They lived in hiding in Petrovo Selo and dressed like the local farmers. The villagers themselves used to say to the village leaders: „If you take the doctor away, we will all go to the woods. He treated us all free of charge and he always gives us good advice and assistance.“ The village was poor, they had neither a doctor nor medicines. That is how they lived until the end of the war.

As soon as Nova Gradiška was liberated, dr Samuel and his parents went there. The war ended in 1945 and Jaša went from Zagreb to Nova Gradiška in an attempt to hear or find out something about his family, as he had heard some rumors. Once there, he asked a man: „Tell me, please,

is there a doctor around here?“ The man told him that there is and directed him to go to the street where a doctor is assisting and bandaging the wounded soldiers. „Is anyone living with him?“ Jaša asked. „He has old parents“.

So, Jaša got to the house and saw near the gate soldiers and the wounded. When he entered the kitchen, he saw his old mother turned towards the



*NADA and JAŠA in 1955*

stove, making some food. He just said loudly „Mother“. She could not hear him well and, without turning around she said: „Over there on the bench there is a bucket and a cup, so take some water and drink!“ She had thought that he was one of the soldiers who used to come in all the time and ask for water. His father, the old Rabbi Menahem Romano, recognized the voice of his son and came out of his room joyous to see his son Jakob, an officer of the National Liberation Army, alive and well. Joy and tears followed. Jaša went back to Zagreb the following day, overwhelmed with happiness that he found them.

The third brother, Majer, was in the Osnabruck camp in Germany (as prisoner of war arrested as reserve officer of the Army of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia). A month later he returned to the country as well.

That is mostly what I have as memories of how the Romano family was saved.

Zagreb was liberated on 8 May 1945. That is where we met and soon got married.

### *Dr Eta Najfeld: My friend Jaša Romano*

In July 1944 my husband, dr Alfred Najfeld, and I met Jaša as members of the National Liberation Army. It was in the village Sokolovo, western Bosnia. At the time Jaša was with the sanitation service of the 39th Krajina division, and my husband was appointed manager of the hospital within the same division. I was in charge of the infectious department of the same hospital.

Our first encounter in the hospital in Sokolovo was the beginning of a close and sincere friendship which lasted until Jaša died. Whenever we could make the time, which was usually in the evenings, after all our work and obligations were taken care of, the three of us would sit together and talk. About what? It was always about the topic that preoccupied all of us: What is happening in the camps? Is there any news from our families? Who has not yet been rounded up to be deported to the camps? And so on. And over and over again. At that time we could not understand and grasp the true dimensions and scope of the tragedy of our people because London radio, Soviet Union radio, and other radio stations did not say much about camps. The great Allies had their own worries and interests. The camps used to persecute Jews were not a priority for the Allies.

Jaša, like ourselves, was concerned about the destiny of the Jewish people to which he was strongly connected. That was the reason that he was from day one committed to the fight against Nazism, as the only true option for us Yugoslav Jews, to fight together with others against the evil of Nazism.

Jaša was an excellent organizer of the sanitation service: in combat he always judged well where to place the sanitation service, attempting to save

both people and resources. As he was completely cautious and accurate in everything that he did, he sometimes got into conflicts with people who could not or would not understand him.



*Dr JAŠA ROMANO with wife NADA on the occasion of presenting his new book in 1980 in Belgrade*

Jaša had the best human characteristics: honesty, justice, truthfulness. He was dedicated, hard-working, and committed to what he was doing. I will never forget the get togethers in our house after the war. Our conversations from Sokolovo continued, but now there was even more sadness since our concerns and fears and gloomy premonitions became reality. That led Jaša to write his major work: „Yugoslav Jews 1941–1945: Victims of Genocide and Fighters of the National Liberation War“. Travelling across the country, searching minutely for pieces of data that he could find, he dedicated his life to the topic of Jews of Yugoslavia. Even today, so many years on, any time one needs to find out something about any members of our former community, the rule is: „Look it up in Jaša’s book!“

I personally have to thank Jaša for a present and a considerate act of his which I will cherish my whole life. In May 1945 Jaša and I ran into each other when the 2nd Army was liberating Zagreb. I was carrying in my hands my son Igor who was born while I was with the Partisans. Igor was barefoot. Jaša saw me and asked: „Doesn’t your son have any shoes?“ I said: „Where would I get shoes?“ To this he said: „Tomorrow I will bring for you some leather

used to seam German calvary soldiers' trousers so you can make your son some shoes". That is how my son got his first pair of shoes thanks to Jaša. I thank him for the shoes and for his precious and sincere friendship.

### *Memories from Father's Life*

NENAD ROMANO: He told me how on one occasion, when he was ten years old, a circus came to Banja Luka to perform, and he accepted to be dressed as a clown and placed at the entrance of the circus tent with loud-speakers inviting people to come and see the show. In return he got a free ticket for the circus performance. The trouble happened when his older brother Samuel saw him and, of course, told their father about it.

Later, when I decided to enroll and study at university of drama arts, I was joking with him „like father, like son“ saying that my love for arts is probably inherited from his “famous” circus days.

Focused on his scientific work, he did not even notice that the little „Fiat“ which he bought in the sixties and which my brother reworked for car races had in the meantime been fitted with racing tires, a noisy engine and special sports seats into which he had difficulty getting in and even more getting out when my brother was giving him a ride somewhere.

He was very strict and demanded exceptional success from my brother and myself in our schooling. Of course, after my brother, engineer Predrag Romano, and I grew up and he was in his more advanced years he grew “softer”. He went completely mellow after the birth of his first granddaughter.

PREDRAG ROMANO: I was 17 and we were on vacation in Malinska. One day, after we got to the beach, we were harshly attacked by a German tourist claiming that he had reserved that spot on the beach. At that moment my father, who was never a strong man, stood up in front of this big man and told him peacefully in perfect German: „Sir, in this country Germans can never have anything reserved!“ The man silently walked away.

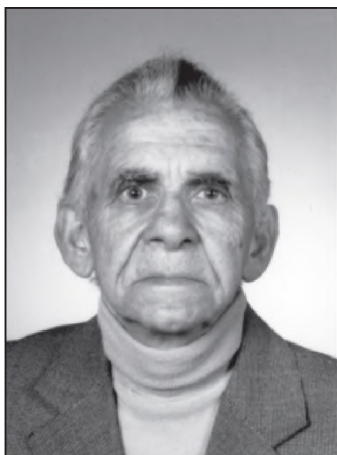
I never thanked my father for this act. Here, I am doing it now ...



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*Eliezer KATAN*

## THROUGH FORESTS AND MOUNTAINS



*Eliezer Katan was born on 22 February 1920 in Rogatica (BiH), of father Eliša, born in 1888 in Rogatica, and mother Mazalta (née Katan), born in 1890 in Goražde. During the occupation, his parents and his younger brother Izidor, born in 1932, were hiding for a while in the surrounding villages. In autumn 1943 they were captured by Ustaša, slain and thrown into a well. The elder brother Albert, born in 1915, survived the war.*

*After the war he stayed in the Yugoslav Army. He graduated first from the Military Sanitation College, department for assistant pharmacists, and subsequently continued his studies at the Faculty of Pharmacy. Within the Pharmacy Service of the Yugoslav Army he worked in different positions and lectured at the School for Reserve Sanitation Officers. Some years before retirement he was appointed head of department for history of the military sanitation service, with the task to collect and process documentation regarding the sanitation service during the National Liberation War (NOR), publishing about twenty papers on this topic. He was a regular member of the Yugoslav Scientific Society for History of Public Health.*

*He lived in Belgrade and was married to Marija (née Fijal), with whom he had a daughter Matilda, doctor of molecular biology, working in London. She is married to Robert Muller, and has a son Alexander.*

*Eliezer Katan died at the beginning of 2007.*



I completed my elementary and lower public grammar school in Rogatica, a town between Sarajevo and Višegrad. Until World War Two there was a small Jewish Community there. With the exception of one pharmacist and one lawyer, all Jewish families were engaged in trading. They had small shops, mostly catering for the village population. My father also had a shop like that with a modest assortment and quantities of products.

My elder brother Albert went to the technical secondary school in Sarajevo, thanks to the assistance of our relatives who took him in and provided for him a place to stay and food, and thanks also to the scholarship extended by the society „La Benevolencia“. Thanks to the support of the family of my mother's sister it was also for me it was made possible to continue my education in Sarajevo (1934–1938). I attended the boys' apprenticeship school, trade for metal workers.

Upon my arrival to Sarajevo I joined the Youth Zionist movement Hashomer Hatzair. I was aware of the objectives of this society since my brother was previously a member as well.

After completing my schooling I tried for several months in vain to get a job. Therefore I asked to be invited for hahshara, preparatory apprenticeship and I received the invitation in January of 1939 to go to Novi Sad, where there was hahshara for trades. I worked in the Vojvođanska Foundry. In April 1939 we moved to the agricultural hahshara in the village Golenić, in the vicinity of Podravska Slatina, where I stayed until February 1941, when it was closed due to the risk of war, and I had to return to Rogatica.

The German occupation of the country in April 1941 and the proclamation of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) happened overnight. At the beginning, the garrison in town consisted of a German unit, with some 300 to 400 troops. There was no Ustaša organization in the Rogatica district at that time, but soon it was established. The decrees and racial regulations put in place by Ustaša authorities had to be enforced. In June, the German army and garrison were replaced by the “home guard”, and an armed Ustaša formation was founded. Right away they assigned commissioners to Jewish shops. Younger members of the Jewish Community were sent to do forced labor in their barracks, and this was done more in order to humiliate them than it was actually necessary.

During the summer, in July and August, the situation in the Rogatica region suddenly changed. The resistance in the villages grew and soon turned into an armed uprising. Resistance units took control of many villages and attacks on roads interrupted the traffic. In the first week of September Rogatica itself became the target of attacks. One morning the rebels walked into the town but stayed in it for only a couple of hours. The “home guard”, with back-up from Sarajevo, was back soon.

A couple of days afterwards retaliation started. Late in the afternoon, “home guard” patrols, led by Ustaša, suddenly and hastily, were taking from houses all men, Serbs and Jews, including my father and myself, rounding them up in the church courtyard, subsequently placing us all in the church residence. We spent the night in the church hall. Needless to say, we were overwhelmed by gloomy thoughts. In the morning, through the back streets, they transferred us to the Public School, located across the street from the military barracks. They put about 140 men in two classrooms on the first floor, and about twenty women, mostly teachers, in another room intended for teachers. They said we were detained as hostages. They allowed blankets and pillows to be brought for us from our homes, saying also that subsequently we can receive clean clothes from home.

The following day, the town commander, the home guards’ chief and the head of civilian town administration came to visit the prison. Looking more closely into elderly detainees, the town commander looked at my father Eliša and told him he could go home but must not leave it. The reason for this was that the two of them served together in the same unit of the Austria-Hungarian Army during World War One. The food, tasteless and always the same, was brought from the home-guards barracks. Practically every day we were taken out for an hour to walk in the school yard.

One afternoon, at the beginning of October, the guards stormed in. They ordered us to run across the street and go the area in between military pavilions. Many of us were only in our shirts, barefoot or in socks. They lined us up in pairs. After some waiting, the radio was turned on. We were listening to the speech by general Milan Nedić inviting the Serbian population to obey the occupier’s authorities.

As I was putting on a clean shirt brought for me from home I found in it a postcard sent from Sarajevo saying: „Daviko and Šmuel went to Jaar to visit their aunt“. The message was clear: they had gone to the woods and joined the Partisans. They were my haverim with whom I did hashara in Golenić.

In mid October the attacks of rebels started again on locations surrounding the town. The discipline in prison became stricter at that time. There were five guards with us detainees in each room. Previously it was just one guard per room, in the hallway in front of the room. Food was brought in only once a day, at night. That was when we started having concerns about what would happen to us as hostages. It went on like that for about a week. One day, after midnight, the men guarding our rooms were called to come downstairs to eat. For a while we could hear them and then everything became silent. About an hour later a guard came into our room saying that the home-guard had abandoned the military camp and that he had decided to stay and join the Partisans.

Right away, one of the prisoners, carrying a white flag, went to the position of the rebels and notified them. Soon some five or six fighters came and told us to go in groups to surrounding liberated villages and wait there until the town is completely liberated. It was early morning, 24 October.

About ten of us, in a group which I joined, went to the village Gučevo, about two hour's walk away. There was a numerous group of fighters from that village who were with the Partisans. Our hosts were very welcoming and after a hearty breakfast there was a surprise – a copy of the „Borba“ newspaper, printed some days earlier in Užice.

The following day we returned to our homes. About five or six younger Jews right away made contact with a Partisan unit. They put us in the security unit to perform guard and patrolling duty. Chetniks also had a unit for the same purpose for other guard locations in town. The patrols were mixed, made of fighters of both of these formations.

In several villages in the region of Rogatica there were hospitals established with a significant number of wounded fighters. The only pharmacy in the district was in Rogatica, with considerable stock of supplies, for that time. The pharmacist managed to prepare and pack for us packages and therefore asked the commander of the guard unit to assign an assistant to him. I was allowed during the day to work in the pharmacy, provided that every second night I do my four hours of patrolling. Above the pharmacy, on the first floor, was the apartment of the doctor, manager of the district hospital in which at that time some Partisans were treated. He told the pharmacist that in the hospital there is a wounded Jew from Sarajevo. He also mentioned a name which sounded familiar to me. I went to visit him. I had seen him before and knew him as a very active member of the „Matatja“ society. It was Salamon Konforti, a clerk from Sarajevo. He died on 19 June 1943 near Goražde.

At the end of November, Rogatica was stormed by groups of Chetniks, local rural folk, with cargo horses and, along with shooting, immediately they started robbing shops. Thanks to a swift intervention by partisan units the robbery ended and they were all sent back to their villages. Parts of the First Proletariat Brigade, founded in Rudo, came to Rogatica on 24 December, in early afternoon. Two days later my haver from hahshara, Pajki, who was also with us for a day in April, at the time of capitulation, came to see me. At that time he managed to change parts of his uniform for civilian clothes. (Valter Koen-Pajki, worker from Belgrade, fighter of the First Proletariat Brigade. Killed at the end of 1942 in Pjenovac, near Han Pijesak. His younger brother, Erih, who was also at hahshara in Golenić was also killed as fighter of the National Liberation War.)

In mid January 1942 the Germans, together with the home-guard, launched a major offensive in eastern Bosnia. In the vicinity of Višegrad, their fight against the Partisans was joined also by the Chetniks. The units withdrew from Rogatica towards the areas around the Romanija mountain in the afternoon on 14 January. That was the day when I last saw my family. The links with the Jewish Community of Rogatica were severed. At the end of December 1941 there was a total of 10 Jewish families in Rogatica, with 38 family members. Nine of them have survived, either by living in hiding or joining the National Liberation War.



*ELIEZER at hahshara of Hashomer Hatzair in Golenić, March 1940*

The units which withdrew from positions were temporarily accommodated in the barracks of the Podromanija region. The guard unit of the Romanija detachment was disbanded and we were sent to different parts of the detachment in the surrounding villages. That is when I was given my Partisan name – Lazo.

The enemy offensive got the Romanija Partisan Detachment into a very difficult situation. Taking of great parts of territory and getting control over practically all communication routes meant practically full disintegration of units into smaller groups. The detachment suffered a heavy blow with the killing of its commander *Čiča Romanijski* (Slaviša Vajner). The severe winter, with heavy snow, further aggravated the communications as secondary roads and forest roads became impossible to use. Many individuals left the units, and some detachments just disbanded. During the offensive, under pressure, the detachment withdrew from its position near the road. At that time there were

about 60 of us. During the initial days we could not get far, we only launched minor attacks on patrols and remote guards. Later we moved towards western Romanija, to villages that most fighters of the detachment were from.

A turnaround happened in the first half of March, when the HQ of Partisan detachments ordered all Partisan units to gather in the town Srednje (about 30 kilometers north of Sarajevo) for re-grouping purposes. Within a couple of days about 200 to 250 fighters came. Apart from the Partisans from the region of Romania villages, there were many young people, students and workers from Sarajevo and the surrounding industrial settlements. I had known some of them before. We were regrouped into new formations and preparations were underway for the establishment of a strike battalion, modeled after the battalions of proletariat brigades. Right away a group was set up and a choir of about twenty fighters for a celebration. The direct organizer of these activities and the author and composer of the song of the strike battalion as well as the choir conductor was our then deputy battalion commander Jovo Cigo. (Oskar Danon, the Sarajevo composer and conductor, decorated with the Partisan Commemorative Medal of 1941, the deputy of the First and Second ZAVNOBIH.)

The First Eastern-Bosnia Strike Battalion was a highly mobile unit with capable commanding staff, high degree of political maturity and self-discipline among fighters. I was sent to the first battalion unit, of about 50 fighters, mostly from villages around the village Pale, and some pupils and workers mostly from Sarajevo. I stayed with this unit as a fighter full fifteen months without any interruption. During that time we crossed the country far and close, from Romanija and Zvijezda, Ozren, via Konjuh to Birač, then Majevisa, again via the Sava and the Bosut forest to Fruška Gora and Iriški Venac, and back again to Semberija, Trebava, across rivers Spreča and Drnjača, along the Milan mountain to Romanija, and back to Šekovići.

When I contracted the spotty typhoid in May 1943 I was admitted to the Partisan hospital in the village Aščerići. That is how I was separated from my Partisan unit and comrades with whom I spent a long time and shared difficulties but also aspirations.

When I was leaving home I was quite well dressed and had good shoes. Things became difficult after one month of walking on foot, when my boots (which kept me warm and dry in winter) completely fell apart. The only thing that I could get at the time was folk shoes made of unprocessed raw hide. If it rained, the shoes would get a bit softer, but they would also become slippery, as if you were walking on ice.

I remember well one dark April night. We were descending down a muddy hill. I could not do ten meters without slipping. I got bruises all over, but I had to get up right away and keep up the pace with the line ahead



of me. Early before dawn we arrived to a village near Vareš, wet and dirty with mud.

The commander, as usual, distributed the fighters into local homes. I was put up with three more men to a small house, and we were told that we are not planned for any guard or patrol. When we entered the front room, where the fire place was, we noticed the great poverty. When asked about food, we said that we were not hungry, that we want to lie down somewhere. In the little room there were three children sleeping and the woman put them to one side while in the other she arranged some more straw and a cover on top of it, making a place for us to sleep. We took off our wet clothes, took off our shoes and socks, and put everything around the fire place to dry. Several hours later, when we got up, we were pleasantly surprised. Our host had cleaned our clothes as well as our shoes and socks and had it all dried. She cooked for us a plain pie (soft mixture of barley baked on a thin oiled baking casserole, baked under a baking lid). She was apologizing for not having anything else to offer. She borrowed a cup of milk from neighbors to put on top of it to make it taste better. Also, of the four colored eggs (it was Easter) that she had for the four of them (her and the three children, the husband was taken as prisoner) she gave us two. So, we each had half an egg along with the pie.

In mid April we arrived to the region of the Ozren Partisan Detachment, holding position in the direction of Doboje and Maglaj. In the villages around there were big groups of Chetniks threatening to attack. After our arrival we went with a part of the detachment to visit the villages and talk to village commanders in order to avoid conflicts. They all promised to come the following day to the detachment HQ in order to work out an agreement.

So, they arrived the following morning, but with a different agenda. Overnight, they collected all their forces and staged an attack on us which took us by surprise. In the first blow they arrested about ten fighters in a house at the outskirts of the village. They stormed the school which was home of the detachment hospital with some wounded fighters and the detachment doctor, dr Roza Papo, who had a big cut that was still healing on her face as a result of a broken window of some ten days ago when the hospital was bombed. We quickly withdrew to the nearby hill and regrouped and went into a decisive counter-attack. The Chetniks were chased away, the wounded and the arrested fighters set free.

At the end of May a group of striking brigades started a move across the mountain Konjuh. We were moving across a totally uninhabited forest terrain. The march took long because we had two or three times to go back and search for the right track to the top. We were without food for more than four days, and we could find no drinking water along our way. We would tease our hunger with a few leaves of wild garlic, when we came across it on



the grassy plateau clearing. Thirst was eased by “acid” glass, similar to clover or other types of leaves found under oak tree bark.

On the very top of the Konjuh mountain we were resting for some hours. The sunny May day gave us the pleasure of enjoying the forest panorama in front of us. The march continued and the following day we arrived to Drinjača, near Šekovići. We made contact with the Birčanski detachment. In the Drinjača river we washed and refreshed ourselves after a long time. The detachment HQ in Šekovići welcomed us with a hearty lunch after which we slept in the school classrooms.



*ELIEZER KATAN was with the fighters of the first battalion of the 6th East Bosnia Brigade (the second one on the right, with the fur hat)*

The battalion's attack on the stronghold Han Pogled (on the road Han Pijesak–Vlasenica) was made around 3 AM. The resistance of Ustaša was very fierce and lasted about half an hour. Making use of the morning semi darkness they started withdrawing towards the nearby woods. Right away we went after them, moving from one tree to the next. It was already daytime when I, hastily and carelessly, suddenly found myself face to face with an Ustaša some fifteen meters away. It seems that we spotted each other at the same moment and reacted instinctively: throwing ourselves on the ground and shooting. You cannot be accurate in such a situation, but I was not touched by his bullets. When the detachment got together again afterwards we found out that two of our fighters were killed in the morning combat. One of them was Buki. His grandfather and my grandmother were brother and sister. (Alkalaj /Merkuš/ Mošo „Buki“, born in 1920 in Bjeljina, worker.

He was with the National Liberation War since 1941, Rogatica, fighter, killed on 15 June 1942 at Han Pogled.)

During the summer of 1942 we spent most of the time in the region of Birač, which became our standing base for combat. Usually it was attacks on minor Ustaša or home-guard strongholds or traps along the road, more or less successful. We would go back to the base for short breaks to make use of the sunny days, to wash and get our clothes clean at the little brook by the Lovnica monastery.

Food was always scarce and what was there was always the same. Breakfast: a thin cooked browned flour, sometimes coffee substitutes or tea; lunch: a small piece of cooked meat with some cooked vegetables or corn-bread. Dinner was often skipped.

The group of battalions was transformed into the Sixth East-Bosnian Strike Brigade on 2 August 1942, in a field near Šekovići. The order of the General Staff was read in front of the lined up battalions. The ceremony was attended by many people from neighboring villages. Within the Sixth Brigade ... „there were as fighters the best representatives of Serbs, Muslims, Croats, Jews ... workers, farmers, and the inteligencia of eastern Bosnia ...“

In the area of Majevisa, Trebava and Semberija there was a number of isolated Chetniks, under the command of different self-proclaimed commanders. For some time we avoided conflicts among us. A group which called itself the Military Chetnik Detachment, under active officer Subotić (after the war he received the rank of general in the Yugoslav Army) put itself at the disposal and under the command of our brigade. The key goal was to strengthen the Majevisa Partisan Detachment in the region.

At the beginning of October the Brigade HQ decided that two of our battalions should move across the river Sava into the region of Srem. Boats were boarded near the village Brodac. There were only 6 or seven boats of small capacity so the transfer took until dawn. On the Srem side, at the embankment, there was minor resistance by local home-guard unit. Beyond the embankment there was a huge complex. One day, around noon, we were near an abandoned hunting lodge (the place was Dvorac), along a very wide cut. Patrols sent a message that a big formation of the German army was moving along it towards us. The order was for us to take positions on both sides in the forest by the road and wait for their formation to come within the reach of our trap. Soon they were there. Our shooting took them by surprise. To protect themselves they could only use the trenches by the road.

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\*THE FIGHTING OF THE 6<sup>TH</sup> PROLETERIATE BRIGADE, „Naša riječ“, Zenica 1973, Pg. 12.

The battle lasted for about three hours. They suffered great losses and started to withdraw. We also lost about ten fighters.

The following day, while we were resting on a distant forest plane, there were four wagons coming to collect wood. The wagons were kept by the afternoon when boxes of shells were loaded on them along with some wounded fighters. It was all covered with blankets. We arrived to a road where there was already a car and our battalion commander standing by. He took from the line-up a number of fighters, including me.

He noticed that the ten of us who gathered around were all wearing German army coats and other parts of uniforms from which we had not yet managed to remove the identification marks. Our task was to escort the wagons through a village which only had a village guard. It was getting dark while our leader dressed in German uniform was telling the village guard that they should all move, including the villagers, until we pass through the village. We got through smoothly. We were soon by the river, and loaded the wagons on the river ferry which was standing there and we were soon on the other side of the river. And the ferry driver, by calling out in German, got the ferry for us to board. We moved on right away and during the night we crossed the road and railroad Belgrade–Zagreb. The following afternoon we managed to cross the road Erdevik–Ilok and arrive to Fruška Gora, place called Ležimirska Kapija.

We were resting in Fruška Gora for about two weeks. We stayed in dugouts dug about two meters into the hillside. We were so used to going without food that the food there was more than good enough. That was an opportunity for full recovery. The unit was also filled with new fighters from Srem, and the brigade now had another, fourth, battalion – Fruškogorski.

During our stay in Srem, the Chetnik units in Majevisa region got better connected among themselves. After we crossed over we clashed frequently with the increasingly strong Chetnik groups. They were preparing for a major strike on our units. At end of November there was fierce and decisive battle with their key group near the village Maleševci (northern Majevisa).

In order to mislead the Chetnik intelligence, the battalion moved at night before the combat, after going through a number of villages. In every village we would do preparations for overnight, stay about an hour and move on. Thus, during that one night we changed seven different places to stay overnight and in the morning we were on position for attack.

In the combat which lasted almost until noon I was assistant to out machine-gun man. He had a coat with well stuffed shoulders. One moment I heard a blow and the next moment I saw his coat shoulder shattered to pieces. The bullet fortunately just missed us. The outcome of that battle was the arrest and the surrender of many Chetniks who were mostly let to go

home, and the ultimate result was the total disintegration of Chetnik forces in that area.

We stayed in the region for another two weeks during which the Majeвица detachment was fully reorganized. By mid December the brigade completed its transfer across the road Zvornik–Tuzla and went south to Birač, where the Chetniks from Romanija were located. When they found out about our arrival they started withdrawing immediately. We arrived in Šekovići on 19 December (St. Nickola's Day) and in a line-up we crossed the river Drinjača, about half a meter deep. Along the right river bank we continued uphill, for more than four hours, without stopping, in order to keep our clothes from freezing. In a village we had our clothes dried and spent the night. The following ten days we were catching up with Chetniks and going into intermittent combat with them, until we got closer to Romanija, where the snow was quite deep and we gave up further chase.

On the way back to Šekovići I walked tormented by the pain in my joints. I was given a cargo horse to ride on. I cannot say what was more difficult – the pain caused by walking or the freezing on horseback. Much of the road I was holding the horse by its tail.

By the end of April 1943 the brigade was moving practically across the same area of central eastern Bosnia as the year before, constantly on the move, frequently getting into combat with Chetnik or home-guard units and strong-holds and intermittent resting in different locations.

It was probably the end of April or beginning of May when our Sixth and the newly-established Fifteenth Majeвица Brigade started a major march towards the area south of Sarajevo. On the second day, while climbing up the Milan mountain, I got a high temperature. Due to suspicions of spotty typhoid I was immediately transferred to hospital in the dormitory of the Lovnica monastery near Šekovići. The high temperature subsided within four or five days. It was in fact a severe flue and the exhaustion which lasted for another ten days, therefore I stayed on in the hospital.

At that time the frequent movement of enemy units in the direct surroundings posed a threat to the wounded and the sick in the hospital, due to which the patients were evacuated from the monastery dormitories, with practically all the wounded and doctor Roza Papo leaving for the area of Majeвица to the village Trnava. Those with lesser wounds, the sick and the convalescents moved to the village Aščerići, situated on a small plateau about two hours' walk above the monastery. After another two or three days I again had a high temperature, I had contracted spotted typhoid. I was lying down in a room, on the floor and all the medical assistance consisted of taking my temperature twice a day, mornings and evenings.

Due to the immediate threat posed by the enemy we moved into the woods. A few of us sick with the typhoid were put up in a sinkhole covered with branches where we stayed for four days. A few days after our return to the hospital, the danger was over.

During my recovery from the typhoid, especially during the first days, I was just silent all day long, sitting by the fire and staring at the cooking pots, waiting for time to pass from breakfast to lunch, from lunch to dinner. I have only scattered understanding of what was happening during that period.

By the end of June the wounded started to arrive who managed to break through after the battle of Sutjeska. Their number was increasing every day and the task of receiving, accommodating, and recording them required the involvement of all, including convalescents, so I too was given certain tasks.

While receiving a group of severely wounded fighters who were brought in on oxen driven wagons I had an interesting encounter. The wagon driver was from Seljane, a village close to Rogatica, who went to elementary school with me. For a year we even shared the same desk. After greetings, we started talking about how it was in Rogatica. He told me that most Jews were rounded up by Ustaša already in February 1942 and taken to the area around the Romanija mountain, where they were executed, but that my parents and my younger brother were still alive and hiding in some surrounding villages.

With the constant inflow of the wounded and the sick their number exceeded 150 and their care in the first half of June required a restructuring of the hospital so that it was divided in a number of villages in the area, which were all on a plateau at a distance from each other of 500 to 1,000 meters. All of these small villages could have had some thirty households scattered in small groups. This created many difficulties in setting up parts of the hospital and accommodating the wounded. There was very few qualified sanitation staff; as I remember, only three or four doctors and about fifteen nurses, mostly those who came with the wounded.

In July 1943 a number of home-guard members threw some shells into a cave housing about ten heavily wounded persons and most of them were killed. The cave was located in a narrow and steep gorge, about 50 meters from the Lovnica monastery. Some kilometers further, in a forest, in the direction of the river Spreča, the enemy found a number of hiding wounded fighters and with them a doctor Sidonija Lipman, and killed them.\*

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\*Dr Sidonija Lipman-Polak, born in 1893 in Baja, Hungary, a Jew, doctor. She joined the NLM since 1941 in Šabac, manager of the hospital of Mačvanski detachment, fell in July 1943 near Tuzla.



By mid July I was well recovered and I asked to be sent back to my brigade, but was not allowed to do since they had very few staff to work in the hospital with such a big number of the wounded and that was why many of us who had recovered were kept there to help.

I was put in a group which was bandaging wounds, to assist in handling severely wounded persons. My additional task was to collect from all groups the used bandage material and take it to persons in charge of washing the material. I was also in charge of collecting from all departments their lists of medicines needed and taking the lists to the pharmacist. The subsequent day my task would be to collect the clean bandaging material and distribute it to groups and departments. The stocks of bandaging material and medicines were very scarce. The hospital pharmacist was mr. ph. Bruno Finkelštajn from Prnjavor. These tasks took all my time during the day, being all the time with the heavily wounded I witnessed their suffering and their courage. Surgeries in the hospital at that time were performed by dr Ivo Herlinger from Osijek.

At that time, in September 1943, the Third National Liberation Army Corps was active in the territory of eastern Bosnia. The hospital that I worked in was named the Hospital 1 of the Third Corps. We had control over a big territory. In October the town of Tuzla also became part of this territory. New casualties arrived to the hospital along with a number of doctors. A significant quantity of medical supplies came from Tuzla. Another arrival was that of the pharmacist mr. ph. Vladoje Grabarić from Zagreb. At that time I was assigned to prepare and arrange the premises and store the received sanitation supplies. That storage was used to supply the hospital and other units of the army.

Some days later when the above tasks were completed, the pharmacist Vlada used a small room with a wooden floor and improvised in it a desk with pharmacy scales and some instruments for preparation of medicines. All of this was brought from Tuzla along with other supplies. Along with a Pharmacopeia, there were also some manuals – practical guidelines for preparation of medicines. Using these Guidelines, Vlado started teaching me some basics of pharmacy.

In December a new enemy offensive was launched against the liberated territory of eastern Bosnia. The hospital was to be evacuated. The most serious wounded people were put into digouts in the forest that were prepared in advance. Some staff and those with lighter injuries were moving along with the combat units. A part of supplies from our storage was distributed to the hiding places with the wounded, to have some reserve stock. Everything else was moved to two separate digouts.



I remember one specific situation. An older engineer, a nurse, and her ten years old son (who had arrived a month before from Tuzla) were moving in the line with the hospital staff. Then, one moment, they stopped and went to a tree. The engineer started calling out: „Friends, let us go this way to this attractive restaurant and refresh ourselves“. A fighter went to them and came back to the line. That was the only time that I have ever seen a person having hallucinations, which happens with persons who are extremely exhausted.

At end of December 1943 the wounded were taken out of the digouts, the sanitation staff came back, and the hospital continued in the same little villages as before. At that time the pharmacist Vlado had an assignment to go to the hospital Trnava in the Majevisa mountain. I was ordered not to get the sanitation supplies out of the digouts. Specifically, I was told to get from the digouts a small quantity of supplies and with them to settle in a small solitary house in the woods, close to the digouts. In that house there was an old man, solitary, father of the regional commander. I did as told.



*ELIEZER in Sarajevo, July 1945.*

The hospital was at a distance of an hour's walk along a forest track. Every second day I would go to the hospital, get my food supplies, and receive from the hospital the list of needed sanitation materials. I would then get the material out of the digouts and the following day take it to the hospital. So it was for two months.

At the beginning of March 1944, when Vlado came back, we got all the supplies out of the digouts and stored them in a small house close to the hospital. Here again we improvised a pharmacy preparation desk. Not far from the house there was a stable, and beneath its floor we dug a space for storage of supplies, covered it and placed manure on top of it.

At end of April the Allies seconded a team of surgeons to assist the sanitation service of the Third Army. Major Dr Colin Dafoe, a Canadian surgeon, and his two assistants were parachuted to us. This team brought with it a significant quantity of sanitation supplies. A small portion of this was given to us, and the team retained most of it for their needs. The head of the

sanitation service, based on our experience, suggested that they keep their supplies in the dugouts. The surgeon initially rejected it, but over time he allowed it. We placed their supplies in two separate dugouts.

In September 1944 Tuzla was finally liberated. During October the hospital and the sanitation supplies storage from the region of Šekovići were moved to Tuzla. At that time the Hospital Centre of the Third Army was established in the town, comprising a number of surgical hospitals, as well as hospitals for internal and infectious diseases. The sanitation storage was placed in a big civilian pharmacy. Another major consignment of medical supplies was parachuted to Tuzla in December and we also placed it in the storage. A portion of it, mostly bandaging materials, was located in the hospital's basement.

By mid January 1945 I was working in the storage, after which I was appointed head of hospital pharmacy in the newly established surgical hospital.

At that time I received very sad news. In the street I met a tailor from Rogatica, whom I knew well. We were taken by surprise when we saw each other and we stopped in the street. I told him what I heard the previous summer about my parents from my school friend Veljko Stakić. The tailor told me that what Veljko said was true at the time, but that he had to tell me about what followed. In autumn of 1943 Ustaša had caught a group of Serbs in the surrounding villages, with women and children, who were hiding there. Among them were my parents and my younger brother. They were all taken to Rogatica, to the house of a painter, and they were slaughtered one by one and thrown into a well. After the war, bones were taken out of the well and buried in a common grave of the Partisans' Cemetery in Rogatica.

At end of March I was given a new assignment in the storage of sanitation supplies, with orders to go with a pharmacist from Belgrade to Zemun, to the main warehouse and collect from it sanitation supplies for our corps. There were no major difficulties in doing this task, but I remember one thing. In the train Loznica – Koviljača I was sitting close to a group of prisoners of war released from camps in Germany. While talking with them, I mentioned that my brother was arrested during the April war as reserve officer in the vicinity of Skadar and that he contacted us from a camp in Italy. One of the group asked me about my brother's name, as he was also arrested there. Hearing the name, he said that he knew him and that they were in the same camps in Italy and Germany. He then continued to tell me that two days before the red Army liberated them, the Germans had evacuated a group of prisoners, including my brother, to the west. This gave me hope that I could possibly soon see my brother Albert.

In mid April, after returning to Tuzla, I was notified of being promoted to the rank of sublieutenant and head of the sanitation warehouse of the Third corps.



*ELIEZER celebrating the New Year 2000 with his family*

The news of the end of the war caused spontaneous enthusiasm. At end of May I arrived to Sarajevo to my new post. In this town where I used to have many relatives and where I spent the best years of my youth with many of my haverim from Hashomer Hatzair, I did not find anyone I knew. That is when I became aware of the complete emptiness. I was thinking about how to try to find if there is anyone in Sarajevo that I could find. I do not remember exactly who told me that there is an office of the Jewish Community with a register of those who are still in the city. I found just one piece of information – about my aunt Regina, my father's sister, with the names of her husband Šandor Samokovlija, her daughter from her first marriage – Rozika, and her husband's daughter – Elica. The stated address was the same as before the war. I soon found them. During one of my subsequent visits to them, I also found another of my father's sisters, aunt Roza, with her daughter Lunčika. Her husband Jakov and son Jozef were killed in February 1942 in the region of the Romanija mountain. I was very excited by this encounter, because they also came from Rogatica. They were saved by hiding in the surrounding villages, for a while together with my parents and my younger brother. They confirmed what I had heard about their persecution. It was only thanks to lucky coincidence that they did not end up in the same group.

My brother Albert came back from PoW camp at the beginning of August. He stayed in Sarajevo only a few days. He was sent to Drvar, assigned to be the manager of a saw mill there. He stayed in Drvar for two years. After that, he was working for three years in Bosanska Krupa, after which he moved to Banja Luka to a new assignment where he settled with his family and lived permanently. He died in August 2003. His daughter Gordana and son Aco live in Banja Luka with their families. For a long time after the war I was preoccupied with how to determine the number and names of family members and relatives who had perished. I made a list. I have determined that the number of victims of genocide in our family including relatives was sixty-three, with names of all of them.

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## Regina KAMHI

### I DRIED DIEPERS ON MY BREASTS



*Regina Kamhi was born in Sarajevo on 29 December 1915, of mother Rifka, née Altarac, and father Isak Levi. No one of her immediate family survived the Holocaust.*

*With her husband Aron Kamhi, engineer, she had two sons – David and Isak, and an adopted son, war orphan, Šlomo Zupković, who is living in Israel with his wife and three children.*

*David is a full-time professor at the Sarajevo Music Academy; he has a son and a daughter, both living in Israel. Isak, doctor of technical sciences, a civil engineer, a citizen of*

*Israel, is living in USA, with three children.*

*Regina Kamhi was working for a number of years in the Ministry of Social Policy in Sarajevo. She developed comprehensive activities within the Jewish Community of Sarajevo and the Red Cross. She is co-author of a book on Sephardic sayings and wisdom. She has received a number of awards and decorations, and for her activity within the Jewish Community she was awarded the Megila of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia.*

*She is presently living in Zagreb in the „Dr Lavoslav Švarc“ home.*

I was born in Sarajevo, a city with a relatively high number of Jews, mostly Sephardim, where the specific Sephardic culture and a somewhat unique social life were cherished.

Already as a girl I was a member of the Hashomer Hatzair, led by Dona Konforti, married Kon. We met every Sunday with Dona Konforte and she would take us for outings and picnics around Sarajevo. She taught us songs

and told us about people preparing to go to the then Palestine. She gave us blue and white bags with Magen David and advised us to save for *Keren Kajemet*. We listened attentively and, although very young, remembered the pleasant outings with our Dona, always anxious for the next one.

I was married in 1935 in Sarajevo to a civil engineer Aron Kamhi, nicknamed Aroniko. Already while in grammar school he was our *madrih* for the oldest group of *Ahdut hacofim*, in Sarajevo called „Alef“, back in 1925 and 1926. Aroniko wanted to go to Palestine but his father prevented him, wanting him to first do his university studies. He graduated from his studies in 1933 in Berlin. After Hitler's coming to power, he returned to Sarajevo, and worked there as civil engineer until 1941. When the Independent State of Croatia was proclaimed, he was taken for forced labor, from which he fled and joined the National Liberation War in 1941. He survived the war and died in 1971 of consequences of a traffic accident. After the war he was employed at the Ministry of Construction and afterwards worked as director of the Design Office for Roads and Bridges.

After I was married I was member of the WIZO Management Board, chaired by Pepica Pinto. After 1933, when Hitler got to power, many German Jews came to Sarajevo. WIZO members immediately became active in receiving the refugees and assisting them in whichever way they could. Some of them moved on, and some stayed in Sarajevo like for instance dr Leopold Kaufer with his family. Later he joined the Partisans, survived the war, and worked in the Military Hospital in Sarajevo as a doctor.

Sarajevo was bombed on 6 April 1941 and very soon the German troops stormed the city. I was pregnant and we were hiding in the shelters.

On 12 April 1941 a group of Jews was executed before a firing squad in Vrace neighborhood. Lists were being made of Jewish apartments and Jews in the center of the city. These lists were used in September 1941 when they started rounding up Jews to be deported to death camps. My whole family lived in the center of the city, in Aleksandrova Street 18 and Šenojina 20. The house consisted of two parts and had ten apartments and five shops. The house was built by my grandfather more than fifty years before that time, after the design by an architect from Vienna. My grandfather, Juda Altarac, was a goldsmith jeweler and was nicknamed „Juda il saatči“ (Juda the watchmaker). Practically my whole family lived in those two houses. In one of the apartments on first floor lived the family of Fanika and Melko Goce-Gučetić. They were nobility from Zaton, near Dubrovnik, and they came to Sarajevo on business. When in September 1941, at night, Ustaša and culturbund people came to the house, they got everyone from the family out of beds and took them in their nightgowns and pijamas to concentration camps, from which none of them ever returned. Family of Goca Gučetić heard the



screaming and crying of my family when they were being taken away, but could not help because they would be taken away as well.

I had my son David in 1936. In summer 1941 I was pregnant and marked with the yellow armband which I wore like all the other Jews. One day as I was going to buy some food, a boy kicked me with his foot in the street, calling me „Ćifutka“ (derogatory term for Jewess). A passer-by chased the boy away and escorted me to dr Jelka Knežević-Švarc, a gynecologist. Dr Jelka Knežević took me to the Koševo hospital right away and together with dr Bokonjić she admitted me to her department.

Dr Jelka Knežević and dr Bokonjić regularly visited me and moved me from first to second and third class so that I would not be recognized by Ustaša, because raids happened all the time. They were taking away Jewish women from the hospital, pregnant, old, sick and powerless. Hiding in this way, in the night of 18 October 1941, I gave birth painlessly to my son Isak-Kika, because the psychological pain and fear were stronger than the pain of delivery itself. My son Kika was born weighing 2.3 kg. After his birth Marica Odobašić, my maid for many years, took me to her home in Zembiljeva street and kept me there in hiding. My friend Seka Trumić was bringing food for me, along with another friend Fahrija Hrasnica-Fadilpašić who was assisting. My mother or anyone else from my family did not see the baby boy Isak, because they were all taken away in September 1941 to death camps. None of them returned.

Fifteen days after delivery, I was given counterfeit documents arranged by our friends who managed earlier to flee Sarajevo and go to Mostar. It was Čučo-Josip Albahari and Mirko Levinger. They wrote a note on a small piece of paper: „Try by all means to avoid showing the documents because they are counterfeit.“

My dear Marica Odobašić got for me the traditional Muslim women's dress (Muslim women wore a scarf over their head in order to cover their face, and a small hat). She was seeing me off at the station as I was leaving with two children, David born in 1936 and Isak-Kika born two weeks earlier. I had put on a wide fitted coat and beneath it two sets of clothes. I also put two sets of clothes on my son David, and for the baby Isak-Kika I had several diapers under his white carrying pillow. I had a note stating their names and dates of birth and data about parents, in case that I were to be arrested. I kept telling David „Your name is Džavid“ (Muslim name), because I was dressed as a Muslim.

I arrived at the old railway station at the last moment, at 6 PM, just before the train for Mostar was to leave. At the first check point I yelled at the train ticket collector and the man from culturbund: „Let me through, I will miss my train!“ „Go, woman, the hell with you“, they said. Thus I avoided the need to present my documents. Somehow, I got to the Mostar train, I sat down in the train with my children and the tears just kept coming from excitement and fear. David asked me: „Why are you crying, mom?“ I answered: „My tummy hurts“.

In the compartment next to me there was a man with the red Muslim cap on his head. I placed my son David on the seat directly across from me, in order not to be revealed. When the control came, I instinctively turned in the opposite direction, opened up my big coat and covered myself with it as if I was breastfeeding my baby Isak. The man with the red Muslim cap told the controls: „Don't you see that this *hanuma* (the term used for Muslim women) is breastfeeding, come later.“ The train was overcrowded and the controls did not come back. Again, I did not have to show my fake documents. It seemed as if the man and I were husband and wife, he with the red *fes* on his head and I with the veil over my head. He asked me: „Why are you travelling at night?“ I told him I was visiting my sick mother in Mostar.

At midnight we arrived to Mostar. There were Italian soldiers at the railway station. The civilian administration was exercised by the Ustaša, while Italians exercised military functions. At that time the president of the Jewish Community in Mostar was David Hajon. After we arrived to town, in the early hours covered by curfew, I had to sit at the railway station until 6AM for the curfew to be over.

The number of Jewish refugees in Mostar was increasing to the level that the Italian authorities could no longer control them, and for this reason they made an agreement with Jewish representatives that a significant number of Jews would be transferred to the island of Lopud in September 1942 and detained there. The year after they were transferred to Italian concentration camps on the island of Rab, eight kilometers inland of the shore, in settlement Kampor. The camp was fenced with high barbed wire. Across the fence was another fenced camp, with detainees from Slovenia. They sent us under the shower, for disinfection reasons as they said, and distributed us to the yet unfinished barracks, with separate parts for women with children, and separate for young women and men. Throughout my time in the camp I struggled with food for my son David and the still small boy Isak-Kika, despite the fact that we received help from the Jews from Mostar. They could bring along some supplies, both food and clothes, but not sufficient for all the children, and the social team that was set up among the camp detainees tried to provide for the smallest children. This team was led by dr Lav Singer, and members included Valika Štajner, Zimerman, Lilika Kamhi, Salamon and others. Covertly detainees were organizing first aid courses and collection of clothes and shoes for the future Rab battalion.

The carabinieri were bringing drinking water in truck-tanks, and we were standing in line with our bawls in hand for a liter of water and some food. The quantities of water and the brief showers, the insufficient and inadequate food, and poor hygiene conditions resulted in my children starting to have health problems. We often had to re-use the same water. I used to

dry the washed diapers for Isak on my breasts – that is how it was until the capitulation of Italy in September 1943.

Partisans from the Velebit mountain region arrived immediately after the Italian capitulation, they liberated the camp, held a meeting and invited the former detainees who wanted to join to go to the liberated territory. The majority was transferred to the liberated territory, through the heavy storm, by fishing boats to Sv. Juraj, because at that time Senj was bombed. We moved only by night to avoid being caught by Ustaša. The old and the sick who stayed behind in the camp were murdered by the Germans who took control of the camp. The young girls went along with the Slovenians to join the Partisans within the just established Rab battalion. We walked on foot to Otočac, the location of the Croatian Partisans' HQ. In Čemernica we were further distributed across the liberated territory.



*Regin's friends during the days when no one anticipated the forthcoming evil*

Čemernica was the collection centre. I was tasked with taking the Jewish group of children from the camp. We were to be transferred to El Shatt, in Africa, because the fighting was still fierce and there was need to save the children. Another group of children was led by Rikica Ovadija. All children were taken at night to the airport for boarding, but they returned back disappointed, because there came another group of wounded fighters who had to go first. We, too, returned to the base with the children at night. That is why ZAVNOH (the National Anti-Fascist Council of National Liberation of Croatia) decided to once again establish children's homes and a children's hospital in the back of the liberated territory.

I did not have enough milk for Isak, he constantly cried due to hunger. While still in camp, in the barrack where a number of us slept together, I

would hold Isak at night against my breasts so as not to disturb other inmates. There was no milk coming, and he wanted it, he sucked and cried, so that my nipples were in scars and bleeding. Even now I can hear his crying sometimes at night.

In the liberated territory there was a doctor from Zagreb, dr Gustav Jungvirt, pediatrician. With the help of Partisans, he set up a secret hospital in a village for children from the camps and other children. My children were severely ill. They had whooping cough, scorbout, itching and vitamin deficiency; Kiko and Bulkica Kamhi – tuberculosis. My son Isak, although already in his third year, could not talk. He would utter inarticulate words: „Jaš, johu.“ Only David understood those words: they meant – I need to pee and I am hungry. I was concerned that he would remain dumb, but it was a consequence of my psychological trauma during pregnancy. My niece Bulkica Kamhi, daughter of my brother-in-law Hajim Kamhi, was just as sick. Isak and Bulka were practically on their death-bed. Dr Jungvirt saved them with my blood (zero blood group), which he took from me and gave them as transfusion two times. After that the children started to recover from their illnesses, scars, scorbout, the whooping cough. Bulkica's eye which was closed due to TBC re-opened again. To our great joy, thanks to the commitment of dr Jungvirt and other hospital staff they survived.

After the liberation in 1945, at my request, I was seconded to the Ministry of Social Policy in Sarajevo. I took my son Isak to anti-tuberculosis infirmary, where he was examined by dr Sveto Teofanović, who continued his treatment and gave us further advice. As soon as the first streptomycin medicines arrived Dr Moni Levi, general, gave it to us.

Minister Mastilović, Zehra Muidović and dr Smilja Kršić, department managers in Social Policy, and subsequently dr Tošo and dr Draga Ilić helped me in treating my son Isak-Kiko, approving for me paid and unpaid leave of absence.

Gradually, I taught him to speak. First, I took him to Trebević. There his process accelerated, so at the advice of dr Sveta Teofanović and dr Drago Ilić, I took him to the village Reljevo near Sarajevo, where the climate was more moderate. One woman from the village got for me six fresh eggs, I soaked them in lemon juice, punctured the shells and added some chocolate and sugar, mixed it with the yolk and fed him with this mixture. I continued to do so after my return to Sarajevo. Initially, he could not stand it, but over time he slowly started to recover along with the fish oil and cod intended and distributed my means of rationing coupons for patients suffering from TBC. Thus, my Kiko-Isak started slowly to exercise and gradually developed into a handsome boy. Fortunately, all the hardship did not leave consequences on the future development of my sons.

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*Lenka Lea STRAHINJIĆ*

**RUN, THEY ARE ROUNDING US UP!**



*Lenka Lea Strahinjić was born in Tuzla on 21 August 1925, of mother Rifka, née Altarac, and father Jonas Klimpl. She had an older sister Estera (born in 1924) and brother Albert (born in 1930). Grandmother Rozalija Klimpl and Lenka were the only ones who survived the Holocaust.*

*She attended the public school in Tuzla, but had to interrupt her education due to the arrival of Ustaša who took over the authorities in 1941. After the war she continued her education in Belgrade.*

*In 1952 she married a medical student Špiro Strahinjić, who later became professor at the Medical Faculty in Niš, founder of the Institute for Nephrology and Hemodialysis. They have a daughter Vesna, professor of the English language and literature, and a granddaughter.*

*After the war, Lenka worked as a civil servant in the Ministry of the Interior of Serbia. She is retired.*

After the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina by the Austria-Hungary, many Jews from Czech and Polish regions were brought to this region as qualified experts. My father came to Sarajevo, where he opened a bookshop and a book-binding business. Once that he set up his family he moved to Tuzla, where his sister Lotika Laufer lived with her family. In Tuzla father continued with the same business – he had a bookshop and a bookbinding business.

My father was of Ashkenazi and my mother of Sephardic origin, and they had a good marriage. I had a happy childhood, during which I was very



close to my grandmother who I thought was the best person in the world. We had a great circle of friends of all origins, we observed our holidays and also went to visit others for their saint patrons' days, Bajram and other holidays celebrated by our friends from Tuzla. With my sister I used to go as guest to our friends' homes for different holidays.

My father was very much appreciated by the Serbs. It was as if they had the same kind of mentality – he had a good sense of humor, he was full of goodness and respect to others.

Grandmother, my father's mother, spoke German to all of us, as at that time German was the language used at schools and very often also in business. At home we always spoke Serbian. But, when we had Sephardic Jews, friends and relatives come over, my mother spoke Judeo-Espagnol with them.

Relations among all ethnic communities were very harmonious both at school and in our neighborhood and my father as a Czech Jew was very happy about this. Well known for his friendly and outgoing nature he was first chosen as player and later as life-long referee of the football club „Šumadija“. With this club he travelled across Serbia, organizing football matches.



RIFKA ALTARAC KLIMPL,  
*LENKA'S mother*

No one of my family, friends or relatives could have guessed what atrocities lay ahead, or imagine what was to come for Jews in Tuzla. With the proclamation of the Independent State of Croatia, the Jews of Tuzla were taken by surprise with the unheard of persecution, arrests and atrocities against Jewish citizens. People were taken away into the unknown. My parents, our whole family and relatives, from grandmother to the youngest grandchild, had to wear the yellow armbands.

The Germans stationed their command in the neighborhood called *Srpska Varoš*, specifically in the Orthodox Christian Bishops' palace, and the Bishop himself was either killed or expelled. Distinguished Serbs were disappearing overnight. Their families used to come with blankets and food to the Ustaša command HQ, although trying to talk with them was useless, and they would leave without getting any information or news regarding the whereabouts of their family members. Most of these families were never again reunited.



A commissioner was appointed for my father's shop, a Muslim, to run the shop. We lost any source of income, the house was struck by hunger.

My grandmother had another daughter, in Brčko, who was running a big manufacture business. That shop was owned by my father's step-brother, also a Czech Jew. The daughter from Brčko assisted our family as long as that was possible. However, on 10 December 1941, on a cold winter night, troops stormed the Jewish homes in Brčko and ordered Jews to come along and fill in some forms in their offices, not allowing them to get dressed, but taking them away in that cold as they were, saying that they would soon be coming back. Thus, literally out of bed, half-dressed, in unprecedented cold, they were taken to the bridge on the river Sava. The execution was designed as follows: they were all tied to each other by wires. They were all with great speed hit on their heads with hammers and finished by "kama" knives stabbed into their stomachs! After that they were kicked by foot and ended in the river Sava. This atrocious crime was performed by the infamous Francetić legion of the Ustaša order. That was how my father's sister Etelka Klimpl, Samuel Klimpl and his wife Olga, and a number of their relatives whose names I do not remember were murdered.

The news that Francetić legion was coming to Tuzla spread very quickly around Tuzla. The chief mufti, the judge – as the most distinguished Croat in town – and a reputable Serbian citizen agreed to go together to the German command and present to the chief commander that the town is in panic and that the citizens have heard about the atrocities in Brčko. The commander ordered that posters should be printed right away with condolences to Serbs, and instructions for the citizens to stay calm, to freely move around, and that nothing was going to happen to anyone. So, that was what happened that evening. The next day, a woman who used to sell fish and dairy products at the green market in Tuzla and who knew the Klimpl family, came and told my father that everyone from his sister's home was slain and thrown into the river Sava. We were dumbfounded and silent with fear. However, father did not decide that we should leave. The family was big, we had no money, all that we had was being spent on food.



*The only survivors of the KLIMPL family: LENKA with grandmother ROZALIJA in Tuzla, May 1946*

Soon, arrests of Jews and Serbs began. Deportation transports started for Jasenovac, Stara Gradiška, and Auschwitz. We all ran away, except for my father; he stayed at home thinking that fleeing was useless. We were hiding in Tuzla and its surroundings and intermittently came home. They arranged for me to be hid in Muslim families and in a Catholic family in the neighborhood Kreka, whose children were my school mates in the same school. That was the family of Štefica Ledić. However, all of this proved useless: the year 1942 had arrived.

On Serbian Orthodox holiday, *Đurđevdan*, grandmother and I went to visit our friends, family of Lazar Kaljalović, to congratulate them. Around 9 PM we were returning home. My younger brother Albert was standing at the window and he told us:

„Run, they are rounding us up!“

And he left the window hastily.

At the same moment, our first neighbor came out and stood in front of grandmother and me and told us the same. We went back to the house where we went for the *Đurđevdan* saint patron's day, and spent the night there. Early in the morning, our neighbor arrived and told us that the whole family was taken away: my father, mother, sister and brother. Grandmother and I were lost. A rural family which used to supply milk and cheese for us, advised us to hide in their village, saying that someone will come at night and take us there. That is how it was. We fled, not knowing what was happening to our family.

My father, mother, sister and brother were later released and were under supervision. Finally, the Germans and the Ustaša had a plan: the first part of the family (father, brother, and sister) was to be deported to a concentration camp right away, while mother, grandmother and I were left for another transport. Mother and I used the protection of Serbian villagers and Serbs from Tuzla and left the town. Grandmother Rozalija was living in hiding with Serb families in Tuzla during the occupation.

Our neighbors were, obviously, linked with some Partisan relatives, so some people from the Anti-Fascist Youth of Tuzla took me to the Majevisa mountain. Thus, the following morning I was already with a third family, while grandmother was put up in another safe home. I think that at the time grandmother was over eighty.

In 1943 we had news from Estera from Oberlager Noebern, Poland. Mother Rifka was transferred to the liberated territory in Majevisa. At the end of the year she was wounded and she froze in the snow in Šekovići, near Vlasenica, and died.

When I came with the partisans to liberated Tuzla in 1944, I was with the others in the Bishop's home, and everyone fell asleep on the straw. I just

sat there, staring. There was no sadness, no strong heartbeat, no desire to see the house in which the six of us used to live happily. My heart and my soul as well as my thoughts were dead.

The following morning I was told to go out to the yard of the Bishop's home, as there was a woman looking for me. I went out and saw Partisans standing in a circle and nothing else. I approached the circle. They made room for me. In the centre of the circle there was an old woman dressed in black. She said nothing, she was only trembling and crying. Along with her the circle of Partisans was crying. I came close to her and hugged her, not crying, and she said:

„Does it mean, my child, that you no longer have anyone?“

I said:

„Don't say so, grandmother. Didn't you have news that I was killed, yet here I am, alive? Mother and father have surely gone to America, to join your brother“.

She kept silent. Her chin was trembling. The Partisans, fearing that she or I could fall down, were holding grandmother and me, bringing us inside and washing our faces with cold water. Grandmother went home escorted by Partisans, and I collapsed on the floor. The Commander said:

„Black Hair, don't cry, we will leave you here with grandmother and we are going to the border in Slovenia to chase the Germans and Ustaša away“.



*LENKA with granddaughter TIJANA, daughter VESNA,  
and husband ŠPIRO STRAHINJIĆ, 2000*

I stayed and was engaged in the work of the Culture Team for eastern Bosnia. My grandmother had not seen any bread for days. We were eating some very coarse corn-bread, which later gave me stomach ache.

It was already October 1944. I decided to complain to the Mayor of Tuzla. I went to see him, not bitter but rather poisoned with anger that grandmother had to starve, that there was no one to give her some vegetables or bread. Although he used to know my family, the Mayor said plainly and coldly:

„There is not enough for us either, comrade, and therefore we cannot give to you“.

I repeated that they did not have to give for me, but that they must give some food to grandmother who had lost everything and had suffered fear, hunger and loneliness. It hurts me even today. I think it was in 1946 when grandmother was transferred to Zagreb, to the Jewish Old People's Home in Palmotićeva Street 16. I visited her several times, until I had my child in 1954. That year grandmother died of natural death.

After the liberation in 1945 I found out that my father Jonas, brother Albert, and sister Estera were executed in Auschwitz.



## II

# IN THE CAMPS



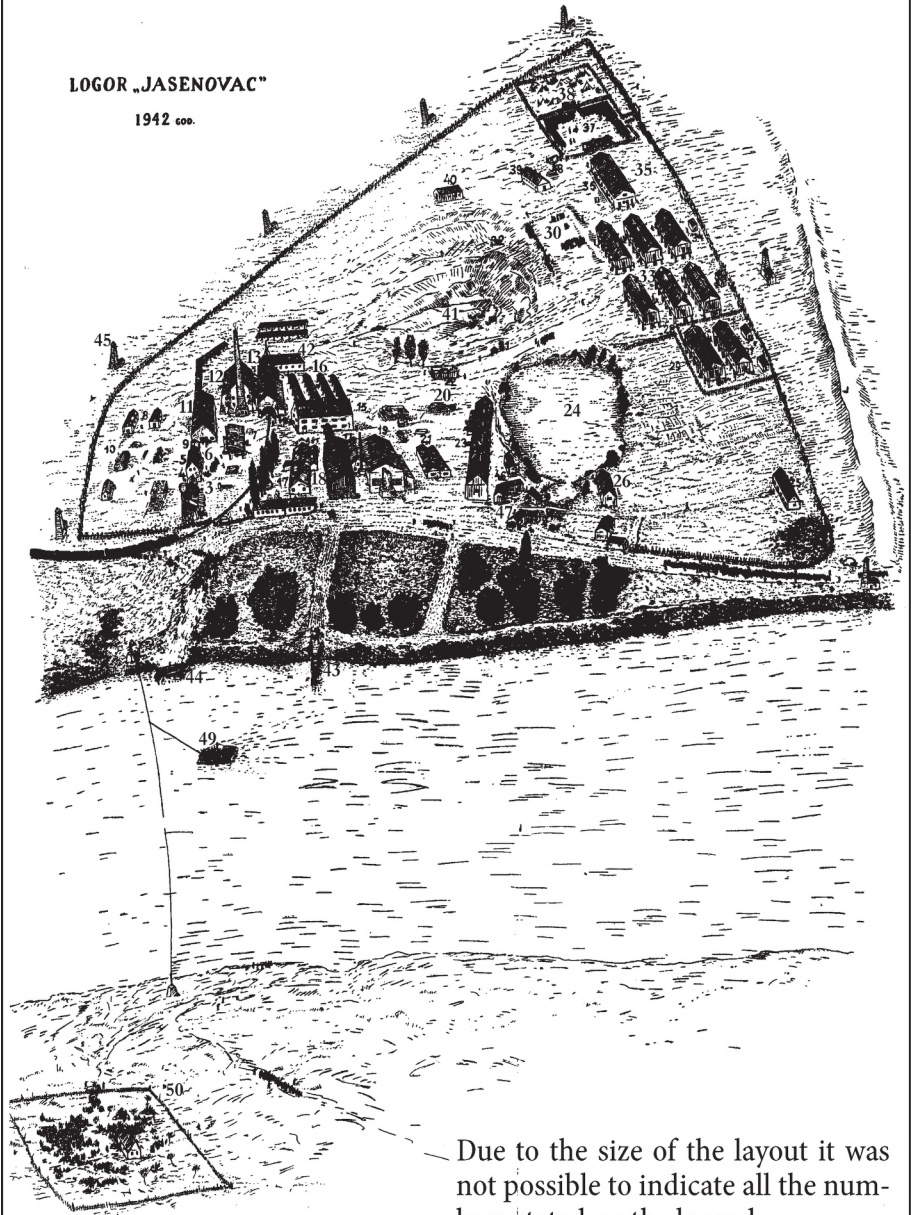
## LEGEND ACCOMPANYING THE LAYOUT OF THE JASENOVAC CAMP

- 1 The Guards' Unit of the Officers' settlement „The Corridor of Mallets“.
- 2 The Bell Tower.
- 3 **The Torture Room – the prison and housing unit of torturers.**
- 4 Shed storing the looted assets.
- 5 The command, the apartment of Luburić – „the holy room“, apartment of Ljubo Miloš – the place of sadistic murders and satisfaction, office of Begović.
6. **The place receiving newly arrived inmates and the place of selection for individual and mass murders and countless public tortures and executions.**
- 7 „Assembly“.
- 8 Warehouse, metal works.
9. Garage.
- 10 Disposal of iron goods, vehicles, etc.
- 11 **The Chain Factory.**
- 12 **The Brick Factory „Ring“ furnaces (ceramics) for incineration of the living and slaughtered.**
- 13 **„Death Tunnel“.**
- 14 Electricians.
- 15 Construction group, carpentry.
- 16 Manufacture of raw bricks – the venue of numerous killings.
- 17 Ustaša „officers“ canteen and dining-room. Workshops: arts-ceramics, arts-metal works, the barber shop, etc.
- 18 **Saw mill.**
- 19 The plant.
- 20 **The venue of numerous „performances“ and executions.**
- 21 Shed for tools and fodder.
- 22 Open latrines „Bajer“ (41), from where water was pumped (31) to „the pond“ (24), which the inmates drank, although infected by typhoid.
- 23 Bakery and food storages.
- 24 **The Ghostly Lake.**
- 25 Economy, stables.
- 26 **Slaughter house.**
- 27 Hospital „B-I“.
- 28 Hospital „B-II“ (Man-Hunt)
- 29 Hospital „settlement“ – for hospital staff.
- 30 **The venue of „performances“ and „exemplary executions“.**
- 31 Pumps transferring infected water from „Bajer“ to the „Pond“ (24).
- 32 Vegetables growing out of the cemetery where victims were buried „shallowly“.
- 33 **Camp.**
- 34 Latrines.
- 35 **Children's exercise grounds, for children who were subsequently slaughtered.**
- 36 Disinfection. Apartment, for children with the teacher.
- 37 „III-C“
- 38 **The Gipsy „Camp of hungry death“.**
- 39 Kitchen for inmates and storage.
- 40 „Krpara“ – place used to sort torn textiles, sent to textile factories.
- 41 **„Bajer“ the big crater, where clay was excavated. Venue of mass murders by exhaustion.**
- 42 **Cyclone gas chamber – soap shop.**
- 43 **Pier.**
- 44 **Ferry for Gradina.**
- 45 **Watching Towers.**
- 46 Vrančić's veterinary clinic.
- 47 **Mortuary.**
- 48 Office „III-C“.
- 49 **Ferry „St. Moloha“.**
- 50 **„House of Ghosts“ of Pero Vukić.**



LOGOR „JASENOVAC“

1942 cos.



Due to the size of the layout it was not possible to indicate all the numbers stated on the legend.

PREGLED  
KONCENTRACIONIH  
LOGORA – KZ  
(NAVEDENIH U KNJIGAMA  
„MI SMO PREŽIVELI...“)



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## Lea ŠRAJER

### WHY DID I LET GO OF MOTHER'S HAND?!



*Lea Šrajer, née Rajh, was born in Subotica on 31 August 1927 of father Lajčo Rajh and mother Mancí, née Kesler.*

*Of the twelve members of her immediate family, only Lea and her father survived the Holocaust.*

*From her marriage to Martin Šrajer, concluded in 1946, she has daughter Eva and son Đorđe, and five grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Eva and her family live in Toronto, Canada, while Đorđe and his family live in Oak Park, a small town near Chicago, USA.*

*Her husband Martin died in Subotica in 1984.*

*Lea lives in Toronto, Canada.*

I lived a happy childhood in a harmonious and typical Jewish family. We observed all the holidays, including Shabbat every Friday evening. At home we ate strictly kosher: not only that we had separate sets of dishes and cutlery for dairy and meat food, but the food was also separately cooked in the kitchen. On Friday mornings I would go with my mother to the open market place to buy a chicken for the Shabbat dinner. We would then take the live chicken to the kosher butcher *shakhter* who would do the slaughter according to Kashrut dietary rules. The *shakhter* had an „office“ in a small room in the synagogue yard.

I remember that several days before Purim my mother always baked a lot of cookies. Triangular cookies with poppy seeds and hazelnuts, called

*kindla*, were especially everyone's favorite. Traditional packages with cookies, shlahmones, were distributed to our neighbors.

Before Passover we would change all the cooking pots and cutlery. We bought matzo bread in the Šibalić bakery. I particularly loved the circular matzo as it tasted best. Of my many pleasant memories of Passover, one is special – a new dress as a present. Once, along with the dress, I even got black lacquered shoes, very fashionable at the time.

Rosh Hashanah was a joyous holiday, and we would always go to the synagogue for service. The tradition in our home was that during Rosh Hashanah we eat at least one sweet dish per meal so as to have a "sweet" year ahead. My mother's choice, but not my own, was a carrot dish. I preserved this tradition in my own home although it seems that my children are not too enthusiastic about it, just like I used not to be. But, they display heroism and eat at least one spoonful of carrots, anyway. After so many years I see once again that my grandchildren also are protesting when served the carrots dish at Rosh Hashanah.

I also have clear memories of Yom Kippur, especially for becoming very hungry around 4 PM. There would not be food at home and we used to spend the whole day at the synagogue. Yom Kippur was the only holiday in my youth that I could hardly wait for to be over.

My grandmother, Flora Kesler, lived in Sombor. She was very religious. I remember that any time she visited Subotica she would insist that we go to the orthodox synagogue. Services in the Great synagogue (the main one) were simply not religious enough for her. She was taken away from Sombor in 1944 and we never heard of her afterwards.

In April 1941 Hungarian authorities occupied Subotica. We lived in great fear. Arrests of distinguished citizens, especially Jews, communists and all enemies of the regime happened on daily basis. It was enough for a person to be an enemy of the regime. It would result in being arrested and taken to the infamous prison „Žuta kuća“ (the yellow house). Many people were tortured in the „Yellow House“. Fifteen distinguished persons, of whom nine Jews, including the son of the Chief Rabbi Gerzon – Nikola, Lola Vol (Wohl), dr Singer, and others were hanged. At present there is a commemorative plaque at the entry to the „Yellow House“.

I could not continue my education in the grammar school because of the introduced „*numerus clausus*“: only a very low number of Jewish pupils could continue their education. Thus, I started a photography apprenticeship, since my father did not want me to stay at home all day long. Photographer Roži Hirš had a studio in the house that we lived in. That was where I met my husband to be, Martin.

Martin grew up in dire poverty. His father left the family when Martin and his sister Kata were still small children. Their mother, Julija Epštajn, supported them by cooking food in other people's homes. This need made Martin get a job as assistant worker in timber trading business when he was only 14, the usual business at that time trading in coal and wood for heating fuel. Seven years later he opened his own business and became the youngest owner of this type of business in Subotica. During the Hungarian occupation, Martin was identified as enemy of the regime and taken to the „Yellow House“, where he was tortured, and it was only thanks to the intervention of his first wife Lilika that Martin managed to get out alive. Most of his friends were executed before a firing range or hanged.



*Photograph from the wedding of LEA'S parents, father LAJČO RAJH and mother MONCI KESLER, in Sombor 1925*

Martin, my father, and other men were taken by Hungarian authorities to what they called forced labor – to the forest. Since in the evening they could return home it was a relatively good part of the occupation. The situation changed when those in forced labor moved to Sombor to build an airport. In Sombor they lived in barracks. Martin managed to get a job in an office. He was in charge of issuing passes for going home, often ignoring the authorities in doing so. His friends from forced labor honored Martin after the liberation for the courage demonstrated.

In the summer of 1942 some of the workers were taken to Russia. Very few of them ever returned. Those who did return, among them my father Lajčo, were taken to Groskirchen, Austria, for work. That saved him from imminent death. Martin was sent to Mauthausen, where he stayed until the US troops liberated the camp. He returned to Subotica right after the end of the war, in 1945. As was the case with most returnees from camps, soon after the liberation Martin was sick with the spotted typhoid. For months he was between life and death and it was only thanks to excellent care by one (unknown) US nurse that Martin managed to survive.



In spring of 1944 we thought that our lives were back to normal. How wrong we were! That year, on 19 March, German troops marched into Subotica and persecution of Jews continued and even accelerated. Immediately after the German occupation, the authorities ordered Jews to wear the yellow Magen David. In the evening, after the curfew began, we could not be out in the streets. On top of that, they established a separate part of town for the Jewish ghetto. We had to leave the apartment that we used to live in. Confiscation of property and jewelry, as well as murders, became everyday reality. On Friday morning, 16 June, with the last stocks of food remaining, they took us to a mill in Bácsalmás, a small place near Subotica. Bácsalmás, which was the location of a collection camp, was full of Germans – and a strongly anti-Semitic place. Around the mill there was a tall fence, with no opportunity for escape.



*LEA with parents in 1934 in Subotica*

I must note here that Subotica was liberated on 22 October 1944, four months after our deportation.

After a week in the mill, we were loaded onto livestock wagons – there were eighty-five of us in the wagon. I was together with twelve members of my family, including among others my mother, aunt, my grandmother's sister, a niece with a five-year old child.

The journey was horrendous, with very little water, food or space. Five days later we arrived in Auschwitz on 29 June. We all thought that nothing could be worse than the journey there. Again, we were very wrong.

We marched in through the gate with the writing „Arbeit macht frei“ on it. That gate is now exhibited in the Jewish Museum in Washington, D.C. Right away, I was separated from my mother who at that time was forty-four, but her hair was already completely grey. To this day, so many years on, I still cannot forget one scene – the moment when I let go off her hand and I never saw her again. For years I was haunted by the thought that maybe if I had not let go off her hand she could have been saved. Or possibly, I would have ended on the „other side“ and perished with her. It has been 61 years since



that fateful day, and it is as if it was yesterday. Of the twelve members of my family, only my father and I survived those horrendous years.

After the arrival to Auschwitz, when we found ourselves naked and barefoot in the showers, I managed to recognize some people from the transport with whom I had travelled, despite the fact that all our heads were shaved. After the shower I was given some shoes and a worn out dress. We were then lined up and taken to the barracks.

The roll calling happened twice a day, early in the morning, while it was still dark and cold (although it was summer), and in the afternoon, in the sun or the rain. This torture would take hours. But, who cared? I remember that we were always hungry and that during the roll call we always stood five in a line. Of our five I am the only one alive today, with memories and thoughts that cannot be described.

There was practically no water for washing our face. We would get one glass of water for five or six persons to wash their faces. The latrines, twenty per line, were outside, without a roof or fence, so people relieved themselves in everyone's sight. The spotlights were continually moving, and the high voltage wire was everywhere around the barracks. I could always feel the smoke and the smell of burnt meat. For a long, long time I was not capable of comprehending what it was – the thick black smoke coming out of the high chimney!

As was the case with most Hungarian Jews from the last deportation transports, we were not tattooed. But selection was moving along at full speed. If one was to become ill, in the evening he or she was to climb a truck which collected the exhausted and the sick. We never again saw those who were taken away in this manner.

The food which mostly consisted of beet otherwise intended for livestock was horrendous, but we all ate it as we needed the energy to survive. We would get one bowl of it for the five of us in a line – and each was to take just one swallowing – not two – because otherwise there would not be enough for all. In the evening we were given a piece of bread with margarine (that remains to the present day the only food I cannot eat). Otherwise, I have learned that everything is to be eaten and nothing to be wasted. I cried for days because it was an awful feeling to lose so many family members in a short period of time! I do not remember exactly (or possibly I do not want to remember) how we spent the days in the Birkenau camp. But I do remember that if we even attempted to sit down during the roll call – the „capo“ would be there right away and would beat us without any obvious reason – just because we were „stinking Jews“. The nights were even worse, there were so many of us in a barrack, and we slept (those who could!), packed like sardines. If one was to turn around, then all in that row would have to

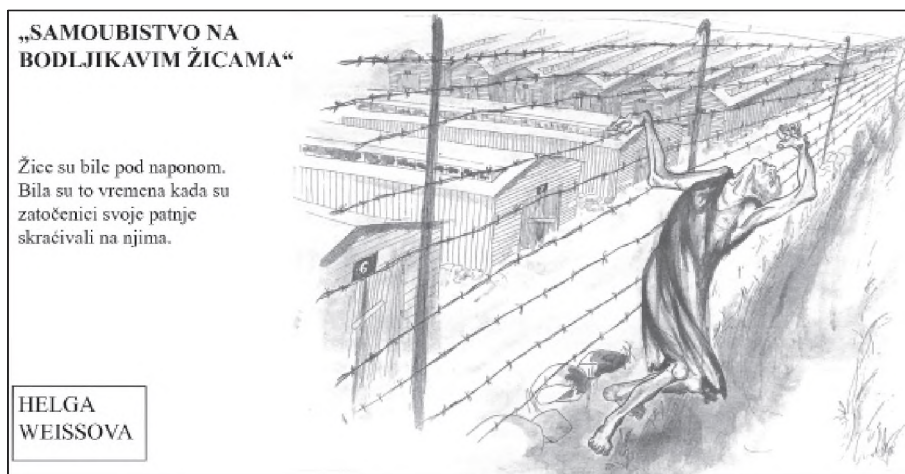
turn around, as there was not enough room. Throughout the night we felt a mixture of fear, terror and hunger. Our emotions were completely dumb as a consequence of all the horrific circumstances.

One day at the end of August (possibly beginning of September, I am not certain) a rumor spread around the camp that 300 young women will be selected for forced labor. We thought we would be taken to the gas chamber. We were to march before doctor Mengele, who was doing the selection personally. My cousin Anica Šporer did not want to apply for labor, but I persuaded her that, if „work“ in fact meant being taken to the gas chamber, than it is better to die than live like we were living. In the first round we were not selected. But we were lucky in the second round. Anica, I and a number of other girls from Subotica (Lili Lederer Šahter (Schachter), Iluš Beder Šporer, and Rožika Bader Vajs (Weiss) were put in a separate barrack. At that time we did not have a clue of what was in store for us. We were obviously lucky, because the majority of those who stayed on in the camp, including many from Subotica, never returned. Later on we heard that the Nazis had executed all those who stayed behind, they were thrown into a big pit that the women camp inmates had to dig themselves.

That special barrack had no roof and no floor. During the night we were shivering with cold, while during the day we were burning in the hot sun and heat. Due to frequent rain we were wet, but we did not mind, because the only thing that mattered was that we were still ALIVE! We were hardly getting any food. The lack of food was compensated by plenty of beating. I remember that we spent three days like that. The fourth day, early in the morning, we were escorted by the SS to the railway station. In contrast to our journey to Auschwitz, the railway carriages this time were for passengers, not animals. I need to note here that SS women were much more cruel than SS men. The train finally started. We made the first stop in Katowitz, where we changed into another train taking us to Langenbilau, the Upper Slesia. Langenbilau was an industrial town with factories producing thread, cloth and other materials.

From the Langenbilau railway station we were taken to the camp consisting of small houses. I simply could not believe it – everyone had her own bed – it was such a luxury! It was about 1,200 young women distributed to do various kinds of work. The camp was surrounded by a high voltage wire fence. The guards constantly shouted at us. The camp was about six kilometers away from the factory. The working hours in the factory were from 6 AM to 6 PM, including a 30 minutes break. Since we needed more than an hour to get to the factory, we always got up at 4 in the morning in order to be in time for the start of work. I worked in the factory Dierig, in the spinning department („Spinnerei“), working on machines producing thread. I oper-

ated two machines. Since the spools of thread were on both machines in two lines, I was constantly running from one to the other end of the machine. In the evening, exhausted of fatigue, I walked back to the camp. The food was very sparse and I was hungry all the time.



*HELGA VEIS, a distinguished artist, also detained in Auschwitz, author of moving graphics regarding the life in the camp and the ways in which inmates dealt with their tribulations*

In order to somehow get more food, I started stealing thread from the factory. I also managed somehow to get knitting needles so at night I would knit scarves, gloves, hats, which I changed during the day for food. The girls who were working in the kitchen could get additional supplies, and they were the source of food. I am sure that knitting saved me from imminent death. Sometimes in late autumn I was ill with scarlet fever, the disease which spread and infected practically everyone in the camp. Right away I was transferred to the *Krankenzimmer*, the room for the sick, and luckily there was a nurse there at all times. The doctor would also visit sometimes, but the SS guards were there every evening to accurately count the patients. Sometimes the SS would bring in new patients. Again, I was incredibly lucky. Since I was knitting sweaters and other winter clothes for the doctor, she protected me against the SS staff who tried on several occasions to take me away. After I recovered from the scarlet fever, I very soon got diphtheria, and the following three months I spent in the patients' room. These three months were the "best" period.

At end of January or beginning of February 1945 the Russian troops came close to the camp, so the SS ordered evacuation. We were given shoes

with wooden soles and some worn out coats, since the winter was at its peak with abundant snow. Of course, we were moving by marching under the strict escort of the SS. Five days later we arrived all frozen, hungry and thirsty to the town of Parschnitz, where we were distributed to factories to work under much worse conditions than in Langenbilau. The Russian troops withdrew, and after about a month which we spent in hard and dreadful working conditions, since labor was needed in Dirig, we were returned by truck from Parschnitz to Langenbilau. The journey back lasted only three hours. In Langenbilau we continued to work according to the earlier routine from 6 in the morning to 6 in the evening, and it was so until 8 May 1945. The guards around the camp disappeared and soon we saw the first Russian soldier. He told us that the war was over and that we were free. At first we could not grasp the meaning of his words, but I know that I will never forget that day.

My cousin Anica Šporer and I left the camp right away. We moved into an apartment abandoned by the Germans. Liberation brought with it many tragedies. Many inmates who had been hungry for long, unused to normal food, could not resist the sudden abundance of food and the overeating led to dysentery and death.

Since it took some time for transports back home to be arranged, we returned to work in Dirig. This time we received salaries and reference letters as exemplary workers.

With the Yugoslav transport which was starting from Brno I returned home at the end of July. On the way to Subotica I found out in Budapest that my father was alive and had returned to Subotica. I will also never forget his face when I saw him at the railway station in Subotica.

After my return, one day in the street I saw my old friend Martin, who returned from the camp but had lost his wife Lilika Hirš and their nine months old son Pišta in Auschwitz.\* From the rubble of our memories, looking into the future and encouraged by our mutual love, that autumn of 1946 Martin and I started slowly and with difficulty to build our life together.

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\*See the memories of Žuža Marinković in the book „We Survived ... 3“, pages 124–129.

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*Eva ARSENIĆ*

## THE STOLEN LOAF SAVED MY LIFE



*Eva was born on 13 February 1922 in Budapest, of father Gyenes Ernő, a doctor, and mother Alice Pollacsek.*

*She completed her primary and secondary education in Budapest. Since she could not enroll to study at university she did a photography apprenticeship and a one year course for English language teachers.*

*She came to Belgrade in 1945 and married Jovan Arsenić, forestry engineer, who died in 1970. In Belgrade she graduated from the Medical Faculty, specialized in internal medicine and did master studies in diabetology. She had the rank of primarius. She was the founder of the Society for Suppression of Diabetes in Belgrade and the Counseling Service for Diabetic Patients. She retired from the post of head of polyclinic of the Institute for urgent internal and cerebrovascular diseases.*

*From her marriage to Jovan Arsenić she has a son Vladimir, doctor, two grandsons and one great granddaughter.*

I grew up surrounded by love, but also taught discipline and obedience. My paternal grandfather dr Jakob Grünblatt was also a doctor. Grandmother was a housewife. (At that time Hungarian Jews changed their family names into Hungarian ones and my father took the family name Gyenes).

On my maternal side I had met and remembered my grandmother and grandfather. Grandfather was a timber trader. On my maternal side, the head of the household was in fact great grandmother Marija. She lived

to be 95. She had three marriages and twelve children. At the time of my grandmother's youth, Hungary was part of the Austria-Hungarian empire. Members of this great family lived in different parts of the Austria-Hungarian empire – some in Czechoslovakia, others in Yugoslavia, Romania and Hungary. They all came from time to time to visit my great-grandmother Marija, so I had met and gotten to know some of them.

Many Jews in Hungary tried very hard to achieve assimilation, since they felt Hungarians of Jewish religion.

My family observed the religious traditions: on Friday evening, with father's blessing, candles were lit. For high holidays father would go to the synagogue.

I attended the German elementary school in Budapest („Reichs-deutsche Schule zu Budapest“), where I had excellent regular and religious teachers. Under the influence of the religious teacher, for Passover I would eat only matzot, unleavened bread.

After I completed four grades of elementary school my teacher advised my father to continue my education at the same school, since already by that time Hitler's pictures were posted everywhere, and I therefore continued my education at the girls' grammar school („Mária Terézi leánygimnázium“), from which I matriculated. By the way, my mother attended and graduated from the same school.

My father had ambitions for me to be a doctor, since his father and grandfather were doctors as well, and he wanted to preserve this tradition. I gladly decided that I would, sooner or later, study medicine. When I matriculated in 1940, studying medicine was not possible for me as a Jew.

My father was a supporter of socialist ideas, and I followed in his footsteps already in my youth.

During the short Hungarian Commune father was an assistant lecturer at the faculty, his area of study was histology, he produced exceptional illustrations. Soon, of course, he was removed from the faculty. He specialized in pediatric medicine and was a reputable scholar in that discipline.

He died young, in 1937, at the age of 46.

While I was still at grammar school one of my friends, Livia Konta, took me to the choir of the music academy and they admitted me as first soprano. It was a huge choir and we were preparing for Easter to sing Bach's Oratorium, one year according to Mathew, another year according to John. Singing in the choir gave me a huge pleasure and I regularly went for choir practice and sang in concerts. In the company that I had at that time I also met and became friends with the young orchestra conductor Andrash Koro-dy, who assembled a chamber choir, and we sang medieval music: Mad-



rigales by Orlando di Lasa and the like. We sang also the „Liebeslieder Walzer“ by Brahms. I did not mention, but as a girl, for several years I had piano lessons.

After my matriculation, being a Jew, I could not continue to study anything at university, especially not medicine and, in order not to sit idle at home, I went for a cooking course and with nuns I completed a private school for English teachers. I started to work for a friend, photographer, who had a well-known atelier Várkonyi in the very centre of Budapest. I learned the photographic trade, passed the technical examination and became an apprentice.

After my father's early death our family income was very low, only the rents that we collected for rented apartments which my mother bought after receiving my father's life insurance; I used my savings (I gave private lessons to pupils in different subjects as a tutor) to buy for myself a Rolleiflex automatic camera and accessories for development and copying of prints and films, a small spot light for the atelier and I started doing photography, mostly photographs of children for which the clients paid me. I had many contacts and knew many parents with children as a result of my father's work as pediatrician with a developed practice.

My parents had a very happy marriage which was the result of their love from early youth. After my father's death, my mother was beyond consolation and under the influence of a friend of hers she joined a religious sect „Christ's Brothers“. The sect members mostly studied and read the Bible, and in this my mother found some consolation and became an outstanding member of that community. Being fluent in foreign languages, she was always in charge of welcoming and taking care of foreign guests. She spoke German, French and English.

My circle of friends was quite big, some of them from the fashionable Jewish circle. Through my school friend Marion Spiero I met younger members of the Hungarian affluent society, owners of the huge steel works at the Csepel island on the Danube near Budapest, Manfred Weiss, and textile mogul Goldberger. Most of them had villas in the most fashionable district of Pest, in the Fashor Alley. That is where they organized parties and receptions to entertain friends.

Another circle of my friends were mostly students, many of whom were dissatisfied with the current situation, supporters of leftist ideas, such as those that I learned and accepted already from my late father. We met regularly, and discussed things. Discussion groups were formed in which we studied leftist literature and had certain tasks to complete. This lasted until the whole group was arrested on 3 June 1943. We were taken to a Budapest suburb and put in a building in Shoroksari street, in the basement

if I remember correctly. We were sitting on straw, turned to the wall and were not to talk among ourselves. The agents brought us there and called us individually for interrogation, and in the meanwhile mercilessly beat us on our feet, fingers and used electricity stimulation. The beating happened every day during the month that we were in the so-called DEF (Department for Counter-Intelligence), along with interrogation, until we all signed some protocols dictated by the agents who were beating us. Afterwards we were transferred to the remand prison called Konti, named after the street in which it was located.

The trial took place before the court marshal located in Margit Körut. The prosecutor asked for a death sentence for all of us. Finally, I was sentenced to five years in prison. In the Konti prison several of us shared the same cell. The guards were soldiers. As it was a remand prison, we were not given anything for dinner. In the spring of 1944 our group, as we were all sentenced by final court sentences, was transferred to Márianosztra, a prison in the hills of north Hungary, where we met with a group of political prisoners from different parts of Hungary.

All the staff in Márianosztra (guards and others) was made up of nuns, while outside guards were men. We worked in the fields and we almost liked it. The nuns would come up to us and tried to convert us to Christianity. When the Germans occupied Hungary on 19 March 1944, the Jews among us were separated and right away we had to wear the yellow star. In June that year we were transferred to the collection prison Gyűjtő fogház in Budapest, housing all convicted Jews from all over Hungary, where we lived under a very strict regime, walked barefoot and in the middle of summer wore coarse fabric prison uniforms marked with the yellow star. I was assigned the post of doing cleaning work outside and distributing food. There were among us a few women prisoners who were allowed to receive packages. Since we were a collective we all shared the food among us. I was one of those who would be covertly taking that food around to different cells. I would hide the food in the sleeves of the uniform, sewn on the bottom. After staying in Gyűjtő fogház from June to October, the Jewish inmates were transferred to the Komárom fortress and on 20 October we were given over to the Germans. We were loaded on freight wagons and transported to Germany, first to the Dachau camp, specifically its part called Allach. We stayed there for about ten days, and were subsequently transported to Bergen Belsen. Upon arrival, we were put into barracks with Slovak Jews. There were bunk-beds.

I remember the time in Bergen Belsen for the bad treatment and torture. Primarily I remember one of our first encounters with a German officer. As I was fluent in German, at the request of my comrades – inmates, I and

another inmate came out in front of the others and requested from him to treat our group as political prisoners with special rights. The German officer, surprised by our act, started shouting at us saying that we were communist dogs and that he would show us our rights. Fortunately, it did not go further than that. It is a fact that they did not shave our hair and had not seized our possessions. Initially, we were put into conditions which, considering that it was a concentration camp, were quite decent. I also remember some unpleasant details: in early morning they would force us out for the roll call – Zählappell. And we would stand there, in terrible cold, not moving, and some people would collapse.

Some of us were given certain tasks. I worked in the kitchen preparing vegetables: our food consisted of fodder beat, or „Schälküche“. Due to my knowledge of German, I was in charge of a group of us working together. We would get up at 3AM, wait in the line for washing, and at 5AM we had to be at our work.

During my stay in the camp everything happened in the so-called collectives. Any food that we would get was shared according to an established schedule. Whoever would break the established order would be shunned by the others. Our food was beyond scarce and miserable: in the morning – a black liquid, which they called coffee. We were given a loaf of bread for a number of us (over time, the loaf was getting smaller and smaller and the group to which it was distributed was getting bigger). At noon – cooked fodder beat, every day, and only sometimes, I guess twice a month, it was some sauerkraut. In the evening it was margarine, sometimes marmalade.

Once, while I was working in the kitchen, I managed to get a whole loaf of bread which I hid under my clothes. The German who regularly checked us found that loaf, took it from me and I was expelled from the kitchen which, as it turned out, saved my life. By coincidence it turned out that soon news spread that the camp leader (lagerälteste), a woman prisoner from Poland, was poisoned. The kitchen staff was accused of this and all the kitchen staff were executed without any interrogation.

Sometimes in the middle of February 1945 the first case of spotted typhoid occurred. The epidemic spread like fire, the food portions were becoming increasingly small, and the loaves of bread were shared by a greater group, and we were dying both of the typhoid and of starvation. As the epidemic was getting stronger, the biggest problem was how to get the dead ones out of the barracks, because in the end those who were dead and those still alive were lying there together. Some of us were still doing at least some work for the “Gemüse Kommando“: the work in fact consisted of transporting the vegetables to the kitchen. In doing this work we were playing the roles of horses or oxen, pulling or pushing the carts transport-

ing the vegetables. Finally, in the barrack in which we were at the time, there were no more beds, and we were living on the bare floors. Food was getting ever more scarce in the last days, although we were not aware of the fact that these were the last days – and finally there was practically no food at all. Warmer weather came, which accelerated the process of disintegration of dead bodies.

During those spring days a good friend of mine Judita Kon from Kolozsvár and I were talking and forecasting our imminent end. At that time I was utterly exhausted; my legs were covered with wounds. There was practically no food anymore and, which was even worse, no water ...

And then, on 15 April 1945, the British liberated the camp.

Immediately before the British entered the camp we saw the white flags – blankets.

All the blocks were closed, we saw a senior rank German officer being driven away in a vehicle.

The liberators immediately distributed to us cans of very rich and tasty food and excellent soup. Starved as we were we eagerly ate the food and got sick, suffered severe pain, and many died because our starved bodies could not take the rich food; neither we nor the British soldiers could have anticipated such an outcome.

We were sprayed with disinfectant. We threw away all the contaminated clothes and burnt them. We took showers, got new clothes and were transferred to barracks in nearby Bergen.

Fifteen kilometers from the camp, in Fallingbostal, there were Yugoslav prisoners who were liberated a day later, on 16. April. They were in a much better state than the camp inmates and they decided to come to our camp and help the Yugoslav women inmates. Our Yugoslav comrades accepted this help provided that they would also help the Hungarian women among us, so we shared the same destiny throughout this period. So, they visited us, brought food and clothes, organized help for those who were severely sick or exhausted, and I was among them.

I was immediately given the task of interpreter. For this reason I was given a white arm band with inscription „INTERPRETER“. As I was beginning to explain to the British soldiers the conditions in the camp, I fell ill with typhoid.

Thus, it was in the barrack in Bergen that I suffered the typhoid and I recovered from it. A group of serious patients was transported from Bergen to Bad Rehburg for medical treatment, those who suffered exhaustion were transferred to Steinhude am Meer, a vacation house in which we were accommodated in hotels and were given very rich food consisting of 5–6 daily

meals. This group in recovery was managed by my future husband, Jovan Arsenić.

In Steinhude am Meer he was in charge of our accommodation, food and other needs of former camp inmates. That is how we met, came to love each other and decided to get married. We even made a prenuptial agreement, witnessed by some friends of Jovan. We were recovering and soon it was time to return home.

We started our journey back home in August 1945. Jovan and I parted in Osijek – he went home to Vinkovci, where his brother lived with his family, and I went to Budapest to find my mother.

I had with me a document in the Russian language stating that I was returning home from a concentration camp. I walked on foot for about 15 kilometers to Beli Manastir, and was sleeping on a field under a tree. When I crossed into Hungary, I took a train to Pest where I arrived on 20 August 1945. I went to „our house“ in Torockó street. My mother was not there, and I waited for her on the stairs at the entry. Apart from my mother, I also found my grandmother Ilka and aunt Margita. I heard that my great-grandmother had died in 1943, aged 95.

That was the end of my calvary and the content of my memories of my experiences.

When I arrived home, Hungary was suffering under strong inflation and hunger was looming. I received food at the Jewish Community. Right away I enrolled to study at the Medical Faculty. I was in contact with Jovan and he promised that he would get me the necessary documents to come to Yugoslavia.

Sometimes in October 1945 a letter arrived containing documents necessary for immigration to Yugoslavia. I was to travel with a truck that was carrying materials for the “Rad” printing plant in Belgrade. Whatever I found of any value I packed in one case and two suitcases and on the set day I left my mother and my homeland.

At the border crossing it turned out that a seal was missing on my pass and I was taken to OZNA (Department for National Security). Luckily, a friend of my Vera Vajs, married Štajner, with whom I was in prison together, was now working in this organization and I was soon transferred to a displaced persons shelter. As I had wounds on my lower leg, at the intervention of a good friend of mine Magda Dušika Seneš I was admitted to hospital.

Finally, in November, I was given permission to go to Belgrade.

After many difficulties I arrived in Belgrade, to Jovan's address. We lived in a rented apartment. I enrolled in the second semester of studies on 9

March 1946 and the same day Jovan and I were married. The following year, on 6 January 1947 our son Vladimir was born, and he presently lives and works as doctor in Zrenjanin. He has two sons and a grand-daughter.

After I graduated from the Medical Faculty, I started to work. I specialized internal medicine and received my master's degree in diabetology. I was the founder of the Society for Suppression of Diabetes in Belgrade and the Counseling Service for Diabetic Patients. I retired from the post of head of polyclinic of the Institute for urgent internal and cerebrovascular diseases.



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*Dina REMER*

I WAS SAVED BY A TRANSPORT WHICH I  
COULD NOT AVOID



*Dina Remer was born in Sombor in 1929, of father Geza Singer and mother Mirjam. She lived in Sombor as the only child in the family until the war broke out and, after the Bačka region was occupied first by the Hungarians and subsequently by the Germans, the family was at risk and was deported.*

*Both her parents and all members of her greater family perished in the Holocaust.*

*After her return from German concentration camps she lived in Subotica and in September 1948 moved to Belgrade and started her medical studies. In December the same year she immigrated to Israel where she graduated from a medical nursing school and worked in health care until her retirement.*

*Dina is married to Đuro (Jichak) Remer, they have two daughters and six grandchildren.*

*She is living in Israel.*

At the time of my childhood Sombor had a population of about 30,000. It was a pleasant and peaceful town, with some monumental buildings. While Sombor was under the administration of Austria-Hungary it was the center of a district. The majority of the population was Hungarian, with a significant share of Serbs as well, and about 1,200 Jews.

At home we spoke Hungarian, while we children at kindergarten and at school spoke Serbian, which was the official language. Most of my friends were Jews.

My father was a book-keeper, as well as my mother. They worked together in a big company. Father was a silent man, he loved his job, and work related problems were much talked about at home. My father's hobby was growing cacti, and we had dozens of cacti at home. I remember that I would often go with him to the nursery of young plants, where he selected cacti. He also liked to weave carpets and we had many carpets at home that he made himself. My mother was doing petit-point. Her whole life she was a book-keeper, she was very skilled at it, and this was her hobby. She also loved books and was always reading. She did not go into the kitchen – it was my maternal grandmother who was in charge of the household. Until I was about five years old we lived on the second floor in an apartment building, and on the ground floor was a store selling furniture materials – the working place of my parents. At 8AM they would go down to the shop, coming back at noon, and at 4 PM they would go down again to return at 6 PM.

My mother suffered from asthma, so in winter she could not go to work, and the house would become full of book-keeping ledgers as she was doing her work from home. The owner of the business, a Jew, respected her very much. She could speak German, and she was very well versed at typing in Serbian, Hungarian and German and she was versed in short-hand writing as well. My mother was the youngest of eight brothers and sisters in her family. My maternal grandfather died before I was born. My mother's family lived in Sombor for about 70 years. Her sisters and brothers and their families lived in towns across Vojvodina and in Belgrade. They often came to visit grandmother and us.

My grandmother was a very good-spirited woman; she went to the market place every day with our maid. All the women selling produce at the market knew her and she talked to them about their family problems. She always wore dark colors. She spoke Hungarian and only some words in Serbian. However, when the Hungarians occupied us in 1941 she demonstrated her resistance to the occupier by starting to speak only Serbian in the market place.

Our family was not religious. I used to go sometimes with my grandmother to the synagogue. In the home of my paternal grandmother and grandfather Kosher rules were observed. They were religious. They lived in Novi Sad and we often went to visit for high holidays. For Pessah Seder it was always me to say the "Ma Nishtana". I was their only grandchild. I was skinny and spoiled in a way and did not eat much. They wanted me to gain

some weight while I was staying with them. They decided to buy for me food that is not eaten at their table. Assuming that I love ham, they bought it for me and put it on a piece of bread and butter, and wrapped in paper they put it on a table, but not on a plate!



*DINA going to kinder-garten, as a four-year old girl*

Belgrade. Early in the morning he went to buy newspapers. When he came back, he was beating hysterically on my parent's bedroom door shouting that the war had broken out. I was ten years old and did not understand what war meant. My parents were very excited and there was talk of someone named Hitler. I do not know whether the adults were thinking that the war would spread and affect us as well.

I first started to feel anti-Semitism in 1940. That is the year when the „Numerus clausus“ law was adopted in Yugoslavia.

In the first grade of grammar school there were about 5–6 of us who were Jews; under the new law only two of us remained.

The Germans occupied Yugoslavia in April 1941. The Bačka region was occupied by the Hungarians.

The Hungarian troops took Sombor without any fighting. My parents were under great tension – what is going to happen?! Hungarian soldiers soon started shooting all over the place, under the pretext that Yugoslav soldiers were hiding in individual homes. We lived in a house on the main town square. We were not allowed to walk in the streets. Through the open shades we saw that the Hungarians have placed a cannon aiming at our building.

In Sombor I attended kindergarten and school. The primary school lasted for four years and I completed it at age 11. That is when I started my secondary school. I also had friends who were not Jewish – I used to go to their homes and they would come to my home, although most of my friends during childhood were Jews. That was also the case with my parents. My mother, born in Sombor, had some friends who were Hungarian with whom she went to school, but my parent's friends were mostly Jewish as well.

I started slowly to be aware of the notion of war; I remember very clearly the image from 1 September 1939. My mother's brother was visiting us from

Suddenly they came bouncing at our door and stormed in; they were shouting loudly saying that they were being shot at from this apartment! Father replied that it was impossible, because we have no weapons at all. A soldier slapped him across his face so ferociously that he fell on the floor. This frightened me, the fact that someone is beating my father.



*With father during vacations in Dubrovnik*

We were told that we have to leave the apartment without taking anything from it. They gave us a piece of paper allowing us to move in the streets, which were completely empty. That was the first time that I saw a dead human body. After some ten minutes of walking on foot we came to the house of my mother's good friend, Hungarian, a widow whose husband used to be a rich Jew. We rang at the gate, and we heard coming from the house the singing voices and music. My mother's friend was surprised to see us. We told her that we were expelled from our apartment and had nowhere to go. She said that she was very sorry that she could not take us in, because she was celebrating with Hungarian officers the liberation from Yugoslavia! We found refuge in a Jewish family.

This illustrates that the Jews could rely only on Jews.

Some 5 or 6 days later we were allowed to go back to our apartment, which was significantly damaged by the Hungarian soldiers.

In September 1941 I continued to attend school; the lectures were in the Hungarian language, which was not a problem for me.

After the initial trauma of the encounter with the Hungarian occupation, life went back to normal. My parents were doing their job, I was attending school. But in fact it only seemed so to me.

For my parents everything had changed. Two brothers and a sister with their families were living in the parts of Yugoslavia that were under German occupation. The sister and her husband were killed in Belgrade together with other Jews. My mother's brother managed with his wife in June 1941 to escape to Bačka and come to be with us in Sombor. They lived with us for several months, until they rented their own apartment. That uncle was taken the following year for forced labor and was killed during the war.

I had an uncle in the Banat region, which was occupied by the Germans. He and his wife, together with all Jews from that region of Banat, were closed in a synagogue; under very difficult conditions, thanks to the fact that he managed to bribe a German soldier with a huge sum of money, he and his wife were transferred across the river Tisa into Bačka. Right away, they came to us. With their arrival our apartment became crowded. There was one family in each room. After a couple of months both uncles had rented apartments.

The Germans occupied Hungary on 10 March 1944. Since that time numerous appalling events just followed one another.

Since the beginning of April we all had to wear yellow stars sewn to our clothes to the front and to the back. When I first came into my classroom with the yellow star, the friend who shared the desk with me for three years immediately moved into another desk. It was humiliating to walk in the street with the mark saying that the person so marked should be hated. Within a week, Jews were prohibited from attending schools.

Arrests of Jewish families began at the end of April. My mother and grandmother packed the things which they thought we would need. Where we would be taken – we had no idea.

The town was closed for three days while the army rounded up all Jews of Sombor. Some images are still very clear in my memory. From the window of our apartment I saw Jews escorted with their belongings, surrounded by soldiers. I was watching people whom I knew all my life in a miserable situation. I saw in front of me how people were being expelled. On the third day the Hungarians came for us. We were carrying heavy stuff with us. They put us into an empty huge storage that was already full of Jews. The same evening they took us to the railway station, which was quite a distance away. We walked the dark streets surrounded by a great number of soldiers who were forcing us to move faster. For my old grandmother this was very difficult, she could hardly keep up, and she left some of her luggage in the street. Our journey by train to Baja took two or three

hours. We got into a huge wheat warehouse. We were on the second floor, where we slept on the floor with the blankets that we had taken with us. That is where we stayed for about a month. I do not know where the food was prepared, but the food was sufficient. In my eyes, from the perspective of a girl of fourteen and a half, the stay in Baja was not tragic, because I was constantly with my friends, and sleeping on the floor was not too bad. My mother did not have a single attack of asthma, but for her, and especially for my grandmother, being on the floor was very difficult. Life was becoming more and more miserable.

One morning we were woken by shouting in German that we should be getting up; pack quickly and get going. Within one hour the building was empty and we were all on our way to the railway stations. There, a train was waiting with livestock carriages, into which the Germans were pushing us and shouting that more people should get in. There were about seventy of us in the carriage. We were so tightly packed inside that one could hardly sit. My mother, grandmother and I were together. Father was elsewhere. The train soon started. We had no idea about where we were going. Some people inside the carriage managed to get on the luggage and look through a small window. They kept telling us which stations we were passing and which direction we were going.

We crossed the Austrian border and stopped at the place Wiener Neustatt. That is when the Germans for the first time opened the doors of the wagon and ordered families capable of working in the fields to get out. The Germans were letting only families of young and strong members to get out. I find it difficult to use the word "selection" when speaking about Wiener Neustatt because over those two days the word got a completely different meaning. The Germans did not allow our family to get off the train. We were not even trying too hard to get off, since we did not know where the train was taking us. In the carriage which was packed in Baja with seventy people there was only one bucket of water, which was soon empty. There was another bucket there for people to relieve themselves which soon became full. Three old people died in the carriage during the journey. My grandmother suffered. We were sitting for three days on our luggage, there was not enough air. The stench was suffocating; there was no food.

We arrived to Auschwitz in the evening; from the outside they opened the wagon door. Down below us were people in striped clothes, their hair cut very short, with striped hats on. That was the prison uniform which I knew from movies. Those people were shouting at us, forcing us to disembark and shouting not to take anything with us. Coming down, frightened by the shouting of inmates, some were falling and those coming after them were walking on top of them. We came to a paved road, long and wide. At a



distance of some meters, SS officers were standing next to each other, with dogs on leash. The dogs were barking terribly. The whole scene was lit by strong lighting. It was an entry into hell. I understood nothing except that it was an awful place.

They were shouting that women and men should form separate lines, five persons per line. I got into a line with my mother and grandmother. I do not know who was in front or next to us, all I know is that we were slowly moving ahead. All of a sudden, we were in the first line and across from us were four or five German officers. One of them would be looking in front of him and pointing his fingers left or right. Everyone would understand from his moves which way he or she was to go. At this point there was no shouting any more, the dogs were not barking, it was dead silence. The officers signaled me, and subsequently my mother, to move to the right. It was all as if in a dream – so slow, and yet so quick. Grandmother was no longer next to us.

For quite a while we were walking along a road surrounded on both sides by high wire fence, with plates indicating high voltage. I got closer to my mother, terrified; I somehow felt that our lives were at risk. We knew instinctively that if we were to do at least a little detail differently than we had been told or implied in the shouting in German, we would die. I did not know how, or why, but I felt that we had come to a terrible place. The dogs were barking, the Germans were shouting: „Los, los, los!“

Hundreds of women, including us, came to a big building. Inside, there was a huge hall; on both sides there were women sitting down, ordering us to get completely naked. They shaved us. I was looking for my mother, but she was nowhere. Suddenly, I heard her calling me. I turned in the direction of her voice; she was standing next to me, but I did not recognize her. She was shaved and naked. We went into the shower room and water started coming out of the showers, not gas. As we were exiting, a dress was thrown in front of us. I was given a huge dress. My mother tore off a piece of the dress so as to be able to walk in it. We walked a long way to the camp „C“. On both sides of the road in camp „C“ there were buildings. All buildings in German camps were called “block”. We were put in „Block 23“. There were thirty „blocks“ in the camp altogether. „Block 23“ did not have bunk beds. We were sleeping on the floor, on bare concrete, terribly cramped together. There were about 1,000 women in there. There was not enough space for us to stretch when lying.

We arrived to Auschwitz on 1 June 1944. The abominable daily routine started early at dawn with the awful sound of whistles and the shouting of capos to get up and come out. One of the blocks housed a line of latrines, which were in fact holes made in concrete; next to them was a line of wash-

ing taps. Along with the whistle blowing and shouting, they placed us in rows of five women, next to our blocks. We would stand there two or three or four hours. The Germans counted us. That was what they called the roll call („apfel“). Camp „C“ had altogether about 30,000 women. Two SS officers counted us. At dawn it was terribly cold, and when the sun came out it was very hot. Sometimes it was raining heavily. We were not allowed to sit or move. I once collapsed, and the women next to me were shaking me in order for me to come back as soon as possible, so that the capos would not see me. Sometimes the number of inmates did not match the German records, and the roll call would start all over again. In such cases there would also be punishment. All of us (30,000 women) had to kneel down and hold our hands above our heads.

After the counting, we had to continue to stand in our rows and lines of five women. Food was distributed. We were given a piece of hard bread, and a black liquid called coffee. The capos poured coffee out of huge pots, and the same pots were used in the evening to pour soup (pots of one and a half liter or two liters for a line of five persons). When I stood fourth or fifth in a row I anxiously counted the women ahead of me, wondering if there would be something left in the pot for me. As the piece of bread that we were given was to last us the whole day, during the first days I decided together with my mother to have the first piece right away and the second during the day. We could not put this in practice. We were so hungry that we could not help it and we ate the second piece of bread right away as well. I remember one time when our bread was stolen from us. The food was abominable, but as of the first day I always ate whatever we were given. All day long we were not allowed to go inside the block; we moved around and lay on the ground. After the evening roll call and the soup, we were allowed back into the block. Every evening there was terrible rushing in order to get a place on the floor.

Two weeks after our arrival my mother got diarrhea (diarrhea was the typical camp disease, due to the awful food and stress). Her condition deteriorated every day. Finally she was in such a state that the capos did not force her to leave the block. Sick people were lying in a separate part of the block; they received no medicine or treatment, they were given the same food as others. I did not see her during the day, as it was forbidden to enter the block. In the evening I was running there to be with her. Later on I would have to look for a place for myself on the floor to sleep in. My best friend's mother promised that she would keep a place for me next to them, while I go to see my mother. One evening when I found them in that mess, she told me: „Bebi, this is a different world, in here everyone should care for herself. I cannot keep a place on the floor for you“. I think my mother was severely

ill for a week or ten days when there was another big selection. After the morning roll call we were ordered to take everything off until naked, hold our dresses in our hands, and our hands above our heads. We entered the block one by one. On both sides there were SS officers watching and assessing who was still capable of work and who was so emaciated that she was not useful any longer. The emaciated ones did not get into the block. After this selection, the block was half empty.

As we were slowly entering the block, I saw my mother on the side. All sick inmates were taken outside and they were lying down on the ground. I ran to her and tried to get her up, but she was so weak that she kept falling down. I left her there, because the capo was shouting at me and got the whip on the ready telling me to get back in the line. Once again I saw my mother at the time when we were allowed to get out of the block. I asked those in charge of the block („Blokelteste“) where were those who did not enter the block? They directed me to the last block of the camp. I saw my mother, but this encounter is something I cannot talk about. That event was and has remained for me terribly painful and traumatic. As of that day I was alone. I was with women from my town, but I felt alone.

The Germans would now and then be selecting women fit for work, for jobs in Germany. These were groups made up of 200–300 women. So, once I was included among the selected but, instead of being taken to the railway station we were transferred from camp „C“ to camp „B-3“. That is where I met my aunt Ela, my father's sister, and I moved into her block. I stayed with her until the day of liberation. I am convinced that if it had not been for her I would not have survived. She could not help me physically, but she was a huge spiritual pillar for me. Finally, I was not alone.

My aunt stuck to the principle: „We shall not work for the Germans“. Every time that we would be selected for a transport, we managed to get away. I did as she advised me. I was happy to have an older person and relative with me; I was not yet fifteen. Once, however, we were not able to get away with the selection; now I know that it was for the best. We were transferred to camp „A“, located next to the railway station. Camp „A“ housed women who had tattooed hands and who were going out of the camp to do different jobs in the area. They knew exactly what was going on in Auschwitz, they knew about the gas chambers and the crematorium. While I was in camp „C“, the supervisor and capos told us that if we do not do as demanded we would end up in the black smoke that loomed day and night over Auschwitz. They were shouting: „Up there your mothers and children are burning!“ At the time I thought, like the others, that they were trying to frighten us, and that what they were saying was not true.

The whole day we were closed in the block, in camp „A“. In the evenings my aunt would show up by the window. We talked for a long time. She would tell us that Auschwitz was an extermination camp, where all the elderly and the children incapable of work were exterminated. She also told us that we should be glad to leave that hell behind. My aunt would cry and tremble with fear all night long. All the months spent in Auschwitz (we had no idea that that was the name of the camp), through starvation, beating and shouting, we learned from my aunt that all that is nothing compared to what can yet happen to us. I was crying for my mother and grandmother.

The following day we were taken to the railway station. The journey took three days in an animal wagon. This time the wagons had no roof, therefore it was not suffocating. We arrived at a camp completely different than Auschwitz. It was fenced with wire fence, but no high voltage. Around the camp, all the way to the fence, there was a forest (in Auschwitz there was nothing around the camp). Here, there was never any roll call, we were not counted; the food was somewhat better; we were accommodated in huge tents; we hardly ever saw Germans. We stayed in the tents for about two months, until a terrible storm destroyed the tents. We were moved to wooden blocks.

That camp was Bergen-Belsen. The camp served as a reservation for workers in different parts in Germany. My aunt and I somehow managed to avoid transports. The blocks became partly empty, and the Germans were transferring us from one block to another. That is how we ended up not knowing anyone around us. Nobody knew anybody else's name. There were women from Poland, France, Greece, Hungary and other countries (Jews from all European countries occupied by Germany). As months went by, the number of inmates was increasing – Jews from camps in Poland, where the Russians had already arrived. We were sleeping on the floor and it was becoming ever more packed. While sleeping we could hardly extend our legs. We were sharing the ever smaller rations



*The beginning of a new life: a photograph from the wedding of DINA and JICAH REMER in Israel in August 1952*

of food and were getting more emaciated. Our strength was reducing; there was a prevailing sense of apathy everywhere. No one cared about the other. Everyone was just trying to survive the day. It was a very cold winter in the north-western Europe. Bergen-Belsen is not far from Hanover. In December everyone got one thin blanket. During the day we used it to wrap ourselves up (I had a summer dress on my naked body, the dress I was given six months ago in Auschwitz). At night the blanket covered me while I lay down on the floor.

From August, when we arrived in Bergen-Belsen, until April, we were taken only once to have a shower. We were awfully dirty. My dress was partly torn; on my feet I had heavy wooden clogs. We were covered by thousands of lice! The food was becoming more meager by the day: a piece of bread in the morning and soup in the evening. Whoever was never there cannot understand what starvation is. In February the typhoid epidemic set in. Many died. Every morning those who got up were still alive, those who remained lying down were either dead or in a coma. My aunt and I would go out, specifically – we would stumble out of the barrack. It was very cold and snowing. We waited for them to collect the dead, and afterwards so exhausted we would return and lay down. The dead were thrown on a pile in front of the barrack. Those who were in charge of this task would then come and pull the dead from the pile either to the crematorium or to the trenches where they were buried. Those who were moving the dead were themselves close to death.

Bergen-Belsen was not far from Hanover and Hamburg. The Americans were bombing these cities day and night. It is true that we were afraid that the bombs could hit us as well, but I was talking with my aunt Ela about how it did not matter; what mattered was that the Germans should suffer and the liberation should come as soon as possible.

In March some kind of anarchy began in the camp: the number of German soldiers had reduced significantly. The food, which was coffee and bread in the morning and soup in the evening, was sometimes skipped. We were starved and emaciated; it was very difficult to move. We had no more strength left to kill the lice. We were in a state of apathy; often aunt Ela would embrace me, and I would embrace her; we spoke very little, there was nothing to talk about, and there was no strength for it.

There was more and more floor space in the camp; people were dying. We could distinguish who was alive and who was dead by whether there were lice on them (the lice abandoned the dead!). One morning I woke up, my aunt lying next to me as usual, but there were no lice on her! I went out of the block and away, as far as I could. I was waiting, lying down on the ground, for the dead to be taken away. I could not stand to see her



being pulled on the ground. For months she was wearing a purple dress. Returning to the block, on the pile of corpses I saw a purple dress. The pile was getting bigger; people were dying at a greater speed than the corpses were removed.



*Commemoration monument at the cemetery in Sombor, for Sombor Jews who perished in the Holocaust, including names of parents and grandmother of DINA REMER*

I entered the block and collapsed. I was so desperate that I could not even cry. A while later I heard from the outside unfamiliar sounds and great shouting. I went out and I saw – three meters away from me was a huge tank! Until this day I can remember the stunned faces of the soldiers. They were looking at us and could not understand what kind of creatures they are looking at – dirty skeletons, moving in some way. From the tanks they were throwing all the food they had. Those who were stronger than me got on the food. I was afraid to get close fearing that they might cause me bodily harm. I had no strength to fight for food. That turned out to be my good fortune. Those who were eating out of the cans, with lots of meat and beans, got terrible diarrhea. Not even a day passed before the British gave us food suited for our ill stomachs. Still, of all the things that the British did for us, it seems to me that disinfecting us with DDT spray and freeing us from lice was the most important.



The liberation day came: it was 15 April 1945. Not far from Bergen-Belsen there was a prisoner-of-war camp, among them there were Yugoslav PoW's from 1941. They came to Bergen-Belsen looking for Yugoslavs. They arrived to my block and wrote down my name. I remember the feeling when I was asked my name! For about a year I was nameless. I had been an anonymous person and nobody cared for me. I never thought that I would not get over that horror, but I felt that I was literally nobody and nothing.

Yugoslav officers came back after a few days and seeing the state that I was in they took me to the hospital. There I stayed for about two months.

All inmates of Bergen-Belsen were transferred to the big camp previously used by the German army. Yugoslav women were put in one building, men in another.

As soon as the last person was removed from it, our previous camp in Bergen-Belsen was burnt to the foundations by the British.



*DINA with husband, present time*

In mid August 1945 all Yugoslavs were returned to Yugoslavia.

I went back to Sombor. The truck took me to the main square, in front of the house in which we lived and from which I was taken away. In the windows I could see our curtains still hanging, but from the window looking down were a man and a woman I did not know. I understood that

there are people living in our apartment and I could no longer go in. There I was – standing in the street, not knowing where to go. So, I went to a Serb family that my parents had worked with. They gave me a hearty welcome. There were lists made up in the Jewish Community, with names of Jews from different parts of Yugoslavia, who had come back. In the list, I found my uncle in Subotica. I went to see him. It was not only my uncle who had returned, but also his wife and daughter. Our greater family had had 26 members. Of them, five had survived, including myself. My uncle took good care of me, but in 1947 he died.

I graduated from grammar school, matriculated and enrolled to study at the Medical Faculty in Belgrade.

In December 1948 I immigrated to Israel, where I settled in Jerusalem, intending to continue my studies. Soon I realized that the chances for me to study at university were meager, primarily due to lack of resources. I earned my living by working as a maid. I could rely only on myself, I had nobody.

I enrolled to study at the nursing school, and in 1952 I graduated from three years of study.



*DINA'S daughter Michal with husband AVI  
and three children – IRAN, NETA, and NIRA*

I married Jichak (Đuro) Remer, born in Novi Sad. We have two daughters and six grandchildren.

At our family gatherings and celebrations I look at my beautiful and successful family and I think to myself that I won over Hitler.

All the horrors and suffering happened only because I was a Jew. Now I live in the Jewish state, created after 2000 years, possibly thanks to the Shoa.

I retired on 31 December 1990.

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Vera ŠTAJN

THANK YOU TO THE GERMAN WOMAN  
HILDA MILLER



*Vera-Estera Kelemen, married Štajn, was born on 3 February 1926 in Novi Sad, of father Jozef and mother Julijana Johevet, née Štern. Father Jozef, born in 1892 in Kanjiža, was an electrical technician, and mother Julijana, born in 1892 in Bačka Palanka, a housewife. Vera completed her elementary and secondary civil engineering school in Novi Sad. She was member of Hashomer Hatzair.*

*Her parents perished in Auschwitz.*

*She had an elder sister Sidonija-Sida, born in 1920.*

*In 1948 she married doctor Andrija Štajn; they have a daughter Mirjam and son Ruben, and three grandchildren. Since 1951 she has been living in Israel.*

My father Jozef Kelemen was an entrepreneur, spending very little time at home. He was remembered as a good and pleasant man, willing to help others. He was president of the football club „Makabi“ from Novi Sad. He perished in Auschwitz in 1944.

My mother Julijana came from a family of Orthodox Jews from Ilok. It was through her that my elder sister Sidonija – Sida and I received our Jewish upbringing. She was such a kind person, she lived for us. She had lost her mother when she was only four years old and, as she used to tell us, she never felt mother's love. She was the youngest of eight children.

I loved my mother very much. She was a dedicated housewife, taking very good care also of me and my elder sister Sida. In order for us to be closer to our religion and acquire religious education, sister and I went to the synagogue to sing. That is how our mother built our link with the synagogue and that was where we went for Erev Shabbat and holidays.

In Novi Sad I attended a yeshiva elementary school which was right next to the synagogue. There were two teachers working there: Mihajlo Boroš and Mavro Fan. Next to the synagogue, on the right, was the building in which my two teachers lived with their families, as well as Rabbi dr Hinko Kiš.

After completing my elementary school, I attended the public school in which I had many good friends among the German, Hungarian, and Serbian pupils. However, after the Hungarian occupation of the Bačka region in 1941, many of my Hungarian and German friends no longer wanted to know us! We, Jewish girls, were very hurt by this because until that time we literally shared our school lunches. Once it no longer suited them to have Jews as friends, they pretended not to even see us.

As I was good at drawing, I wanted after completing the public school to be a painter and go to art school. But, being a Jew, I could not enroll in the school of my choice.

My mother, who found it very hard to cope with all this, told me later that I should not just sit at home, that I should be doing something. She very much wanted me to learn to sew. That is when I started my apprenticeship as tailor with a lady who was my mother's tailor. Since I did not like it there, I decided to stop sewing, and I told my mother so. So, the following few months I stayed at home, helping my mother, drawing and reading.

When in April 1941 the Hungarians occupied Bačka, they soon started rounding up Jewish men and taking them for forced labor. They always kept coming up with new ideas. On one occasion, they issued an order that Jews are to submit their money to the authorities.

Already in summer 1941 they started arresting communists and all opponents of the Hungarian Fascist regime. Among the arrested were some members of Hashomer Hatzair, where I was also a member. They would take them to the building called „Armija“, where they would beat and torture them, and where some of them were hanged. One of them was Timar. Another young woman and a young man were also hanged, but I have forgotten their names.\*

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\*The Hungarian court marshal in Novi Sad, on 21 November 1941, sentenced to death the following Jews: Lilika Livija Bem, Andrija Lederer, and minor Zoltan Timar (see the book by Jaša Romano: *Jews of Yugoslavia 1941–1945, victims of genocide and fighters of the National Liberation War*, published by the Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade 1980, Pg. 247; editor's note).

The next devastating blow was the Novi Sad raid from 21 – 23 January 1942 resulting in a mass massacre of Jews and Serbs. That was when my mother's uncle was murdered, although his two sons survived. They told us that there was a huge pile of corpses of Jews at the graveyard, they even named some of the victims, including our family members. During the raid, my late husband and his young wife that he was married to before our marriage were taken to the bank of the Danube where they took group by group of those rounded up, lined them up and murdered them. Whoever was out in the streets could hear the shooting. The two of them were close to the line of those whose turn had come to be murdered, but an order arrived from Budapest to stop the massacre and take the rest to the theatre building. Although the order had arrived, they continued to round people up and soon they came to our house. They asked who lived there, but they did not take us to the Danube; instead they took us to the theatre building. Others were also being brought and kept there in terrible cold until midnight; an official came and without mentioning the massacre, told us that they are not going to do anything bad to us. In his words, what had happened was a result of Chetniks who had killed some Hungarians.

Among the victims of the raid were my mother's cousins with small children, three girls and a boy. They were wealthy, had several maids, Hungarians, who did not allow the soldiers to take the children. They sheltered the children and hid them behind their backs. The parents did not return. They were killed on the banks of the Danube, thus the only ones remaining in the house were the girl Olika, nine; the boy Robi, five; the small girl Marta' only six months old, still breastfeeding; and the girl Eva, five. The oldest among them, Olika and Robi, perished in Auschwitz, after arriving there with their grandparents. Eva was given to a family without children, which adopted her and thus saved her life. The baby Marta was adopted by relatives from Budapest who had two children of their own, but they managed to raise them and take them to Israel. Marta is now living in a happy family, has a daughter and two sons and five grandchildren.

After the raid, mother was fearful about what else could happen, and that the fact that I was not working could be bad. That is why she found for me a new place where I could learn to sew. There were fourteen other young girls working there. We learned together, and I was making good progress in my work, although I did not like it.

Until the arrival of Germans in Hungary in 1944, although discriminated on the basis of anti-Jewish decrees and laws, the Jews were living there relatively peacefully without major turmoil.

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\*See the testimony of Marta Flato in this book, page 349–354; editor's note)

With the arrival of the Germans, rumors started to spread that we would be deported to forced labor. That was why we got our backpacks ready with key necessities. We knew in advance the day of our deportation. When they came for us they told us that we could not take any money with us, but to take it all out and put it on the table. We were told to take off any gold and other jewelry that we had on or in the house and put it all on a table; and we were told not to close the doors of our houses and leave with them. That is how we left the house. I remember clearly that my mother was told to take off her wedding ring and that she did so unwillingly, starting to cry as it hurt her terribly.

As we were walking along our street, the neighbors with whom we lived in friendship and who knew that the Jews were being taken away, upon seeing my mother cry, were calling after her: „Mrs. Kelemen, do not cry!“ we came to the synagogue, where they were getting us all rounded up. The Hungarians were no better than the Germans. As they were taking us to the railway station, they did not speak. We moved in lines of five and walked in the middle of the road. Once we arrived at the railway station the trains were ready.

In the wagon with us there was a woman with her daughter. She left her younger daughter who was 3 or 4 with her maid to take care of her, so she could see them from the train moving to another train for Budapest, where she was to take the girl. The woman and her daughter who were travelling with us were killed in the camp, while the child whom she left with the maid had survived. We were in a train which was going to Subotica, and upon arrival we got off and were taken to a ghetto, within a factory.

We stayed there for about three weeks. I was with my mother and sister. All of a sudden our father arrived, saying that he would be separated from us as he was being taken for forced labor. While people were looking for a place to settle down and place their belongings somewhere, soldiers lined us up and asked who wanted to go and work. Since my father had a good qualification, he applied. I think they selected about two hundred people for work. Father came to say goodbye. Although I was eighteen at the time, I did not fully understand what was happening. My elder sister started to cry. That was the last time that we said goodbye to father – he was taken to Auschwitz with his apprentice Bruno Hofman, who survived.

In the ghetto we slept on the wooden floor.

The food we had was what we managed to bring with us or what the Jews and good people from Subotica brought for us. We were in Subotica for three weeks, after which we were taken to Baja, again to stay for three weeks, this time however under more dire conditions in terms of accommodation and food.



We were put on a horse farm, with sand in the ground and very dirty. There was a doctor among us, a Jew, and we asked him if it was possible to get my younger sister out of there, since she was suffering from tuberculosis. However, she remained with my mother and me. One day they came to take the men, while we were to continue on our way and be displaced again. Of course, they did not tell us where we were going. When we were leaving Novi Sad, there were many people who came to see us off. They gave us different things. Every time we were moved we thought that we were being taken somewhere to do work and that things would be better for us if we work. In Baja we were loaded on animal wagons and after a three-day journey we were unloaded at the railway station in Auschwitz. Although I did see people in striped clothes on the stations that we passed on the way, I did not realize that they were camp inmates.



*VERA in her youth*

When we were pushed out of the wagons three days later, we were already half-dead. We had thought that things would be better where we were going, but they were worse. When we got off the wagons it was afternoon. I remember that it was Shavuot. The Germans knew how to do horrible things to us on our holidays. I saw again people wearing striped clothes and soldiers, this time German soldiers. They were shouting at us, hurrying us up and beating us. They were ordering us to get out of the wagons. They started beating my older cousin, who would not part with her chest with documents. It probably happened to others, but I saw her as she was right next

to me. My mother advised her to do as told. There was overwhelming panic around. They guards were urging us to be quick, shouting „schnell, schnell“ all the time. I recall that we were very much confused and not grasping what was happening.

They separated men with sons from women with daughters. To the left were men, to the right women. Suddenly, there was a young woman, with two lovely babies in her arms, a girl and a boy with curly hair, sobbing. The children were sobbing along with her. We could not understand what she wanted – she wanted to give her children to us, but we did not know what to do with them. Later I found out that there was a part of the Auschwitz camp to which twins were sent to be subject to experiments. Was that what

this woman was afraid of, or was it the fact that women with children were taken together with the children to the crematorium? As I was standing in line I saw a German officer with a stick in his hand pointing to people and ordering them: left or right! So naïve was I that I thought that he was just randomly separating people to the left or to the right. Certainly that was not what it was. I held my mother under her arm, next to me were my sister and my cousin, and I told them to stand behind my sister, so that we would all go together to the same side. That, of course, did not help. When we got to the officer who, as I later found out, was Dr Mengele, he hit me hard and pushed my mother away as we were holding on to each other. We just turned around and looked at each other. I did not understand what he meant. At that time I felt heartache, as if I was torn apart, I cried out loud. People around me told me to stop crying.

It was all happening at the railway station. My mother and I were separated, and later we moved towards the camp. Once there, I stopped crying and watched around me at what was happening. I saw women in dresses with a red line across their backs. I saw that they were completely lost walking up and down, without hair. My first thought was that I was in a mental asylum. I thought that this was what I will become as well. We continued to walk until we came to a big room, where we were told to undress and stay in our shoes only, placing our clothes in one spot and move on. There were women there who shaved our heads and all our body hair as well. Then they took us to a place where we were to leave our shoes. Subsequently we were given other clothes and shoes. We were taken to the shower room; once we all got in, they turned on the hot water. It felt good to take a shower after so much time. When the water stopped, we moved on to the next room, before we were given dresses. First we got shoes. Again, we were lined up and taken to the camp, which consisted of 32 barracks, wooden structures housing about one thousand women each. It was terribly packed, 13 women sleeping in each bed. When one wanted to turn around, everyone had to do the same. They were bunk beds with three levels.

I remember what happened before we went into the barrack. I do not know why it was conceived in this manner, but we were standing in a circle. A woman collapsed. By that time there were capos already there and, instead of getting her up, they started slapping her face and that was how she became conscious again! That happened before we got into the barrack.

At the entry we were given dinner – a piece of bread with a small spoonful of margarine. Being in shock due to everything that was going on, especially regarding my mother, I did not feel like eating, so I placed the bread next to me on the ladder by the bed, thinking that I would eat it in the

morning, if I become hungry. And, truly, I was hungry in the morning, but the bread was not where I had left it. During the night, someone was more hungry than I was.

The food was abominable. In the morning we were given some liquid, the color of tea or coffee. There was no place where we could wash up, we felt untidy and dirty. We used the tea that was given us to slightly wash our faces!



*The happy days of the family: mother JULIJANA, VERA, the elder sister, SIDA, and father JOZEF KELEMEN*

When clothes were distributed, I was not lucky to get a normal dress. In fact, it was a very pretty dress, but not suited for Auschwitz, rather it would be a party dress. A long dress with a pretty detail on the breasts, my whole back was open. I looked ridiculous in it. As if I did not have enough trouble, now I was the laughing stock! The rain season started. During the roll call we had to stand there. The dress was made of such material that it was completely wet when, after the roll call, we were returning to the barrack. I used to take it off and put it by the bed to dry. Already at five in the morning we were getting out for the roll call. I struggled to put on the dress because after the rain it shrank and became too small.

One day we were standing for roll call. They were counting us and looking for someone who was missing. We were standing until they found a woman, undernourished and probably sick, who had hid in the toilette as

dr Mendele was doing the selection. They took her away and told us to turn around. We saw a woman lying on the ground with a belt around her throat, like a dog.

The days were going by and becoming increasingly difficult. My sister and I wished that they would take us and send us to do some work, just to get out of Auschwitz. There were rumors that that was possible. One day, when we came out for the roll call, we saw a group of people, I think they were from different factories. The Germans were selecting stronger inmates for work, so I, my sister and our cousin were fortunate to be selected. We were transferred to another barrack, to quarantine, which consisted of being separated from the others. We were not even allowed to leave for the latrines, but we had a bucket there for such needs.

One day they came and said they were taking us for work. The place where we were accommodated in Auschwitz was called camp C. There were also camp A and camp B, and we were transferred elsewhere but I do not remember what it was called. They let us come into one of the barracks and in the evening they sent us away to shower. The shower water was very hot, we dressed ourselves and came out. It was already night and very cold. I could not stand there, and while my sister was standing and talking to someone I laid down on the ground and fell asleep. She panicked and started looking for me until she found me sleeping on the ground. That was when I woke up.

They took us to the train and we got in. It was not as packed as when we were coming to Auschwitz. There were about two hundred of us, almost all very young, only a few who were married. Upon arrival to our destination, next to a barrack there stood a German woman, *commando fuhrerin*, in charge of managing the women. The place was Wüstegiersdorf.

From Auschwitz to Wüstegiersdorf we were escorted by a supervisor (Aufseherin) with a list of our two hundred names. When we just arrived to Auschwitz we were not tattooed, I suppose because the Germans thought that we should be destroyed right away and sent to the crematorium; fortunately, it turned out that we were taken for work. The supervisor came into the barrack and said: „Girls, it is going to be much better for you here, you will each have a separate bed with a mattress and a blanket. Each will have her own plate and spoon“. We could not believe what we were hearing. But it was true. We worked in the factory producing aircraft parts.

We walked every day to the nearby small town to work. My sister and I were given easy tasks, consisting of checking the size of manufactured parts.

We had only just started our work, and I got a high temperature. I could not stand up and work, so I laid my head on the table. I needed to sleep. Everyone was shouting that I must not do that. I told them that they could

kill me, but I could not stand on my feet any longer. That day I got pneumonia. My sister continued to work.

It was already winter and it was snowing, the snow sticking to our shoes. The shoes were high, with wooden soles, and it was difficult to walk. My sister hurt her foot and could not walk, so she was in the room with the sick, including me. She was with me several days. One day the Lagerälteste came and told us that we were not brought there to take care of each other, but that my sister would have to go and work. She told us this in the morning, but in the afternoon my sister went to the toilette and came back with red eyes. I asked her what had happened, why she was crying. She did not manage to answer me, she became very sick. She coughed blood. I gave her my night gown. There was panic. The lagerelteste came with another girl – we could not hide her situation from the commando fuhrerin. They told the commando fuhrerin everything, because anyway every evening in every room there was the routine counting.

Fears came over me that my sister would be taken to the crematorium. Lagerelteste told the commando fuhrerin everything, she had seen our eyes red and crying; she asked us what it was and we told her. She asked nothing else, just told me to come to her room. Being as I am, I told her everything openly, without lying: I said that my sister was already ill when we were still at our home, that she suffered from tuberculosis, that she had been to hospital and that her situation improved greatly, but it seemed to have come back. I also told her that the lagerelteste came to see us in the afternoon and told us that we had not come there to lie around, but to work. She was deeply touched by my concern over my sister, and told me not to cry and not to worry because my sister, after she recovers, would be given an easier task inside the barracks so she would not have to walk long to work. She really did as she promised. My sister was in the sick room for 12 days and she was coughing blood. The bleeding was difficult to stop, so the commando got injections of calcium, and my sister's situation improved although her health remained fragile until the liberation. One day, after I was well again, the commando fuhrerin came for the counting and again called me to her room. She asked me if I was strong enough to clean her room, care for the fire and clean her boots. She also told me that it was not a whole day's work, and that after I finished the tasks I could take care of my sister. That was how it was. We were there until the end. I could speak and understand German, and I felt some kind of sympathy from her side because until that time nobody had done for me or my sister anything nearly as good. Her name was Hilda Miller.

One day she took me to the factory where we saw emaciated people, of dry skin, dressed in rags. From her bag she was getting food and giving it to



them to eat. I saw something good in her eyes. She once took me for cleaning to the Dörnhau camp; it was a kind of a hospital in which half-dead people had to sew. It was dreadful to look at how those people were suffering and going for work.



*HILDA MILER, the German woman with "goodness in her eyes", who saved Vera's and her sister's lives in the camp*

On another occasion I was again given a cleaning task in town. At that time I saw a notice saying „evacuation“. I heard that the Russian army is close and that some men, capable of moving, had already been taken away. I understood that the war was soon coming to an end. We women were allegedly supposed to be evacuated, but the commando fuhrerin prevented that – and she managed to prevent it until the very end of war, 8 May 1945, when the Russians liberated us. It happened at a place on the border between Poland and Czechoslovakia.

From the camp we went to the nearby small town of Dörnhau, and some inmates left the place by walking on foot. Since my sister could not walk, we joined a group of 15 Czech Jewish women, who found a horse and a carriage and got some food. They claimed to know the road to Budapest.

As we were leaving, Hilda Miller came to say goodbye, since I had told her that we were leaving. We were both very excited, but neither of us asked the other about the place where the other would be, some future address. That was how we parted.

At the Czech border the horse and the carriage were taken away from us. We continued on foot until we came to a small town; the Checks there gave us yogurt and cake. We continued on foot to a school building, where we stayed overnight.

The following morning we continued on foot again. A bus came our way and took us to Brno, where we slept overnight in the street.

There, we were robbed of the little that we had with us, so all that we had left was what we were wearing. We continued until we came to the rail-



way station, and we waited for a train. We continued by train, packed together on the roofs of cargo cars.

Once we arrived to Budapest, we were received by the Jewish Community and taken to a school building where we could wash ourselves. While walking along the street, someone behind our back shouted at us: „The stinking Jews are coming back“. This distressed me terribly, after all that we had been through.

It was four of us together – I, my sister, and two other girls, and one of them suggested to go to the Yugoslav consulate office and inquire how we could return home. They advised us to go to a shelter and wait there for other inmates and go back as a group. We did not do so, but we took a train to Subotica, and started for our homes.

However, once there, we did not know where to go. We had no parents. Some people said we should go to the hotel. My sister and I said we would go to our home, the apartment where we lived with our parents. When we got there, we found people unknown to us. We told them that we would like to see if something remained that is related to our parents, we knew they were no longer living. The woman who was there got for us a family photo and said she had kept it in order to give it to someone of the family! After what had happened to my parents, I was very touched by seeing the photo again. The word soon went around that we were back and people gathered around us.

A Jewish woman, married to a German, invited us to her house to sleep overnight and made lunch for us according to our wishes. The following day the woman who was now living in our former apartment came to tell us that we could stay in her daughter's small apartment until we figure out what to do next.

We registered at the Jewish Community, which was already organizing food for returnees. I continued to care for my sick sister. Right after our return I wanted to continue my education, but my sister said I had to work so we could sustain ourselves. We did somehow manage to get by, and sometimes good people were willing to help.

One day a man who used to work with our father approached us and gave us quite a considerable sum of money, saying that his brother and he owed it to our father. Every time they saw us, they gave us some money.

Although Novi Sad had been and had remained a beautiful town, with many parks, we missed those who had not come back. I very much wanted to immigrate to Israel. I could not make this wish come true in 1948, due to the severely poor health of my sister who, regretfully, died in 1949.

In 1948 I married a doctor, Andrija Štajn. Due to his profession – he was treating patients suffering from infectious diseases; he could not get the immigration permit. This wish only came true in 1951 when we immigrated to Israel. I had a wonderful husband, who had passed away and left us in 1993. His first wife was taken with an eight months old baby in 1944 to Auschwitz, where they both perished.

In Israel we settled in Acre where my husband worked until his retirement. We started our family.

One day, 18 years later, I heard from an inmate that our former lageralteste Lili in Germany at the funeral of their German friend met Hilda Miller. Hilda right away asked her whether she knew what had happened to me. She told her that I was living in Israel, but she knew nothing else about me. When she later told me about it, I was very happy that Hilda was alive and that nothing bad happened to her. She was working in a hospital as a nurse, in the place where we used to work.

When I got her address, I wrote her a letter. Since then we were in regular contact. Since we wanted to see each other, during one of our journeys to Germany with my husband, we arranged a meeting. We met in Austria, near Innsbruck. She came with her adopted son. We spent the day together. We wrote to each other until her death.

My grandson Eliad was seven when at school they talked about the Holocaust. Upon returning home from school, he talked about it with his mother. She then told him that his grandmother was a Holocaust survivor. One day he asked me to tell him how I survived. I told him that he was still too young and would not understand my story, but I promised that someday I would tell him all that I went through. With this story I am doing it now.

I am ending my life story thankful that I have had the opportunity to keep my promise.

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## Ješua ABINUN

### I STAYED ALIVE BY COINCIDENCE



*Ješua Abinun was born in 1920 in Sarajevo, where he lived permanently until 1941, in a Sephardic family with four children.*

*Together with his father and brother he was taken from Sarajevo on 25 October 1941, first to a labor camp in Sarajevo, via the Sarajevo collection camp, to the Jasenovac concentration camp, where his father and brother were executed. His mother and two sisters were taken in 1942 to Jasenovac, and were allegedly executed while being transferred via Gradiška to the Đakovo camp.*

*Of the four children and the parents, Ješua was the only one who survived the war. Numerous members of his greater family perished in the Holocaust.*

*He has a son and two grandchildren living in Toronto, Canada. With his wife he is living in the retirement home „Zenta“ in Split.*

In Sarajevo my father had a carpenter's shop, and mother was a housewife. We were a middle class family. One sister's name was Simha, we called her Sidica; the other was Regina; the brother was Santo, nicknamed Šani. My brother was a sales assistant, and I was a friseur. The older sister finished her apprenticeship and worked as a tailor, while the youngest Regina (born in 1930) in 1941 was still practically a child, only eleven years of age.

Mother was caring for everyone, she did the household chores, while father worked in the shop. We children, once we grew up, had decent lives.

We all worked: my brother, I, my sister, so we could afford a good life. We did not have our separate apartments, but we had a rented apartment in a building in the center of the city. That was how it was until the war broke out and until the German occupation. After that, as is well known, the situation in Sarajevo became very difficult for Jews.

Before World War Two, father would regularly every morning go to his shop and work until evening. We, children, took his lunch to him. And we did our schooling until we too started to earn for our living.

When he finished school, my brother had a permanent job. He did additional work as well, designing and arranging shop-windows. I worked until 1941 at Marindvor, for a friseur master who, by coincidence, was also later to be an inmate in Jasenovac. He was also on the run with me. And he was killed.

Life was good, we lacked nothing. Everyone was working. It was a big family; there were my father's and mother's sisters, and their children. We were all very close. The family cult was strong. And, there were grandmother and grandfather. When grandmother died, grandfather was alone, and he married again. We always visited grandfather and he visited us. Sephardic families attribute great importance to family.

We celebrated the holidays together, we went to the synagogues. Strict care was taken to have everything ready in time and do nothing on the day of the holiday. On Saturdays we observed the Shabbat, at times to a greater and at times to a lesser degree. I must admit that we were not very religious, but we did cherish the Jewish tradition and observed the Jewish holidays. As children we loved all this, and continued as adults. Still we cherish those days and gladly remember them. We still sometimes mark those days, thanks to our organizations, communities and friends.

It was a numerous Sephardic family with many members, practically all of whom perished. I must say that until 1941 I faced no problems on the grounds of being a Jew. We lived absolutely normally with people of other ethnic and religious communities, exchanged visits, maintained contacts, and exchanged visits for holidays.

There was a Jewish primary school in Sarajevo which we attended, and continued in the public secondary school. At school we had religious education. I cannot remember the teacher's name. Hebrew was not taught. We knew Espagnol, which we learned from our parents. Mother spoke only Espagnol and it was spoken at home quite a lot, so we children also acquired the language well. But, that was not the contemporary Spanish; we spoke Judeo-Espagnol, although we do understand the modern Spanish as well. Wherever I went abroad, and I was fortunate that as a friseur I did travel a lot across Europe, the knowledge of Spanish helped me.

My family originated from Spain, but father was born in Sarajevo. Grandfather, supposedly, also came to Sarajevo from somewhere else, but I do not know when. Mother came to Sarajevo from Travnik. They all originated from Jews who were expelled from Spain 500 years ago. They all dispersed, and a great number of them came to Sarajevo.

We had quite good lives under those conditions. The most frequent Jewish family names in Sarajevo were: Abinun, Papo, Altarac, Kabiljo, Montiljo... there were so many people with the same family name that we had to have at least one nickname to be able to tell which family we are referring to. There were cases that people would have the same family name and the same father's first name. My family, Abinun, were nicknamed Foli. I cannot explain the meaning of that nickname. There were also names like Juso Kokošak, or Dani La Vaka. Vaka means a cow, and the name was added because he worked with meat products. There were also some humorous nicknames. Such as Juso de la Kurva, which implied something unethical. People did not mind their nicknames. Without them you would not be able to tell families apart, whether it was this Abinun or the other, since there were ten more of the same name! We children did not have these nicknames.

After the war there were many mixed marriages in Sarajevo, while this was not the case before the war. The tendency used to be to marry another Sephardic Jew. Among the Sephardic Jews marriages were also arranged. Care was taken to avoid someone from an affluent family marrying a poor person, capital was to stay in the family. There were match-makers who went around and arranged marriages. There was also coercion; I know of such cases, that a girl would be forced to marry a certain man. She did not love him, she loved someone else, but ... there were such cases.

In Sarajevo there was a Jewish organization Hashomer Hatzair, and a strong working class Jewish organization „Matatja“. „Matatja“ had an amateur section which organized performances and entertainment events. It gathered talented amateurs. „Matatja“ mostly gathered working class youth, while „Kenu“, within Hashomer Hatzair, gathered Zionist youth, which was preparing for immigration to Palestine. Both organizations were mostly for Jewish youth. But we also went to „Sloga“, an organization in Sarajevo which gathered the youth of other nationalities, and also organized performances and entertainment events.

I was for many years a member of „Matatja“, until 1941.

Zionism did not attract me. We were a working class family. There were some progressive Jews who had influenced us in somewhat different ways. To be honest, they introduced us to communist ideas, while in „Ken“ the youth was educated only for immigration to Palestine. Among our peer groups we would engage in discussions about these issues. At that time we

were sixteen, or seventeen, or eighteen, or twenty, and actually we did not have our own opinions. In 1945 we were not strongly convinced that we should go to Israel. We enjoyed the same standard of living, no one asked if you were a Jew or not. And it was like that until 1948, very few people thought about leaving for Israel. After the Informbiro Resolution, and what followed, a significant number of Jews left for Israel.

Being craftsmen, we did not have capital, nor did we own our homes. My father had a workshop, and always two or three workers; but, we never had to worry too much about how much we would spend on food, clothes or other needs. What we had could always be stretched to cover everything, but we had no capital. There was a practice to prepare dowry for the daughter's wedding. So we, as well, had everything ready for our sister that she would need once that she was to be married. There was a big chest to which the purchased goods were neatly put, including textiles, all in bundles ... we called it *dota* (dowry). Those Jews who had capital, houses, several shops, or were engaged in trading, were considered rich.

In 1941 my sister was nineteen. She had a boyfriend, a Jew, who was with me in the camp, but the circumstances prevented the marriage. At that time I was twenty-one, she was two years younger. None of us married before 1941. We were all still living together: sister and I, father and mother.

For high holidays the family would get together at home and in the temple. Certain foods were always cooked for the specific holidays. On Yom Kippur we observed the fasting. For Passover we would have the Seder and father read from the Haggada the exit of Jews from Egypt, we ate unleavened bread, matzot. For Purim the tradition was different and there were parties, children would go costumed from house to house, say some rhymes and get some money, giving children money for Purim was a tradition. There were many Jewish families in the neighborhood where we lived. And nearby was the Bjelave neighborhood, again with numerous Jewish families. I also knew about Predimaret, which was home to many Jews. And there was a place, Kurtižiku, where people would buy toys for children for Purim.

I never sang songs, I did not have a voice for signing, but I enjoyed listening to Sephardic romance songs. There were some people who were very good at singing, not professionals, but they would sing for our inner circles, like in „Matatja“. I very well remember the song „Adio, kerida“: „La kerija mas ke me vida“. I forgot the rest, it has been a long time since, but I still like to hear it to this day. Before the most recent war conflicts in former Yugoslavia, there was a US group performing at the Sarajevo Jewish Community, with a program of Sephardic music. There was a signing society „Lira“ in Sarajevo, which toured Europe signing that music.



We loved the Ladino language in our family. We mostly spoke it among ourselves. There were also people of other nationalities who worked with the Jews and knew and spoke Judeo-Espagnol, mostly in trade. Knowing the language was a help to me when I travelled abroad for hair-styling competitions. There are many words of contemporary Spanish that we did not know, because the Ladino was somewhat archaic, the Spanish of the fifteenth century, but it was helpful wherever I travelled.

In the family we heard many stories, anecdotes and proverbs that were passed on orally from one generation to the next. There were many proverbs and jokes and Judeo-Espagnol. For instance, if you wanted to tell someone that you do not understand, you would say: „No li digas al loku, ni munču ni poku“, meaning: „Do not tell the fool either too much or too little, he will get it wrong!“ Or: „A fly cannot get into a closed mouth“, meaning „keep your mouth shut and you cannot go wrong!“

Generally, the Jews fit in well into the Bosnian context, with its specific humor. We lived in harmony with all communities, our neighbors, everyone preserved their own traditions and respected those of others; I must say that it was true tolerance. That was so until 1941. But then the situation changed. It was unfavorable to know a Jew, be with them in the street – that is all common knowledge now. Traders in Bosnia learned the Ladino language from Jews. There were Muslims engaged in trading, in the Bašćaršija or Predimaret districts, who spoke Ladino better than I did. They knew everything, as they had to attract clients and do everything to please them.

In the wake of the Jews leaving (and especially the time of their persecution), the businessmen of Sarajevo regretted the fact that the Jews were leaving for Israel, aware that the trading would no longer be the same without the Jewish traders. Jews were very capable traders: both in buying and in selling. I remember an outstanding businessman, he was a Partisan veteran, he said that the trade in Sarajevo would not easily be recovered without the Jews, without the international contacts which they had had.

My father wanted me to be a carpenter, work together with him in his workshop, whereby he wanted to tie me to himself for life. I thought that things were going too slow for me, that it was stopping me from going the way that I wanted to go, and I openly told my father „I wish to do something else“.

So, I went to the hair-styling business. That was what I was doing until 1941, when a commissioner came and took over the shop from my master friseur. That master friseur by coincidence was together with me later in the Jasenovac concentration camp, where he was killed during an attempt to escape. He used to have a very nice shop in Marindvor. His name was Rafael Levi.

The commissioner was the typical alcoholic. He got the shop for nothing and he threw me out right away. After I survived the Holocaust and came back to Sarajevo, I found the shop of my master, it was still intact and would have been returned to him had he survived. His sister came, and the cooperative which we established purchased the shop back.

I was without the job only in 1941. It was in May or June, I cannot remember, as soon as the commissioner came. My master friseur, for whom I worked, was among the first to be taken away. His family was also taken away with him. It happened suddenly, overnight. Commissioners were assigned to Jewish shops, under the authorities of the Independent State of Croatia. The power was also German, but the Ustaša exercised it. From the Great Temple they took whatever they wanted or could take away. They even removed and took away the tin of the roof. I was in Sarajevo at the time and I saw: they were taking the tin away because it was of special quality. Fear and panic set in.

The commissioner came in the morning:

„Out! Out!“, he shouted.

Not a single Jew could get a job in Sarajevo. They were all fired, and the capital and shops were seized from those who had them. It was like this: the then authorities served the order, whereby the then owner was instructed to leave the shop, saying that the shop no longer belonged to him but to the one who came with the order. So, the commissioner came to our shop as well, with the order stating that the shop of the Levi now belonged to him, not to Levi any more. That was allegedly legal. No one came of his own will, without the order of the authorities. The authorities were strictly Ustaša. What followed was: moving around with the yellow armbands, arrests, rounding up. It was first the outstanding and rich people who were taken away. So, right away, about fifteen or twenty of the most prominent Jews were taken to Vraca (among them, I think, was also Avram Altarac, the initiator of the synagogue construction initiative) and they were executed there. That was the beginning of mass persecution and liquidation of Jews, confiscation of their property, and deportation. Initially, they were taken away in smaller groups, to the first camps: Jadovno, Kruščica near Travnik. Later, the deportations became massive.

My master friseur and his family were taken to Kruščica near Travnik. Some were taken to Kruščica, others to Jadovno. I saw how they were arrested in the streets. Before the arrests, they were taking us for forced labor: cleaning the streets, digging the trenches. There is a photograph, it was exhibited at the museum in Sarajevo after the war: Jews pulling the huge roller machine for paving of the streets. After 1945 the photograph was exhibited in the Jewish Community. I was taken for forced labor, in settlement

Svrakino Selo, next to the Skenderija center. We were digging, and we were guarded by a policeman. People were beaten when they could not or would not work. I was not beaten, I could do the work. I was young and strong, twenty-one, and this continued until October, when massive deportation to camps began. My transport, I think, had several hundreds of people in it.

First they took away the men, all of them to the military barracks used as the Sarajevo camp, after which they were loaded onto sealed wagons and sent directly to Jasenovac. The barracks were later, after the war, called „Maršal Tito“, and the buildings are still used as military barracks. That was where people were rounded up. They would come at night. We had backpacks ready, as we knew that they would take us away. Where to run? Some managed to go to Mostar, under fake names, or under veils. There were men who put on Muslim women's clothes to get away. And there were cases that a person would get a Muslim name, and a pass, in return for money. For instance, someone would go to Mostar and get there a pass under a Muslim name, for the person to leave town as a Muslim. Whoever got to Mostar was practically saved. Mostar was under Italian rule. They had a different attitude to the Jews. The pass was not cheap. Possibly we had enough money to get the passes, but we were not into it, we were not thinking about it, as it was three of us. We were also naive in thinking that we had our trades and we would be working somewhere and thus stay alive. That was naive. We believed that both the Germans and the Ustaša needed craftsmen and trades. However, they needed no one, they were massively taking everyone away. Without asking who was who. Whoever had something, it was confiscated. For instance, when we arrived to Jasenovac, they took away our money, rings, all that we had.

Before 1940 I never saw Jewish refugees in Sarajevo. I did hear that there were some from Germany, or from Vienna, that some did come as refugees, specifically to Zagreb. But to Sarajevo – possibly a couple of such families. That was what I heard, I did not see them. They say that in Zagreb there was quite a number of families from Vienna, already in 1939 or 1940. They had fled to Zagreb thinking that they would hide, but the same destiny awaited them there. We knew very little about what was happening with the Jews in Germany. Even what we did hear, we did not believe. Regretfully, we wrongly believed that as people of our trades we would have a different treatment. However, the Germans were intent of exterminating the Jews, and that would be it, no more of them. This intention of the Reich was wholeheartedly embraced by the Ustaša who enforced it even better than the Germans.

When I was taken away, I think it was 25 October 1941; we were at home, in the place where we lived, in Cara Ismaila street. The agents and the police came and took my father, brother and me. We had our backpacks

ready with the basics, because that was all that we were allowed to take, thinking that we were to keep what was ours. But they took it all. All the men from our neighborhood were rounded up at the same time, so it was a big transport of fathers, sons and grandsons. The women were taken away later, to Gradiška and Đakovo. My mother and two sisters were taken away in 1942. They were deported to Jasenovac in biting cold. Since there was no room to take them in, they were taken to Gradiška and they were told that they would be taken further to Đakovo. However, it is said that they were all liquidated along the way.

And we were taken to the barracks; within the barracks compound, there were rails, so wagons could approach. That was where we were packed into wagons, without toilette, without anything, and closed in. I think we travelled in the sealed wagons a day and a night. Inside, people relieved themselves, did everything. Some elderly people died on the way. In front of Jasenovac, we stood for a long time. It was dreadful. Then we were taken inside the Jasenovac camp. At the entry to the camp, everything that we had was taken from us: watches, rings, backpacks. It was Ustaša who did this, soldiers in Ustaša uniforms, with the big „U“ sign on the hats. Their formal name was Ustaša supervision service. The service consisted mostly of rural people, except for commanders. The Ustaša were mostly from Herzegovina. Dressed up, well fed, they were cruel in the way in which they treated us. I could hear from their talk and their songs that they were from Herzegovina. I knew exactly, and later on we heard who was from where. They mostly came from Široki Brijeg and Imotski.

Entry to Jasenovac camp did not only mean taking away of our belongings, but also beating. Different types of humiliation. For instance, they ask: „Who has got good handwriting?“

Being naïve, some people volunteered. Then they are taken to clean toilets. Then, they force us to run to village Krapje. Beating us along the way. Whoever could not run was killed.

While in camp Krapje every morning at 4 AM we went to work and came back very late. We were building an embankment, because there was risk of the rising Sava river flooding Jasenovac. It was dark when they took us there and also practically dark when they took us back. The food was some kind of porridge. The conditions were horrible. As the water level was rising, they had to transfer us to Jasenovac proper. Whether it was November or December, I am not sure. I think it was November when my brother and I, together with a big group of inmates, were transferred at night to Jasenovac.

It was the first snow. The winter 1941/1942 was very cold. The Sava river had frozen, it was that cold. And we were in Jasenovac, the part called *Cigłana* (Brick Factory), owned by a Serb, who managed to flee, where we

were put in the attic, right above the brick baking furnace. We were told that that day we would not be working, due to the extreme cold. However, since they were a bit drunk, they came with iron rods. I know that it was 14 November. They were randomly beating whoever was closest. My father was killed right there, my brother was wounded, while I managed to get out and hide and was not affected on that occasion. That was the beginning of one big liquidation campaign. Quite a number of people were killed there and then with the strong iron rods. Whoever was hit did not survive. There was no system at all in that cruel onslaught. They just stormed the room in which we were and started hitting. On that occasion I was not beaten, but my brother was, and he had to go and see a doctor. They bandaged his arm. I remembered the date; it was the day my father was killed.

There were things so terrible that they seem unbelievable. For instance, at that time they needed wood for fire, as heating fuel. I think it was in December. They forced us to go to the forest to get the wood. They tied us up as horses and we would, in pairs, pull the wood for 3–4 meters. Whoever could not pull, was beaten up and left there, in the forest, where he stopped. I remember that well. It was abominable.

We were wearing the same clothes that we came in – they did not take away our winter coats. You wore whatever shoes you had. It was terribly cold, and no place to get warm. The camp became full, and the Ustaša started liquidating inmates to make room for those who kept coming. The camp could take about 2,500 to 3,000 people. And new inmates kept arriving. The Ustaša were not bringing in only Jews, they rounded up whole Serb villages, with children in cradles. There were also many Roma. The Roma had a choir which entertained them by singing, and once they finished the performance the Ustaša killed them. Then the second group, and the third ... So they were killing the Roma, as well as Serbs, Jews and others.

Two of my uncles were there, of similar age as my father. It was said that those who cannot work would be transferred to another camp. And the work to which we were assigned was awful. We could not take off our shoes at night, because the winter was so ice-cold that the shoes would freeze overnight and we would not be able in the morning to put them on. So, you slept with your shoes on. These elderly people naively believed that they would be taken to some old people's homes. Contrary to their belief, the Ustaša loaded them on trucks and took them for liquidation.

I somehow managed not to be there where they would find me. In the brick factory, where the brick furnaces used to be, there were some kind of indents, like booths of a sort, in which about six of us would sleep. But, we did not sleep on our backs, rather we slept on the side, so that we could all fit in. While we were doing so, they would not come looking for us. They did

not think that someone could be sleeping there. I stayed there until leaving for Gradiška.

When they were asking for shoemakers and other craftsmen for Gradiška, they did not ask for friseurs. I applied as shoemaker. But, once I was there, a barber shop was opened.

In the camp there was a kitchen, a barber shop, tailor shop, ironing workshop, disinfection service – this was so both in Jasenovac and Gradiška. There were several working groups: outdoor workers, forest workers, farming group, etc. The Jasenovac camp had its economy, and people worked, for instance as coachmen, or feeding horses and doing other work.

We used to get up very early. When I was with the outdoor group we went to cut wood in the forest. Everyone had to do one meter of cut wood and pile it up neatly. I could never accomplish as much. They could have killed me, but I joined a group of three villagers, who were skillful in this work, so I was the fourth in their group. This way, jointly, in the course of the day we would get four meters of wood ready. We could not go back before it was done. The food that we got was almost nothing: carrots, or beat, or potatoes cooked in water, no salt added. Bread was distributed seldom and in very small quantities.

Roll calls and checks were performed every morning. If someone was missing, it was a must to determine where that person was. It did happen that someone would escape. Those were individual escapes. And they sometimes claimed that someone attempted to escape so that they could, as punishment, liquidate the person.

I saw with my own eyes how women and children were tortured and liquidated. I was once watching this from the attic, it was happening at the place called Granik on the Sava river. We were hiding in the attic and we saw them killing women and children. Inside the camp's perimeter, there was *Granik*, the place where boats would approach. There also they would kill the new-comers and throw their bodies into the Sava river. Mostly, they killed by slaughter, seldom with bullets, often also by means of iron rods. They would also throw the children high up in the air and intercept them on knives as they were falling down. One cannot believe something as dreadful, but it was happening. I saw it. We watched it from that attic.

Or you could witness the following: two officers are walking, and two inmates are moving. Then, one says to the other:

„I bet you I will shoot him right in the forehead!“

They place the inmate against the wall and shoot. If he hits the target he wins the bet, or the other one wins the bet if he misses. It happened often. By coincidence or good luck, it did not happen to me!



I remember the names of some Ustaša: Brkljačić, Alaga, the one who survived and was in Zagreb at the beginning of this last war – Šakić, Dinko Šakić. He was camp commander, a cruel and savage man. Such were also Maks Luburić and Majstorović.

I remember what happened when I first returned from Gradiška to Jasenovac. As we were approaching, the bells were ringing for all to assemble. What now? We were told that two inmates had escaped. However, these two (I knew them) did not escape, the Ustaša just pretended and presented it so. So, in retaliation, twenty or thirty people needed to be liquidated. We were lined up. This man Šakić, the camp commander, was there with his Ustaša. And Šakić told his subordinate:

„You know what, let us first have all those who lived with these two and slept with these two, come forward.“

Inmates used to sleep in barracks, in groups of ten or fifteen. I slept in an attic, in the artists' group, while those people slept at the place where they worked. There was a carpentry workshop and they slept there.

„Bring here those who slept with them!“, he said.

And people did come forward; they did not know what was coming. But they were too few, the Ustaša wanted more for liquidation.

„Give me the roll call list“, said Šakić.

I was standing in the line, and he was calling names:

„Abinjon!“

I was second on the list. As he called my name, I was dumb-founded. I did not step forward. Another person was called after me, and he did step forward. Someone reported him, and not me. Šakić said:

„Come forward, you!“

And he got this person out of the line for liquidation. They selected from the list some twenty or twenty-two persons, as far as I remember. They liquidated them the same day, as retaliation for the alleged escape. At that time my brother was in the leather plant, he had already heard that I had been taken away and liquidated. What happened in fact was that I was struck with such fear, my feet became numb, I just simply did not respond. I knew what was to follow, that all those selected would be liquidated, because such retaliation followed every escape. That was how I survived.

I do not know whether Šakić personally, with his own hand, liquidated people – he was the camp commander. I do not believe so, or maybe he did it just for the fun, with the pistol. But I know for fact that he was horrible, just as Maks Luburić – that I know for sure. Whenever Maks Luburić came to Gradiška or to Jasenovac, by evening 500 people -Jews, Serbs, Roma, did not make any difference – would have to be liquidated. Right away. I do not know if he killed

them directly, I never saw it. I did see officers killing people around the camp personally; for instance, Alaga or Brkljačić (he enjoyed shooting at inmates). I also know that Majstorović did the actual killing. I did not see it myself, but I heard that he did, that he had a keen interest in liquidation of inmates.

In the camp there was a barrack with Serb children. It was children of six, seven or eight years old, whom they dressed in Ustaša suits and wanted to re-educate them in the Ustaša spirit. And I know that in Jasenovac they sang songs. However, those children also disappeared suddenly, they were liquidated. With respect to liquidation of children I remember one event, which happened when I was in Gradiška. A great number of Serb families had arrived. Under the deal with Germany, the Ustaša had the task to send labor to Germany. Mothers were separated from the children. We watched it, it was sad and devastating. Mothers would not separate from their children, and they separated them by force. A great number of men and women were taken to Germany to work. All of us in the camp were aware that there was the cyclone room. At that time there were about 400–500 children. They were all killed by the cyclone. I think it happened at the beginning of 1943.

One of the senior officers in Jasenovac was Pićili, who constructed the extermination furnace, built by the inmates. However, the incinerated bodies gave such a pungent stench that they had to stop it. For a while, they disposed of the bodies in the brick furnace and incinerated them there.

I never had the opportunity to see the details, but I did hear about the Pićili's furnace being fueled and used for this purpose. It was something like a crematorium, built after the German ones. However, these camps did not have the equipment or the resources like the Germans did, and it was a rather primitive design, so the stench was so bad. People used to say that human bodies were used to make soap. That was a rumor in Jasenovac. It is a fact, however, that the Ustaša liquidated great numbers of people in location Gradi-na, just across from Jasenovac, on the other bank of the Sava river. There were big groups taken for execution there, especially at the time before the closure of the camp. Every night there were mass liquidations in the camp itself, in the location Granik, and people were also taken across the river by ferry for execution in big numbers. There were the grave-diggers, always changing. The grave-diggers would dig, throw those killed into the graves, and the Ustaša would then throw the grave-diggers in as well into those same graves. The next day would be the next liquidation, another group of people, another group of grave-diggers. That was the intention – to liquidate the camp in this manner.

At that time I was in the barber shop. With me was a man named Jovo, a Serb. The Ustaša asked for barbers every day. The outdoor works had stopped; the only thing left to do was to liquidate the camp. It was already February and March 1945, it was by that time obvious that the end of the war was near.

They wanted gradually to liquidate the camp, winding it down to smaller scale day after day. All they did was eat, drink, get intoxicated, and kill. And they asked every day for a new barber to go and shave them. After doing his work for the day the barber would be killed. Thus, on 21 April out of the total of twenty barbers that there were altogether only four or five of us remained. That was when our chief, Jovo Jagoda, warned me to get myself out of sight:

„Get yourself out of sight when it is time to go there, because otherwise I will have to assign you to the task.“

I did manage to not be there, so I did live to see the evening of 21 April 1945. There were still about 800 women in the women's camp, while in the men's camp the number was about 1,000. On that day, 21 April, they took all the women away. The women were told to take their belongings with them as they were being moved to another camp. However, the women knew exactly that they were taken for liquidation. They did not take their belongings with them; some were even singing. They knew they were going to death. That evening the Ustaša executed 800 women in the Jasenovac camp alone!

We did not witness the liquidation of the women with our own eyes, but we did see from our built barracks how they were setting on fire the barracks used for women until that time. That evening they wanted to liquidate us as well. However, they could not physically manage, apart from the 800 women, to have us all killed as well. They left it for the next morning.

Tomorrow, however, thanks to our party organization, we manage to break out of the camp. Although unarmed, we took their machine –gun. The Ustaša were firing at us, even threw bombs and, protected by the machine gun we managed to get to the river Sava and escape. Of the 1,060 inmates, in this break-through, only 60 of us managed to get out alive. It was pure coincidence that I was not hit. I cannot say that it was heroism of any kind. We who survived were hiding in the forest for two or three days. There were some villagers who brought food to us in the forest. At that time to XXI Serbian National Liberation Brigade came and we joined it immediately. We were completely exhausted. I weighed about 38 kilograms!

In the Gradiška camp there was the Tower. In the camp Stara Gradiška there were solitary cells for women, with horrendous conditions. In the Tower there were women of all nationalities. There was among them a commander, Maja, and a senior lieutenant, Vrban. When this woman Maja first time killed an inmate (she shot her, and generally she used to take the inmates for execution), Vrban kissed her, congratulated her and commanded her on having become a true Ustaša. That was what the Tower was like.

From Jasenovac to Gradiška we drove about 45 minutes. The transport was always by trucks. It was a privilege to be in Gradiška. The prison itself was a built structure; in contrast to the barracks of Jasenovac used for sleep-

ing where at times there was even snow inside. It was wooden barracks, and the winter of 1941 was very cold, therefore the conditions were extremely difficult. In Gradiška they also took people for liquidation. When one group of inmates in Gradiška managed to escape, the Ustaša killed fifty inmates in retaliation. They lined them against the wall and shot them. In Gradiška there was a part of the camp, called settlement K, where a group of inmates were in solitary cells, left to starve. These inmates were mostly Croats, communists. They too on one occasion attempted to escape. Their attempted break through was not successful, there were fire arms all around them. They were all killed in the attempt.

The Tower was an infamous women's camp. Women were brought there in great numbers. Jews, Serbs, Croats. Also women with small children. Liquidations happened in a structured, successive and planned manner.

If I could not see the liquidations with my own eyes, there were signs whereby I would know that they happened. First – they would be taken away; second – their clothes would be coming back; third – they were no longer in the camp, and they could not be anywhere else.

I knew that Ustaša did horrendous atrocities. You could not see them; if you saw them you would be killed. As for the manner of killing it included just shooting people on the spot, beating them up, there was a lot of that. One of the infamous camp sections was camp 3C. That was where beastly beating happened. The inmates were constantly inside wires. That was where the most often took Partisans of Chetniks, if they captured them. Or, a person could be thrown there as form of punishment, be sent to camp 3C. And then you just stayed there, you starved to death and never came out. In the camp we could only see individual murders. If you witnessed liquidation, you were liquidated as well.

The camp staff were mostly older inmates who managed the labor tasks, who was to do what. They took the inmates to work assignments, to gather wood, to do construction work, they would call the roll call, check who was doing what. So, they were inmates. And as for the supposed privileges that they had – what kind of privilege could they have had? With the exception of possibly getting somewhat better food and not having to do the actual work. But they were all liquidated as well. None of them, as far as I know, had survived until 1945. I remember when one grave-digger commander, who even enjoyed the great trust of the Ustaša, was liquidated. I also remember the names of some Jews who were camp staff in Jasenovac: Bruner, Klajn, and a person named Leopold, and also Štajner. They were among the first inmates. The only privilege they had was that they possibly received a little more food or bread (getting some bread was a big thing!) and that they did not have to work.

In Jasenovac there was a barber shop for the Ustaša in which inmates worked. And when liquidations happened, the barbers were the first to be liquidated. So, no one could survive. The Ustaša did not want witnesses of their atrocities. If anyone avoided liquidation, it was pure coincidence; it was just that at that moment the Ustaša did not manage to get everyone executed.

During our break through we were getting close to an Ustaša who, out of fear, could not get the bullets out of his shot-gun. They were very stunned by our break through. So much has been written about it; I used to buy all the numerous books whatever they came out, and there were many. And many books by survivors. Now much of it is gone. People passed away. Now, in 1996, I am 75, and I still remember certain things. There is a man in Zagreb, he is in hospital now, he used to remember everything. He is in the old people's home, very weak. He memorized names, he wrote, he knew everything much better than I do. His name is Jakica Finci. I did not memorize names.

After the war it was painful for me to give statements about the dead, whose death I did not witness, although I know they are not around anymore.

I was under a great burden after the war making statements about the dead, testifying about the Ustaša. Any time they catch one, you are called in to make a statement about who he was, what he did. I already got tired of all that. Can you imagine what it means to have a family and then remain the only one alive? I want finally to be left alone! It used to be very difficult, always bringing back the tormenting memories. It is not simple, after having your parents and three siblings, to be alone. When I was taken to the concentration camp I was 21, and when I got out 25, completely alone, without anybody or anything. And I had to make these statements, declaring people dead. And then the trials, it was very troubling. Having to prove things. But how can I prove that I saw someone being killed? On the other hand, it is known how many people were brought there. Where are all those people? And when this man (Franjo Tuđman) wrote in the book „Bespuća“ („Wandering the Historical Reality“) – that it was 59,000 – on the other hand we know that in Sarajevo alone there were 11,000 Jews of barely 1,000 had survived.

As for the well-known Jews, I know that painter Ozmo was executed in Jasenovac. I know that some other people known as intellectuals were executed. There was a camp section in Jasenovac proper, called *Zvonara* (the Bell Tower), where the distinguished individuals were brought and executed. There they liquidated just like that, based on rumors. It happened that Maček was there, for fifteen days, maybe a month. I knew the inmates who took him food. No one dared say anything about it.

One year they bombed us in Jasenovac and shouted along:  
„There you go, it is your people who are killing you!“

A man from Sarajevo was killed during it.

Some picture postcards have been preserved that I had given to the Museum after the war. The writing on the postcards stated the first and family name, the group in which you were, and what you were asking to be sent to you if possible. In Zagreb I had an aunt, my mother's sister, from whom I received a package, before she and her family were also taken away. Other people were also receiving packages; we no longer had anyone to send them. People also say that some relief was arriving from the Red Cross, but very little, and it was not distributed to us. A few times we received packages from the Jewish Community of Zagreb, from which the Ustaša would first choose and take out whatever they liked. It was not sent to my name, but the community did send something, it had the contact, it functioned as a Jewish Community. For a while, the Jewish Community of Sarajevo was also functional, but briefly. It seems that later everything was liquidated.

After we broke through from Jasenovac, we were in the forest for two days. There were people in my group who were from the surrounding villages and knew the area. Some fifteen or twenty of us gathered in one place, all from the same break through. One of our group from the local village went to the village and told the villagers that we were there, that we were starved, that we had been starving also in Jasenovac, and that now for two days already we had had no food. The local women brought us some food at night, so that we would have something to eat. And one evening they told us to come into the house and they would give us some warm milk and corn porridge. We went. We set up the guard outside. But when the word came that the Germans were coming, we had to withdraw back into the forest. And so it was for two or three days. Until the XXI Serbian Division came, which let us join them.

I was with Jakica Finci, we were going to the Lipik hospital. The Partisans took our weapons and sent us to the hospital. I stayed in hospital several days, recovered a bit and came to Zagreb. At that time there was the National Commission for War Crimes, and there were many arrested Ustaša who "changed clothes". We recognized them and provided information about who was who among them. For a while we were helping the authorities in this manner to uncover the truth. Later I went to Sarajevo.

When I arrived to Sarajevo I had nothing. Luckily, Emerik Blum was there (he was also in the Jasenovac camp, and had also escaped). He was involved with the new authorities and he helped us get the basic clothes and accommodation, with a friend of his. There was nothing to eat. I came to the Army HQ in Sarajevo, to work, so that I could get some food. Of my whole family, there were a couple of cousins with the Partisans.

Some returnees came back to Sarajevo six months after the war, some a year after the end of the war. Then we established a cooperative, I was one



of the founders. I also worked in the cooperative. The Army was willing to keep me and help me because I had nobody. I refused. Afterwards I took additional schooling, and worked for a time as trade union official. One of my cousins came back; she was a Partisan Veteran, another one who was with the Partisans since 1943 also came back. And for a while I stayed with them. I went back to my craft. Later I married a Croatian woman who had a child.

I returned to Sarajevo in 1945. My whole greater family had perished. Of my more distant family, two cousins came back. One of them was married to an Orthodox Christian. He was killed right away in 1941 and she stayed in Sarajevo. It was the three of us that had survived of the whole greater family.

My father had a brother who had had five sons. They all perished, some in concentration camps and some with the Partisans. No one survived. I survived by coincidence. My father was killed at the beginning, in 1941, in Jasenovac. My brother was in the raw hide plant "Kožara". They, too, in the night of 22 April, organized an escape. Since they were processing hide, they all had poison, made for each one, in case that they get caught. Everyone had the poison in his pocket. A man who survived the escape from the raw hide plant is now living in Israel. His brother was escaping together with me, and was killed, and my brother was escaping with him, was wounded and took the poison. So, no one of my direct family survived. I did. By coincidence. There was no logic to it. Simply, it did not hit you and you stayed alive.

After the war I was an active member of the Jewish Community of Sarajevo, especially after my retirement. While I was still working, I did not have so much time to spend at the community. I was director of the cooperative and had the great responsibility for eight branches and 350 employees in Sarajevo.

But, after I retired in 1981, not a day went by without me going to the Jewish Community.

In 1992 I moved from Sarajevo to Split, where my wife and I are living in a small apartment in the old people's home. If she were in good health, things would be easier.

What most helped me in life was my positive outlook. Without it, I do not know how I would have survived. It sustained me and enabled me to start building my happiness. I never had any difficulties with my wife's first child and the child that we had together. My wife's daughter completed her education and our son completed master studies. My greatest wish was to spend some more time with our grandchildren, but I do not know if that would materialize. They are in Toronto, Canada, where they went as refugees during this most recent war. He also married a Croatian woman. They have two children. His wife is working, she is an engineer, while my son is master of economics. It is only my grandchildren that I miss. I thought that in my old age I would be with the children, but I do not know if that wish will come true.

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*Jonas FISCHBACH*

LJUBO MILOŠ: „I WANT TO SHOOT DIRECTLY  
INTO THE SERBIAN HEART!“



*Jonas was born in 1901 in Filch, in present-day Ukraine, of father Lav (Leib, La-  
jbiš, Leon) and mother Sofija-Soša, née Fin-  
kelman. In that village his father worked in a  
saw mill.*

*He attended his elementary school in  
several places, and grammar school in Vienna  
and Travnik. He graduated from the Medical  
Faculty in Zagreb.*

*Jonas had four sisters – Klara, Lota, Tila  
and Berta.*

*He specialized in internal medicine and  
worked in a number of medical institutions.  
After the liberation he worked as specialized  
doctor at the department of internal diseases of the Main Military Hospital  
in Belgrade.*

*From his marriage to Bjanka, née Sabo, he has a daughter Rut.*

In the place where I was born there was no school and I went to a private Jewish school. Namely, there was a teacher, a Jew, who taught Jewish children the Bible. We all used to sit at the same table, the teacher at the top, and we children (about ten of us, of different age) on his left and right side. At that time I was about eight years old. By the time I was ten my father thought I should go to the grammar school. However, I did not speak Polish, which was the language of instruction in grammar school, so I had to quickly learn the language. Without adequate knowledge of the language I

still managed to enroll in the grammar school, and after attending for about a year I was speaking Polish quite well.

After that my father moved to another town, again in an Austrian province, Galicia, the town of Holodenka, where he again enrolled me in grammar school, but soon again he decided to move me to another, in the same town but close to our apartment. This grammar school was Ukrainian, so there was need for me to learn Ukrainian language. After I completed the second and third grade of this grammar school the war broke out and we all had to flee. All Jews, among them my father with the family, fearing the coming of the Russian army, fled westward.

That was 1916, and we were fleeing on an open horse-drawn wagon. My task was demanding: I was sitting in the back and when the wagon went downhill I was in charge of breaking. Doing this task gave me pride. After travelling for several days we arrived to present day Czechoslovakia, to the town Nikolsburg, where the Austrian authorities got us off the wagons and put us in barracks used for quarantine. I remember the wooden beds and straw mattresses full of bed-bugs. It was so hideous that I preferred to sleep on the floor, while my mother slept on the bare kitchen table, since she could not stand the bed-bugs. We stayed there for about eight days in quarantine, and afterwards the Austrian authorities packed us into railway carriages and unloaded us in present day Slovenia, placing us as refugees in different homes, mostly on the outskirts of the town called Konjice, in farming houses in the area and in small sheds that the owners had in their vineyards. That is where the family lived until the collapse of the Austrian empire.

But I was not there all the time. Father managed to get me to a grammar school in Vienna. For a while I lived with a family in Vienna, but the flat that the family lived in was in fact an old house again full of bed-bugs. Most of the night I would sit up at the window, because that was where there were the least bed-bugs. In Vienna I completed the fourth and fifth grade of grammar school.

The collapse of the Austrian empire came in 1918. In the meanwhile my father started working in Bosnia, in the vicinity of Travnik, in a saw mill, because he was an expert in saw mills. Thus we came to Bosnia and I enrolled in the Jesuit grammar school in Travnik. I did not speak Croatian, but knowing Polish and Ukrainian helped. The management of the Jesuit grammar school did me a favor and set a deadline for me to learn Croatian. In a matter of several months I managed to get some knowledge of the language. Initially, I just attended classes, as I could not answer in the Croatian language. But, in half a year, my knowledge was good enough for me to equally participate in the instruction. I graduated from grammar school in Travnik in 1921.

Subsequently I went to Zagreb and enrolled to study at the Medical Faculty, living most of the time in the students' dormitory. Near the end of my studies, my parents moved to Zagreb and the last year of my studies I lived in an apartment.

I went on to specialize internal medicine and did my internship as a volunteer. I never received any salary or compensation for my work at the Zagreb clinic.

At that time I managed to get citizenship in Sarajevo and I found a job there in a health insurance society „Merkur“, a society similar to the workers' insurance, but in this case intended only for civil servants. I worked as a doctor in this society until the war. When the war broke out, the society was not functional any longer, most people went to the army, although formally the society continued to operate.

It was exactly on 15 October, at night, when the Gestapo agents in civilian clothes woke up the whole family and got us outside.

They loaded my wife, my seven year old daughter and me onto an open truck. We waited there the whole night until the truck was filled with Jews who were also taken out of bed by the agents in the area where I lived.

At dawn I was taken with the other men to the railway station and loaded onto closed cargo carriages, completely empty. The same day I was taken to Jasenovac.

My wife and daughter were separated from me and were taken, with other women and children, to the women's camp, in Sarajevo. They were fortunate that the Partisans kept attacking the railway station, and there were not enough railway carriages. They spent several days in some barracks and were subsequently released, with the intention to be rounded up again soon. The women, of course, fled whichever way they could, and that was how my wife and daughter managed to get away. My wife pretended to be German, using the pretext of her Garman family name and she managed to get to Zagreb by train, leave our daughter with my relatives, and alone she fled to Split.

Once in Jasenovac, we were unloaded on the platform. We were made to walk on foot to the town itself, to the Christian Orthodox church where we were closed in. That church had been used previously also for an overnight for other transports, from other places. You can only imagine what it looked like, as it was used for overnight stay by some thousands of prisoners before us. Churches do not have toilets, no place for prisoners to relieve themselves, so they did it wherever they could. Once we arrived there, I had to look for a place to sit, not lie down, as everything was contaminated with feces, because people like us used to come there after a whole day's trip in closed

carriages and had to relieve themselves upon arrival as best they could. I do not remember how I managed this need. I did not defecate, but I must have urinated somewhere, probably against some wall, it could not have been different.

The second day they took us to the Jasenovac concentration camp. At the entry the Ustaša took away our belongings. Every one of us had a bundle of belongings, a small suitcase, or a package, bigger or smaller, with clothes, shoes, the basics. They took practically everything. I remember that I had a lot of things, and all they left was two shirts and socks. They also let me keep my doctor's bag with some medicines and bandages in it. I said it was a doctor's bag and they let me keep it. They had respect for doctors. I had no valuables with me or on me. Then they got us into the barracks.

The barrack that we were put in was a big two-storey building. The bunk beds had three levels: the first on the floor, the second about a meter and a half higher, and the third at some two meters from the floor. Those who had a blanket used it to lie down on, but most of us did not so we lay on bare wooden planks.

The barracks were large and housed several hundreds of inmates. When a new transport arrived, it would be packed full. I was on the bed of about one meter high. Everything was so packed full that we pressed literally next to each other. Later we were put also in other barracks, with more space. The number of inmates quickly reduced, they were either executed or died of starvation. After a month or two there was room for everyone.

When I arrived to the camp, there were many inmates who had come earlier and were already completely exhausted. They died of starvation at incredible speed. The number of inmates in our barrack after two months was cut to half.

There was much killing going on in the camp.

The food was utterly scarce. We were given some food once or twice a week and we had to work all day long. While I was in the camp there were no capos there. In every barrack there was one of the inmates which would be the equivalent of the capo in other camps. But in contrast to capos, that was just an inmate like the rest of us. The difference was that this person passed on the orders of the command or the camp management about what was to be done on a specific day. Otherwise, this person lived the same life as we did. He also starved, had the same accommodation, and suffered just like the rest. And he was full of lice, horrendous. Just like the rest of us. In the Jewish barracks there was a Jew, who communicated such orders. We were not mixed. Jews were in Jewish barracks, the Serbs in Serb barracks, and the Roma and Croats in other barracks.

I did not do any physical labor. As a doctor I was spared. I had a little card, attached to my chest, with the symbol of the Red Cross and the writing: doctor. That saved me. That is what I need to be thankful for staying alive. I could move around the camp freely. I was under no obligation to do any work, but I had to go with a group of inmates who were doing outdoor work. Thus, I too was on my feet all day long, like the others, the difference being that the others also had to do shovel work because they were supposedly building a river embankment. The inmates were building the embankment by shoveling earth near the river and moving it with the same shovels to five or six meters from the water line, to the embankment. The shovels were the only tools they had. As a doctor, I was obliged to be there.

I could not extend any help to other inmates, not because I was forbidden from doing so, but because I had no medicines or bandaging material whatsoever. I was just formally present there. I had my doctor's bag, which was empty. Only my stethoscopes were inside it. The only privilege that I had in the camp as a doctor was that I was exempt from physical labor. I could not stay or rest in our barrack, because whoever was found in the barracks during the day was liquidated immediately.

Every morning they would appoint people – inmates – to tour the barracks, and in return they were given some more food. Whoever they found there, lying, incapable of going to work, was taken out in front of the barrack. I had seen people who had come to the camp before me, terribly emaciated, skin and bone, many of them incapable of standing up – as they were being taken outside. Then the trucks would come. They would be piled on the truck one on top of the other and taken away, we did not know where. An hour or two later, the truck would come back, empty. Later we heard that those people, half alive, were thrown into the Sava river.

I did not see Jewish women and children brought to the camp. I did see Serb women and children. There were separate barracks for the Serbs, one or two. There were not many. Ustaša very quickly liquidated the Serbs who were brought to the camp. And they brought them in very often. In their barrack was a Serb student who acted as doctor. He would from time to time come to me to ask for medicines, but we did not have any either. I asked him – how come there is only one barrack for the Serbs and all the others for the Jews?

He said:

„My barrack also is not always full. They are all the time taken away and executed.“

As one never knew how many were alive in that barrack or how many were executed, they often received food even for those who were already dead; therefore in terms of food their conditions were better than ours. The



food was distributed by barracks, the same quantity for every barrack. They had enough food because they were fewer, my colleague medical technician would sometimes get for me some cooked beans intended for the Serbs. I was so hungry that I ate with a hearty appetite, although I had a sensitive stomach and was aware that I would later suffer stomach ache.

The inmates were building the embankment every day. As they were always digging in the same place, they had dug huge holes in the ground. At the time of rain those holes would fill up with water. The Ustaša would entertain themselves by pushing people working near those holes inside, into the water, and would not let them come out. The people would try to get hold on to the edges of the pit with their hands and the Ustaša would step on their hands and laugh. They would not let them come out, until they drowned.

Near the embankment I saw another horrendous scene. There was a newly arrived inmate, I did not know where he had come from. He was a Jew, tall, well built, strong. One of the guards felt challenged by the look of this tall and strong man, so the Ustaša got him on the ground and started jumping on top of him. He continued to jump until he killed him, just because he was so tall and well built.

I was all distressed and embittered so, forgetting caution, I asked the Ustaša who jumped on the man:

„Why are you killing the man?“

„I was ordered so“, he replied.

„Who ordered you?“, I went on.

„There, go there“, he said pointing his hand „over there is my commander, go and ask him and that will be the last you ever asked anyone anything.“

I was so excited and I started towards that commander, who was sitting on the bank of the river a little distance away and playing cards with another officer. When I came close and saw him I became aware of what the Ustaša had just told me – that that would be my last time ever to ask anything ...

I turned around and went back. I blended in with the inmates who were building the embankment. I took off the “doctor” sign, took a shovel, and started digging. That was how I hid because I was concerned that the Ustaša would come after me. I did see from some distance away that he was standing there as if looking where I was. But, there were hundreds of people around and he could not spot me.

One day, when I was in my barrack where, formally, the infirmary was also located, one of the guards came and asked me to go with him to the Serb barrack. I did so. The barrack was empty. There was the earthen floor

and on it, on some rags, there was a woman, half-naked. She was dying. On her naked breasts there was an infant. An infant breast-feeding on the dead mother. I turned to the Ustaša and asked:

„Why did you get me here?“

„Help, doctor“, he said.

There was nothing I could do. The mother was dead. There was nothing I could do and nothing to use to save the infant.

The camp that I was in was close to the brick plant. The inmates were lining up bricks and wood for heating, the brick factory burnt wood. One of the employees of the brick factory, later I learned that he was an engineer, entertained himself by killing people who worked there. He came up to an inmate and said:

„Turn around!“

The inmate would turn, he had to obey, and the man would take a log and kept hitting the man on the back until he was killed. I saw that with my own eyes. He could have killed me as well, but did not. I suppose he too was impressed by the cardboard plate on my chest with the Red Cross sign which gave me the wild courage to witness such events.

Once I went to the Ustaša command and asked them to give me the big box full of package wrapping material which I saw next to one of the barracks. The packaging was canvas used to wrap packages intended for us inmates which, regretfully, were never delivered to us. Later, I cut the canvas into strips and used them as bandages. On one of the wrappings I found my name. My sister from Zagreb had sent a food package for me. I was never given a single package and thus I concluded that other people were not getting their packages either.

Within the camp there was a small barrack. The people working in the brick factory kept their tools there. The barrack had an attic and some inmates, five or six of them, were hiding there. They wanted to skip the mandatory labor. I went there because I heard there were some sick persons among them. They were all Jews. They were lying down, all dressed, on the earth floor, although it was an attic. Inmates never took their clothes off. I too was dressed all the time, in a suit and a winter coat. None of us were given camp clothes. We were not even assigned numbers. No one in Jasenovac had an assigned number. When I got closer to them, one of them recognized me. He was from Sarajevo, just like me. He said:

„Doctor, I cannot open my mouth.“

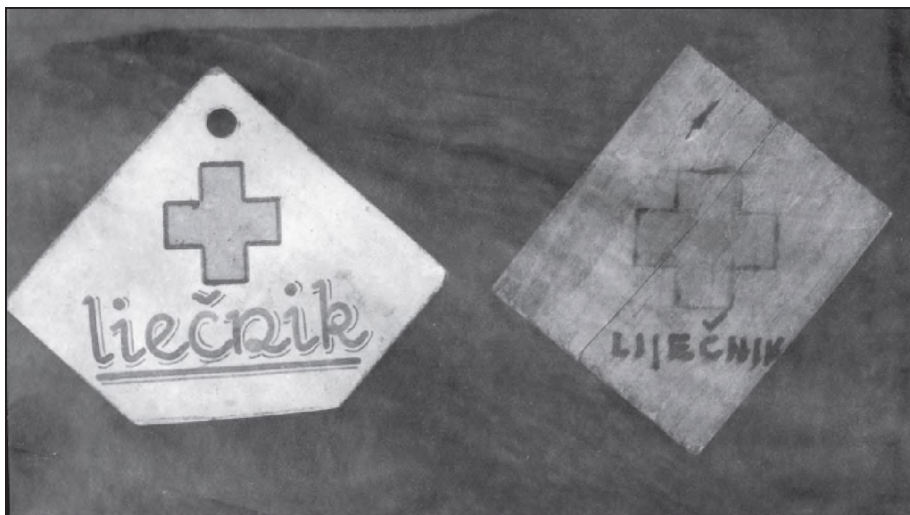
He was speaking through his teeth, I could hardly understand him. As a doctor, I understood right away that it was a case of tetanus. Tetanus is a disease acquired through wounds, and those working with earth are

especially susceptible to it. It is a horrible disease, resulting in death in dreadful pain.

The barracks were controlled every morning. There were so many people who were so weak, due to poor nutrition and exhausting work, that they could not get up from bed. They were all collected, put on piles and loaded onto trucks and thrown into the Sava river. There was no helping them.

It was impossible to escape.

I saw Maks Luburić, when he was inspecting the camp with a group of German and Ustaša officers. He walked through the camp and we were looking at him.



*The mark for doctors worn in Jasenovac by JONAS FIŠBAH*

One day, while we were doing outdoor work, a camp alarm sounded, signaling for all of us to go back. It was unusual, for us to return to camp in the middle of the day. The camp commander was Ljubo Miloš, an infamous butcher. He got all the inmates in one spot, in front of the barracks. Facing us he placed an army unit with machine guns aimed at us. Ljubo Miloš came in front of us and delivered a short speech. He said:

„Something unheard of has happened. An inmate shot at an Ustaša.“

The inmate was a Serb. Later we heard that it was the chief of the Serb barrack and that was how he was in contact with the camp management. He somehow gained the trust of the management and of Ljuba Miloš. He spent time with the camp command service. He was even allowed to carry a gun, to defend himself against his own people from his barrack, who threatened to kill him because he was working in the interest of the Ustaša. He drank

with them and played cards. And it happened that while they were drinking and playing cards they got into a fight, pulled their guns and the inmate shot at the Ustaša.

Ljubo Miloš said that it must not be allowed for an inmate to shoot at a Croat, an Ustaša, and that in retaliation they would execute twenty Serbs. He invited the guard of the Serb barrack to pick those twenty inmates for execution. The man said he could not pick anyone.

„If you cannot pick, than you will be among the twenty“, said Ljubo Miloš.

„Fine“, said the inmate.

So he added him to the group of twenty Serbs that he himself picked.

But, seemingly, this was not enough.

He invited the chief of one of the Jewish barracks and told him to pick ten Jews to be added to the group for execution.

The chief of the Jewish barrack said that he could not do it.

„In that case you come here“, he said.

So, he too was added to the group.

Then he remembered that there was more. He ordered that Jews who had arrived from Austria be brought there. It was a group of Jewish refugees that the Ustaša arrested across Croatia and brought there.

He lined them all up, took a shotgun and one by one executed all of them. He shot every single one at the heart.

Those men just fell one on top of the other. When he stopped, he said:

„Come on, doctors, check if they are dead!“

There were a few more doctors besides me. People were lying, shot, on piles. I watched them. You recognize a dead man immediately; it is not difficult to tell. All of a sudden from one of those piles a Serb got up and said:

„I am alive.“

He was hit but not dead.

Upon seeing this Ljubo Miloš was infuriated.

„Come here!“ he said.

He angrily got hold of him, started tearing his upper clothes off and said:

„I want to shoot directly at a Serb heart.“

He put the gun against his chest and fired.

I remember many of those who were with me. Near the end of my stay in Jasenovac I started writing down the names of those who had died. Most of them died of exhaustion, starvation, tetanus – the notebook with the names was left with my friends from Sarajevo, Kabiljo and Danon. God

knows if they are still alive. In the notebook there were many names of Sephardic Jews from Sarajevo.

In January 1942 I was transferred to Stara Gradiška.

In the Gradiška camp I met Emerik Blum. In Gradiška there was an infirmary and a factory in which the inmates worked. Those inmates were not killed, they were even fed quite well. I suppose they needed them. Among them was Emerik Blum. If they had known about him, they would have taken him away and killed him immediately, because he was a well-known communist. He was a good friend of mine.

There was a room that was furnished as infirmary, with five or six beds. We, doctors working there, would sleep in those beds at night. I let Blum sleep with me in the same bed at nights and during the day he hid under the bed. That was how I kept him alive for a while.

Blum knew about engines and was in charge of maintaining the boats. Once he managed to fix a boat and asked to do a test drive on the Sava river. They let him do it, gave him the boat and a guard, an Ustaša. As soon as he was out in the river he managed to overturn the boat and escape by swimming.

I was in Stara Gradiška until April 1942, when I was released from the camp, with the obligation to report to Banja Luka to the Institute for Suppression of Endemic Syphilis which was widespread in Bosnia among the rural population, especially among the Muslims. When I left the camp, I was lucky to get the typhoid. I was released from the camp at the request from the Institute for Suppression of Endemic Syphilis, thanks to the persistent appeals from my family.\*

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\*See the testimony of Berta Postružnik on pages 283–290 of this book. According to the data known to the editors, dr Fišbah was assigned to work in the primary health care centre in Maglaj. When Maglaj was liberated in 1944 by the National Liberation Army, he was assigned the post of manager of the hospital of the 39th Krajina division. After the liberation of the country he worked as specialist doctor at the department of internal diseases of the Central Military Hospital in Belgrade.

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Eva ĐORĐEVIĆ

## SCARS IN THE WOUNDED HEART



*E*va Đorđević, née Ižak, was born on 27 July 1927 in the small town Mako, in Hungary, of father Dezider, born in 1890 in Seleuš, southern Banat, and mother Marta, née Glik (Glück), born in 1907 in Apatfalva, Hungary.

*Her father was killed by the Nazis during the first year of the war. Many of her family members perished in the Holocaust.*

*After returning from the camp to Belgrade she completed her secondary education and graduated from the Medical Faculty. Along with attending the school for children*

*affected by the war, she was working as interpreter for the British doctors at the Clinic for Plastic Surgery in Belgrade.*

*From her marriage to Dušan Đorđević, psychologist, professor of the University of Belgrade, she has three daughters. She also has two grandsons. She worked as specialist of professional medicine in Pančevo, until her retirement in 1982.*

My father was a grains trader and my mother a housewife. From 1927 to 1938 we lived in Bucharest, Romania, where my father worked in the branch of a company engaged in grains trading, with headquarters in Vienna, Austria. At the time of the Anschluss, the German occupation of Austria, my father lost his job on the grounds of being a Jew. In Romania we lived as Yugoslav citizens with residence permits. At the time when my father lost his job, the government of Romania was pro-Fascist, and denied



my father further residence in the country, so in April 1938 we came to Belgrade, where my father got a job. We lived in the neighborhood of Dorćol, in the vicinity of Bajloni market place.

There were many Jews living in Dorćol, which is why this district was very much the target of Nazi bombing on 6 April 1941. The building that we lived in, address Cara Dušana 73/I, was hit hard by a devastating bomb and, having received multiple hands and face injuries, we could hardly manage to get to the basement which was used as shelter. We could not return to our apartment due to the damages and the destroyed staircase. As my father had relatives in Pančevo, on 11 April 1941 we went to stay with relatives, just hours before the Pančevo bridge was blown up. Until that day we were hiding around Belgrade, in different shelters. Father reported to the army every day. The army always sent him back, saying that they would call for him if needed. Thus, on 12 April 1941 we woke up to a German occupation. That is when the Nazi atrocities against the Jews began: the mandatory wearing of the yellow armband with the Magen David and the word „Jude“, prohibition to go to public places, limited movement in the streets, forced labor. The worst was the humiliation of the Jews and constant fear of raids and executions.

During the night between 13 and 14 August 1941 the Nazis stormed our flat in Pančevo and forced us to leave our home within half an hour and take with us the basic necessities, by all means money and jewelry. When we got out in the street, there was already a lineup of Jews sharing the same suffering and rounded up before us. They made us go in the direction of the town hall. There they took our money and jewelry, including my gold necklace which I got as a present from my parents for my birthday. It is impossible to describe the fear and the suffering that we felt not knowing what will happen. Once we were robbed, they loaded us on a line of transport vehicles that were to take us under guard in the direction of Belgrade. Again, there was an overwhelming atmosphere of fear. The bridge had been destroyed, so we thought that we would be thrown into the Danube. That did not happen, rather before crossing to the other side by ferries we were met there by the representative of the Jewish Community, our religious teacher, Rabbi Kaufman, who told us that we would cross by ferries to Belgrade and that everyone who had friends or relatives should go to them for accommodation while those who did not would be accommodated in the synagogue.

Our friends, family Šlezinger, took us in in their home in Kneginje Ljubice Street 21a, across the street from the Federation of Jewish Communities which, under the occupation, was called „Jewish Office“. We had to report at the collection point in Džordža Vašingtona street, where they recorded our

data, opened our files and distributed to us badges that we must wear on our chests and our backs: on yellow background a black Magen David star and a yellow armband with the writing *Jude* on it.

In a matter of days there was an announcement that all Jewish men should report at the place in front of the Jewish Community, on a certain day at a certain hour, under threat of execution for those who fail to obey. That was how my father went to report. Thus, all men were taken away. Initially, we did not know where, nothing was said, and we were terrified about what could happen. Only subsequently did we hear that they were taken to the camp Topovske šupe, in Belgrade, near the Autokomanda square. Of course, we hurried there, my mother, I and all women whose family had been taken away. We tried to find them.

Somehow we managed, through the holes in the camp fence, to talk to our dearest. We did so covertly, one inmate would summon the other to the fence so shortly we saw and heard our family members, but the guards forced us off the fence pointing the butts of their guns at us. We went back. We went there even twice a day, hoping to see our father and talk to him. Once I even managed to get into the camp, and father took me in to show me where he was staying. Mother was waiting outside. He was on the upper floor: a big room with straw mats on the floor packed next to each other. To this day I wonder how I managed to get in, although only for some minutes. It was awful for me to see my father, who for me was the image of everything superlative to be incarcerated like that, snatched from his family, so humiliated. Yet, I was happy that I could see him and embrace and kiss him.

I shall remember the day of 6 October 1941 as long as I live. On that day, as usual, we were waiting near the camp gate hoping that we would manage to ask some guard or inmate to call our father to the gate or the fence. To our surprise, we suddenly saw my father coming out of the camp and pushing in front of him the cart loaded with waste to dispose of it a bit further away from the gate. We used this opportunity to see him, talk to him, because he said that he could stay only very shortly. We were not fortunate to have some more time with him. Suddenly, there was a whistle blown, and there was shouting that all inmates should line up inside the camp grounds. Thus, he had to go inside the camp. At the same time we saw some vehicles entering the camp. We waited outside, not for long, when we heard that inmates would be transferred from this camp to another and that this „relocation“ will be happening gradually, ever day a certain number of inmates would be relocated. The following morning we came again to see father and we briefly spoke with him through the fence until the villains came with the butts of their guns and forced us away. We came again at noon.

The following day and the days after when we came we saw a number of open trucks full of inmates who were being taken away from the camp. Father was still there. That lasted until 14 October 1941. Having the presentiment that the parting would happen soon, I approached the guard and asked him to call my father so we could see him. The guard asked me where my father was from. All the men in the camp at that time were rounded up in Banat and Belgrade. I said he was from Pančevo. The guard said that he was from Pančevo as well and called my father. There was still something humane in him that those who gave him orders did not manage to destroy. He let us talk for about ten minutes. We said that we would be coming again in the afternoon. When we did so, we heard that my father had been taken away on that day. That day, 14 October, was the last day that I saw my father. For me that was the saddest day of my life which shall stay in my memory forever. People started guessing where they were taken, and there were different rumors around: some said Šabac, others said they were taken for labor to Germany, but there was no specific news about my father. Our fearful hearts were filled with gloomy forebodings.

Women and children were still „free“. At end of October we were offered the possibility to flee to Hungary. There were rumors that women would be put into camps, and that children would be separated from the mothers. I was against us leaving as I was hoping that we would get some news about father. Relatives and friends were persuading us to use this opportunity as we were facing great danger. Finally, we did leave on 31 October 1941. Regretfully, we did not have this opportunity earlier, while father was still with us.

Our fleeing to Hungary was arranged by a wonderful woman, a German woman married to our relative, a Jew. I do regret that I did nothing to nominate her for the Righteous Among Nations, but maybe it is not too late even now, although she had died a long time ago. Her name was Marija Tomić, born in 1913 in Bački Gračac, she was a retired civilian disabled as victim of war. She lived in Novi Sad, in Narodnih heroja street 19/I. She saved us and tens of other Jews, by organizing escape in German military trucks. At the border between the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) and Hungary declarations were presented that the trucks were transporting cargo. We were instructed to keep completely still, practically without even breathing, in order not to be discovered. When we arrived in Novi Sad the police had discovered the scheme. We managed to flee the house where we were put up and in which Marija lived. She and her husband were arrested, tortured, and later released. While fleeing, we left in the apartment a suitcase with our documents, and the police probably seized it. We were a group of about twenty fugitives. On foot, without an-

anything, we set off to find a friend of my father's in Novi Sad. We told him everything and he took us the same night by train to Budapest and put us up with his relatives.

The relative arranged for counterfeited documents, a fake residence permit for us, without a trace to the police. From the places of our birth they got our birth certificates. So we lived by moving from relatives to relatives. Jews in Hungary were still free, although certain restrictions were already being introduced. A cousin of ours, who had a shop making women's underwear, took me in as apprentice, and introduced me to other workers as a relative from Novi Sad which at that time was under the Hungarian occupation.

Before the war I had completed the third grade of grammar school, but I could not continue my education in Budapest because I was there illegally. The relatives arranged for me to learn English, together with their children. After we stayed with relatives for some time, they found for us a boarding home managed by some Jews who were hiding immigrants. There were Jews there from Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia. One morning, in February 1943, there was a raid and we were arrested. Our friends suggested that, if apprehended and asked who helped us to come to Hungary, we should name someone who had been dead for some time.

We were taken to two different camps in Budapest, and subsequently to the camp *Rice*, on the border with Czechoslovakia, where we stayed three and a half months. We were made to clean the camp perimeter, to take buckets of sand to a hill 300 meters high, eight hours a day. Again, with the help of relatives, my mother, my aunt (who was with us all the time, Ana Švarc from Vršac) and I managed to get medical certificates stating that we were ill, and we were released from the camp, with the obligation to regularly report to the Budapest Department for Foreign Citizens. We were told by the department that we have to report every month and were not allowed to leave Budapest. We did so until 19 March 1944, when Hungary was occupied by Germany. At that time again we had to go underground and change our residence all the time. I stopped working in the shop, and my mother and I did work for different families, my mother as a cook and me as maid. As soon as they would start questioning us about who we were, we had to leave and move on. Bombing by Allied forces started. In shelters we were suspicious, the janitors became the key informers and the situation became precarious.

On 15 October 1944 extreme Hungarian Fascists – Nilai came to power, infamous for their cruelty. The same month an announcement was made that all Jewish men and women aged from 14 to 60 should report on 25 October at a certain place and time. Whoever disobeyed would be executed.

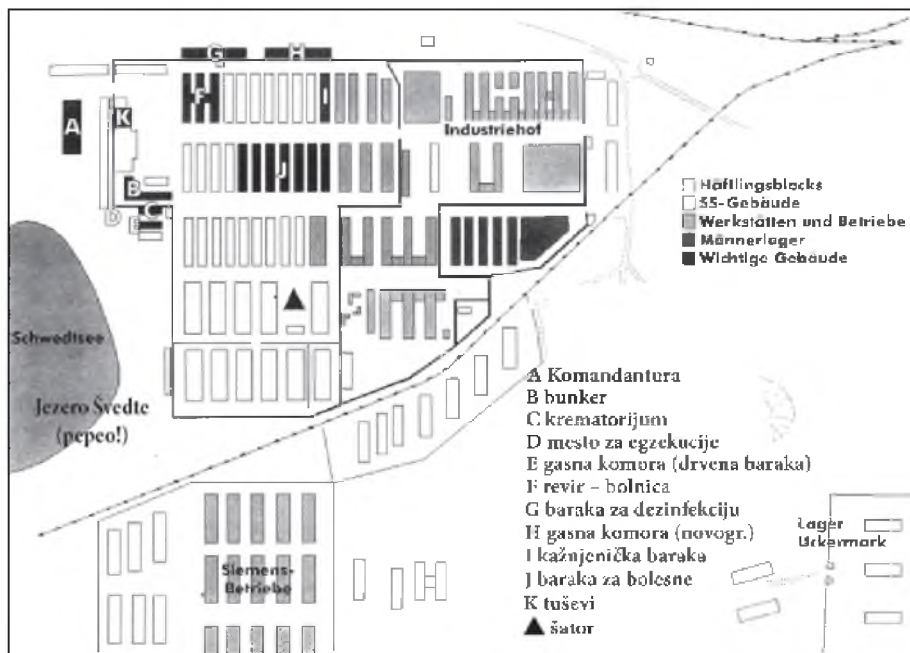
As we had exhausted every possibility of where we could stay, we reported. As of that day we were made to walk 30 – 40 kilometers per day, in pouring rain and cold, towards the Austrian border. At night they would force us into pigsties or stables with cattle, and the following day the suffering would continue. The clothes we were wearing could not get dry, the shoes were torn. Sometimes, we spent the night outdoors, if it did not rain. During this journey we were stopped at the place Szentgyörgypuszta, where we were to dig trenches. Our guards, Nilai, Hungarian Fascists, were cruel, they tortured and humiliated us. After we completed the digging of trenches, we moved on foot towards the Austrian border, and while doing so we were forced to carry heavy shovels.

In November we arrived at the Austrian border and the Hungarian Fascists handed us over to the German Fascists. There they packed us into trains and the trains took off into the unknown. After a while, the train stopped at a railway station, where we saw workers in striped uniforms, with numbers on their sleeves above red triangles. Through the window we called one of them. It turned out that he was a Yugoslav, a political prisoner. The railway station proved to be Buchenwald.

That man told us what was ahead. He wished us all the best. The train moved on and after a while we arrived to Rawensbrück, where we were exposed to unbelievable physical and psychological torture. We were pushed into a packed full barrack with three level bunk beds, and we placed three per bed, on straw mats filled with lice and one lice filled blanket. They took our clothes away, gave us some flimsy summer dresses and thin jackets, and they kept our shoes because they were already torn due to the long walking. We were woken up at four in the morning, in a most unpleasant of ways – shouting, cursing, whipping by the capos Lili and Jađa, from Poland. Then we were forced out of the barracks for roll call, where they kept us until eight o'clock, often at temperatures as low as –10 to –20 degrees, the distance between inmates one meter so that we cannot warm each other by our closeness. Whoever tried to do so was beaten. After standing at the awful *Appell-platz*, which was the name of the roll call site, where we were lined up, already exhausted and frozen, with a pot of dark liquid, called coffee, and a thin slice of bread made of flour and saw dust, we were forced to work outdoors and in cold warehouses at very low temperatures which we could see on thermometers located near the guards at the camp gate.

We were tasked with loading coal onto trucks with our bare hands, pushing these trucks, filling bags with flour and carrying them to the trucks (the bags were 50 to 80 kilograms), digging the frozen soil with heavy hacks, unloading vegetables from trucks and pushing the unloaded vegetables to

the warehouses in heavy carts. It often happened that in the evening after the hard day's work, they would force us to continue working under the spotlights. We were taken to the railway station outside the camp, with lined up carriages full of different cargo – furniture, kitchenware, textile ... robbed across the whole of Europe. We were to unload and move those things to warehouses. After returning from work, we were searched by guards and capos.



*The layout of the Ravensbruck camp where Eva Đorđević was an inmate*

We suffered terrible starvation, we could not maintain personal hygiene, and were covered with lice. The camp was intended for women, about 45,000 from all over Europe. Every day upon returning from work we would find in the camp dozens of dead bodies, piled up like wood – inmates of ours who could not stand the torture.

To our great surprise, when a new transport arrived, we saw among those arriving the woman who saved us – Marija Tomić who was brought there from Hungary, where she was repeatedly arrested for assisting Partisans, Serbs and Jews. She had been released from prison in 1942 and she went to live illegally in Budapest. She was found in 1944 during a raid, and she stated on that occasion that Hitler had lost the war, after which she was deported to Rawensbrück.



On 5 March 1945 we were transported to the Burgau camp, a section of the Dachau concentration camp. The journey took 17 days. We were loaded 10 *Häftling* per cargo carriage. Once in two or three days we were given a piece of bread and a piece of very salty salami. When we asked for water, we were beaten on our heads by the *Aufseherin*. There was a bucket for us to relieve ourselves, and the bucket was emptied once in two or three days.

To Burgau we arrived totally exhausted, the roll call continued, as well as the cruelty and humiliation. They could not send us for forced labor as we were by that time just living skeletons. Some three weeks later, we were transferred by trucks to Türkheim, also part of Dachau. There we were put in underground premises, again on lice-filled straw mats and blankets, along with the mandatory roll call.

About a week before liberation, we were transferred to Landsberg, yet another section of Dachau. The accommodation was the same as in previous camps, food every second day, bread made with wood saw.

We were liberated on 27 April 1945 by the US Army. Exhausted, sick with spotted typhoid, we were moved by the liberators to the improvised hospital in Bad Wörishofen, which previously was used as place for recovery of German officers.

After a long recovery, we were repatriated via Osijek to Belgrade. We arrived to Belgrade on 12 August 1945.

My mother and I immediately went to the Federation of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia to inquire about my father, and we found out about the tragic destiny of my father, our relatives and friends. All inmates from Topovske Šupe camp were executed the same day when taken away from the camp, in the vicinity of Pančevo, on the way to Jabuka. We heard from many residents of Pančevo that they had seen or heard the convoys going day after day towards Jabuka, carrying camp inmates.

I have no words to describe my sorrow for my lost father. My mother and I have placed a modest stone plate with the inscription saying *Desider Ižak, 1890–1941, victim of Fascist terror, forever mourned by his family*. We placed the plate on the grave of his mother, Rozalija Ižak, buried at the Jewish cemetery in Pančevo.

After all the physical and psychological suffering, I started a new life, completed my secondary education and graduated from the Medical Faculty. During evening hours I attended classes for pupils affected by the war, attending the grades 4, 5, 6, and 7; during the day I working as interpreter for the British doctors at the Clinic for Plastic Surgery in Belgrade. I attended the eighth grade as a regular student in Novi Sad. My work at the clinic

motivated me for the medical studies. I married, and I have a wonderful husband, Dušan Đorđević. We have three daughters and two grandchildren who are now students. I worked as specialist of professional medicine in Pančevo until my retirement in 1982. The new life gave me lots of joy, but there remained forever an unhealed scar on my wounded soul and body. The irreparable loss of my father, relatives and friends, the loss of home, the physical and psychological suffering, humiliation and torture – it is something I will not be able to forget as long as I live.

What I had written here is only a part of what I lived through during the horrific years of war, but after two heavy heart attacks I could hardly muster the courage for this much.

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*Jelena VICULIN*

## RETURN FROM A HOPELESS JOURNEY



*Jelena Viculin was born in 1922 in Budapest, of father David Hoffman and mother Helena, née Safir. From 1922 the family lived in the town of Ada in the region of Bačka, where her father was a rabbi. The family had nine children: five sons and four daughters. At the outset of the war one of the brothers was in Switzerland and one in Budapest. The oldest sister Olga was married in Austria and, after the Anschluss, together with her husband, she fled to Yugoslavia, to the region of Bačka, where she lived in Stari Bečej and where she and her husband were executed in the raid in*

*January 1942 and thrown under the ice of the river Tisa. Other children lived with the parents in Ada.*

*Together with her mother and three sisters, her father and three brothers, she was an inmate of the infamous Auschwitz concentration camp, where the parents perished. Apart from sister Olga and the parents, many other family members on both maternal and paternal side perished in the Holocaust.*

*After the war she married Jadran Viculin, with whom she has a son and a grandson.*

Before the Germans completed the occupation of Hungary in March 1944 and installed in power the Hungarian Fascists, we lived in our apartment in Ada. But, at that moment, our life changed completely. The decrees came into effect for Jews to wear the Magen David star. The elders were much concerned, and we younger ones were not yet fully aware of what

was to come. Rumors started to spread about our forthcoming deportation, which soon happened.

At the beginning of April we were ordered not to leave our homes. The following day, a German officer came to our home with a number of Hungarian gendarmes and officials of the authorities. They searched the apartment. They took my father to a separate room and ordered him to tell them where he had the money and other valuables. They ordered us to pack. They said we should not pack too much as we would not need it.

We were taken from our home, where we left practically everything that we had, towards the railway station and into a big yard which was otherwise used for sale of fuel wood. That was the collection point to which they brought other Jewish families from the region of Ada. From the yard we were taken the same day to the railway station. We were loaded onto the train and taken to Szeged. There we were put into a synagogue to which Jews were brought from different places across Bačka. There we lived and slept on the floor: women, children, the elderly. There were few men, because they were taken away earlier for forced labor. Jews from Szeged, who at that time were still at their homes, brought food for us as much as they could and they tried to relieve our difficulties. Very soon they were to experience the same destiny as we were then going through.

The camp commander, a Hungarian officer, had the task to compile a list of all the inmates. As he had no one to assist him apart from the guards, he asked a number of us to help him in this. That was where they were getting us ready for Auschwitz. At the same time there were rumors that we would be moving on. The camp commander, the Hungarian whom we helped with the list, summoned some of us and said in a serious voice that he did not need us any longer and that he wanted to do us a favor. In the evening, when it gets dark, he would withdraw the guard from the camp gate, and we can remove the yellow armbands and go wherever we wish. We did not understand and, confused as we were, we asked him where we could go. You are free, go where you wish. We asked – what about our parents? He said – go, because tomorrow you will be taken from Hungary. That was all he said. We told our parents about this and they were surprised to hear it. We decided to stay with our parents, we were very close.

The following morning the order came for us to leave. We got together the few things that we had taken from our homes. A soldier who was watching this told us that we would not need any of this in the place where we were taken. They pushed us into animal carriages, tightly packed next to each other, as many as possible. The taller ones were peaking out through the open carriages and said we were being taken towards Austria.

We stopped not far from Vienna, in Gänsendorf. They took out the dead ones and separated those who volunteered to stay and help with the farm work. I think that most of them had survived. The rest of us were told that we were moving on to a place where we would all be together. While standing in the closed carriages at the railway station, we heard the alarm sounding. There was bombing around us. The guards went away to hide and left us in closed carriages. We had to wait for the railway to be repaired so that the assembled cargo carriages full of Jews could move on. We did not know where we were being taken. I do not remember how long the journey took. The long composition of carriages finally stopped on 1 June in Auschwitz, by the well-known gate with the writing on it saying „Arbeit macht frei“.

We were pushed out of the carriage, carrying the few belongings that we had. We were told there not to bother because we would no longer need these things. The men were separated and taken away immediately, so the three of us – my mother, my sister and I – never again saw father and our three brothers. The women were taken a bit further away to the crossroads at which soldiers were standing. Among them was an officer, the infamous Dr Mengele, who performed the inspection. We approached him, four in a row. He said nothing; he only made signals with his hand indicating left or right. The three of us, I and my sisters, were separated from our mother. We were sent to the right and she to the left. We never saw her again. To the left meant those who were not fit to work and who were sent to the crematorium the same evening to the gas chamber.

As we were approaching Birkenau it seemed to me as if we were getting into a madhouse. We saw women with hair shaved off in torn clothes standing behind the fence. Some hours later we were looked upon with the same wonder by the new arrivals. We were taken to a barrack, our hair was shaved, we were stripped naked and everything was taken away. We were not to keep anything. They gave us a shower and took us to camp C, where the block commander told us that in here there is no asking questions, all one is to do is listen and say „yes“. The key role in the barracks was played by Czech and Polish Jews who came before us and knew how everything worked. Camp C consisted of 32 barracks, each housing about one thousand women. I was put with my sisters into barrack number 23, which was known to be the worst one as it leaked when it rained. We lay on the concrete floor as there were not enough wood planks for everybody. In the morning we were to get up very early for the roll call. We ate once a day, some gray liquid from a pot for four or five persons. Without our food utensils, we would each take couple of sips and a few pieces of bread. We washed ourselves without soap or towel. We were freezing without any underwear in torn silk dresses. We looked like savages. Even the basic hygiene was impossible. The „head“

in our barrack was Franka, from Katowice. On several occasions she comforted us. Persevere, it will not last for much longer, the front is near. Don't even think of touching the fence wire, it will kill you. She gave us hope. I ate the food, I wanted to survive and go back home.

On the other side across from us were Gypsies, with many children. One night they all disappeared. That was how life was in Auschwitz.

The daily roll call was a special torture. If the number of inmates did not match, we would have to stand or kneel for hours in the cold.

At the beginning of September we had a new „head“ of our barrack, her name was Klara. One day she told us that they would be asking for inmates to do hard labor but that would be an opportunity to survive as the war would not last for too much longer. And truly, after a few days Dr Mengele came to the camp to select „workers“ for hard work. He said nothing, we were just passing by him. Those who were weak were sent back by him to the barrack. They took us to camp B. That was the place for the women who worked and they were tattooed. We from camp C did not have tattooed numbers because camp C mostly served as a place to proceed to the crematorium and the gas chambers. We washed and were given gray dresses and head scarfs. We were loaded onto carriages in which there was room and one could lay down. There was even a bucket of water there, which meant a lot and gave us joy because earlier we could not get any when we wanted some. It was as if we came from hell to heaven! Our „head“, Klara, saw us off to the camp doors with tears in her eyes and said we were saved. The train started. I think there were about 3,000 women on it. The journey took a long time and we arrived somewhere in the vicinity of Danzig, to Stutthof camp, where we stayed several days. Red Cross people came. They registered us and we were assigned numbers. Not tattoos, but numbers on a piece of fabric sewn to the sleeve of our dresses. After this we were taken to hard labor, digging of trenches near the town Torn. Later we were also taken to dig trenches elsewhere, around the town Argenau. They made for us a separate camp of tents in the woods. From there we were taken every day for work. The food was meager, but better than in the camp before. Winter came and snow. We were digging frozen soil, hungry, freezing and exhausted. We slept on the ground with a little straw on top of it, one blanket each. To keep warm, we slept close to each other. In the tent there was a small furnace that we could use to build a fire but we did so seldomly because we were so exhausted that we did not have the strength to do it. The tents were made of thin plywood. Every tent had its „head inmate“ who represented us before the whole camp – Lagerälteste – and who communicated with the Germans. It was two older German officers, experienced SS, who passed on their orders through her to us. The „head“ was from Berlin, I think she was a journalist. The “head” for our tent was Maria from Budapest,



an opera singer, who had just graduated from conservatory. In the evening, when we would go to bed, we would ask her to sing. One evening she sang an opera aria. The German officer who was doing a round of the camp heard the singing and opened the door of the barrack. We got frightened. He asked who was singing. Maria answered to say it was her. He said that she should report to his office tomorrow. She did so and as reward she got a loaf of bread and a package of margarine, which at that time was very valuable.



*JELENA in her youth*

My younger sister got sick. She was called Roži, and from early childhood at home we called her Babuka. She felt very weak and I was concerned for her. To spare her, I took upon myself to dig her sections of the trench, while we were digging, guards stood around us. One of the guards who was standing close to us, was eating an apple while doing his guard. I was trying to complete my section and my sister's section as soon as possible. He called me to himself and offered me an apple. I was looking at the apple which was for us a true rarity. We were not allowed to talk with the guards or ask them questions. So, I took the apple, thanked him and put the apple in my pocket.

As I did this, the guard shouted at me:

– Why don't you eat the apple, do you think it is poisoned?

– I cannot have it now – I replied.

– Eat it – he persisted.

– I cannot now, today I am fasting, and should not have anything to eat.

– What is today?

– For us today is a great holiday and we fast – I said.

– What is the name of the holiday?

– Yom Kippur – I said.

Hearing this, he nodded as if he understood, and he moved on. I was in fact fasting. In the evening we shared the apple.

Sometimes, while digging trenches, we would come across some potatoes and we would eat it uncooked as a speciality. For Christmas we were given some potatoes and meat, and a spoon of sugar each. There was with us

a nurse from Novi Sad, the wife of dr Goldman. She advised us not to eat the sugar right away, because even more difficult days are ahead. The front was getting closer. The army was passing by. From Polish farmers who were also brought in to dig trenches we heard that the Russians are close and that this would not go on for much longer.

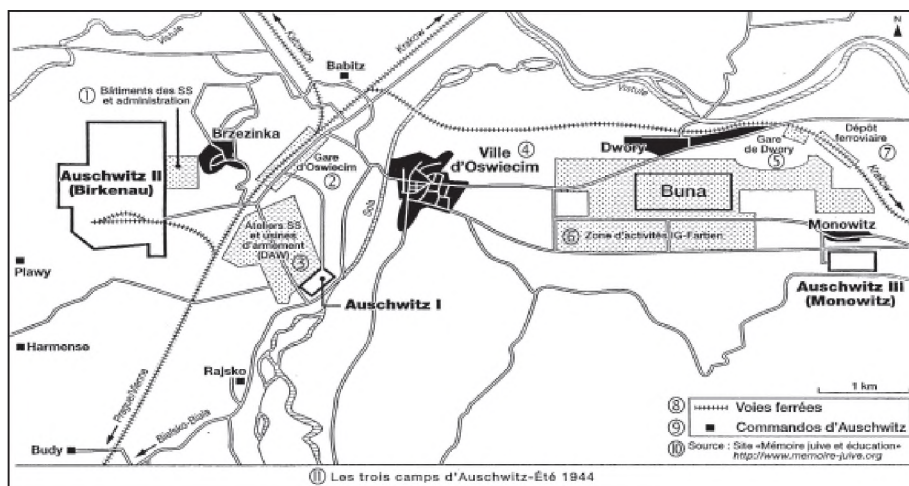
One day we were lined up and an officer in charge of us delivered a speech saying: the end of the war is near. We are withdrawing and taking you towards the German border. We tried as much as we could to make your lives easier. We wanted you to go back to your homes. We will select those who can walk on foot. We three sisters were sticking together. We were among those who started the walk. Later we heard that some days later those who stayed behind were all executed.

They took us through the forests, for kilometers, without food. With our fists we took snow from the ground and that was our food. That is when Rozika, the nurse, told us – now you can take that sugar. We walked for days listening to the canon fire. When we finally arrived to a big abandoned farming estate, we found some food there. There was a cow there as well, therefore also some milk. We rested. We were called to line up again and they told us:

„The front is near. You can hear the canons. We want to save those of you who accompanied us. We tried to make it bearable, as much as we could. Listen to us! The last Gestapo troops will pass by here tomorrow morning. While they are passing by, none of you must be in the yard, because if they see you they will take you with them“. And then he asked: „The Russians are near; we save you, and would you do the same for us when the Russians come?“ We were all silent.

They left us there. They went into a car and left. In the morning, just as they said, Gestapo arrived. As women were running around the yard looking for food, they noticed us and again they took us to move on with them. The cannons were heard more and more closely. We were no longer guarded by guards. At the insistence of my older sister Adela, who insisted that we must get away, us three sisters and a few friends found a good spot in the forest and jumped into snow up to our waist. The soldiers were off, and we were there alone, while it was getting dark. We were free but with no idea where to go. We came to a road. In the distance we saw a chimney. As we approached we realized that it was a small house of a poor Polish family. They listened to our story and took us a bit further away to an estate that was abandoned by German soldiers. There was still cattle there and quite a lot of food. The Poles, who were working there before, came to feed the cattle. They gave us milk, and there were potatoes and other food. They told us that we were free, that the Germans were not coming back. That is how we experienced liberation.

The Russians were very close, we were expecting them any minute. Soon afterwards, one morning, the first Russian soldier came to the door with a shot gun pointed. We jumped all over him shouting with happiness. He was appalled and afraid of us because we were looking so miserable. We explained to him who we were. He told us right away with enthusiasm that he was going to Berlin.



- |  |                              |   |
|--|------------------------------|---|
| 1. Buildings of the SS and documentation | 4. Town Auschwitz (Oswiecim) | 9. Operating command Auschwitz                            |
| 2. Railway station                       | 5. Railway station Dvori     | 10. Source of information „Jewish memories and education“ |
| 3. SS workshops and armaments factory    | 6. Zone Manovic – I.G.Farben | 11. Three camps of Auschwitz – summer 1944                |
|  | 7. Railway depot             |   |
|  | 8. Railway lines             |   |

*Layout of the Auschwitz camp, where Jelena Viculin was incarcerated*

The house on that estate, where we stayed, was a big house with no other houses directly close to it. Soon, other Russian soldiers and officers started coming to it. The HQ of one of their units was accommodated there. In the evening they set the table really nice for dinner. They asked questions about who was in the house, where we were from, and they invited us to join them for dinner. When we saw all that was there, we started to cry. They were comforting us by saying that they were going to Berlin and that they would revenge all the evil that the Germans inflicted. The following day they moved on. They left a lot of food for us, and I got sick from eating it, so I had to be taken to Kronovo, a town completely in ruins, but the big hospital was operating. The recovery was not easy. In the hospital I met many camp inmates, Jews from Hungary, and this made my recovery easier. It was thanks to my sister Adela that I recovered. She saved my life several times.

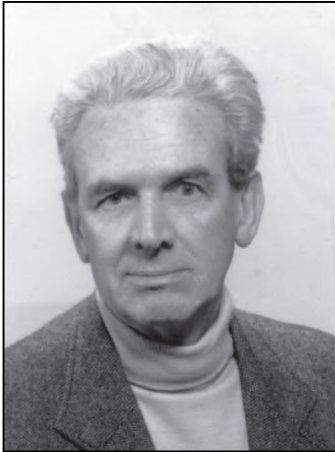
After my recovery we were in the Red Cross building, where a transport was being assembled. We were transferred to the collection centre in Bromberg. Afterwards, through another transport we travelled by train, via Hungary and Romania, to Ada.

Our apartment from which we were taken to the camp was already lived in. Our things were gone. Some returnees, a few Jews, arrived to Ada before we did, and they offered us accommodation in another house that was not occupied at the time. As my father and the whole family enjoyed great respect in Ada, many people offered their help. We were waiting impatiently to see whether any other members of our family would be coming back, but regretfully no one else did. We lost numerous members of our family. I cannot even count how many. My younger sister Babuka, when the opportunity arose, went to Israel. She married and had two sons and is still living there. The older sister Adela married Pavle Fišer who was for four years in a German prisoners of war camp as reserve officer of the Yugoslav Army. Some time later they also immigrated to Israel, and they have been living there happily. In Ada I met a Partisan officer, fell in love and married him. He is a wonderful man and I have lived with him since then in a happy marriage. I have a son and a grandson.

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## Jakob ATIJAS

### OPTIMISM SUSTAINED ME



*Jakob Atijas was born in Sarajevo in 1920, in a working class family. Father Moric was a waiter and mother Mirjam, née Kabiljo, born in Žepče, was a housewife. The elder sister Rikica-Rivka was doing apprenticeship for a tailor, brother Samuel for a plumber, while younger sister Flora was attending elementary school. His paternal grandmother, Mirjam, née Romano, had nine children.*

*The whole of his direct family perished in the Holocaust – mother, both sisters, and brother.*

*After the war he was employed in the Army, where he retired with the rank of colonel. From his marriage to Anka Atias he has a son Boroslav and a grandson living in Brisbane, Australia.*

*Editorial note: the manuscript is published in an abbreviated form, while the whole text is maintained with the Jewish Historical Museum.*

While I was working as a young man I came in contact with other workers. Among them there were those who were part of the workers' movement, but also those who were not. They wanted to win us over for their ideas and thus I became a member of the Youth URS trade unions. That was the circle of friends that I moved around in. I read as much as I could or knew, primarily books by Jack London and other authors.

I never had any conflicts with other people. Anti-Semitism was first felt with the coming of Hitler to power. Already at that time Jews started to

arrive from Austria. People tended to think: maybe it is not going to happen to me. Still, there was fear. It was becoming increasingly difficult. We were aware of what was happening: starting from destruction of property, arrests and killing, even before the concentration camps were established.

In the business where I was working there were Croats of Catholic religion, Serbs of Christian Orthodox religion, Muslims, two Germans. We lived a normal life. Our boss was not supporter of either Nazism or anti-Semitism. He was a Serb, a decent and honest man. He had six or seven apprentices and the same number of assistants. That was how it was until 1941.

After 6 April 1941, when the German troops entered Sarajevo, my boss had to close the business because he was denied the operating permit. At that time, the commissioner came to the shop. The shop became a workshop in which the Wermacht maintained their passenger vehicles. They kept some of the workers to continue working there. I was called at the end of May and stayed working there until end of July 1941, when the order came from the Gestapo to fire all those who were not „Arian“. That was how I and two more workers were fired.

I continued to live in Sarajevo with my family, my mother, sisters and brother. My father had died in 1937 of heart attack, aged 49.

Living jobless and labeled was not easy. Initially, we were wearing yellow badges with the letter J, and subsequently we were given armbands, because it was believed that the badges were not sufficiently visible. Relations among people changed. A curfew was introduced, at twilight you were not to be out in the street.

Raids began. Camps were already set up. In Sarajevo there was talk that Jews were being rounded up in Zagreb and other places. Some Jews from Sarajevo left the city for places under Italian occupation. My sister Rivka continued to work for a bit longer, as she was a tailor, the younger sister could no longer attend school, and the brother also became jobless.



*MIRJAM and MORIC, mother and father of JAKOB ATIJAS, 1919*



We were terrified that something was going to happen to us. We had our backpacks packed in case it all came to the worst. We had heard that some distinguished Jews from Zagreb and Sarajevo were already deported. We anticipated that at some point it would grow in scale and that our turn would come.

Going to the forest was not possible. We were waiting to be deported. In the evening on 3 September 1941, the Ustaša police blocked some streets in the centre of town. A person could escape here or there. My brother and I thought that we would be successful in getting away, but we were not, since our mother and the younger sister were with us (the older one had in the meantime married). The Ustaša police came and knocked at our door at nine thirty at night. We knew what it was. They rounded us up into police cars, took us to the Sarajevo railway station and onto animal cargo carriages.

We could take with us only what we could carry in our hands. Everything was already packed. The Ustaša police handed us over to Ustaša supervision service in the carriages.

The first looting of our belongings happened when we were loaded onto carriages. „Open up, what do you have? Take it out!“ Less than half of what we had remained with us. They took whatever was good, including my shoes. Luckily, people from the transport gave me another pair of shoes.

Kruščica is a place near Travnik. That was where they put up a temporary camp. The transport took about half of the night and in the morning we were in Kruščica. We were unloaded, and went into the camp made for Bosnian Jews. They first started rounding up people from Sarajevo. Every day they were deporting new ones. They did not separate us; rather, as the families arrived they took their space in the barrack.

The camp commander was officer Mandušić, a man from the region of Lika or Dalmatia, a “Vlaj” as they said to imply his origins. He was an immigrant. Immigrant Ustaša carried on their collar the three-color flag which distinguished them from others. I do not remember others. Once again they registered us and once again they “cleaned” us“. My mother, brother, sister and I were in one corner of the barrack. They left us alone.

Transports were arriving every day. Humanitarian organizations started sending us food. A kitchen was established.

All that we did was maintain the hygiene in the camp, where we stayed until the end of September, when an order arrived to separate men and send them to another camp, and leave the women and children there. At the time my brother was 16 and he had to go. They lined us up, separated the men from the women and children, putting the women to one end and us to the

other. They opened up the rail carriages and that was when we knew that we were going to Jasenovac.

There was beating and hitting with gun butts. The Ustaša supervision service took us over from the camp guards and transported us to Jasenovac. We travelled in livestock carriages. It was completely dark inside, the windows closed. It was in the carriages that people had to relieve themselves. There were older people there as well. And so it was for two nights and one day.

There were more than fifty people per carriage. We were just watching what was happening around us. Until that time they had not yet killed anyone, but they did hit people with gun butts and feet. They would not allow us to help the elderly, and if we tried they even hit them.

In the first camp we did not carry any markings, except for the yellow armbands that we arrived from Sarajevo with.

When we arrived to Jasenovac in the morning, the Ustaša were there with dogs, at a distance of one meter from each other. They opened up the carriage door and we had to jump out, while being pushed and kicked. That was how they started torturing and arranging us. We were registered, inspected in case someone had a fork or a knife or any valuables. They took all the watches, necklaces, bracelets or anything else that was overlooked in Kruščica and took it all away.

They separated us for camp 1 and camp 2. Camp 1 was located in Krapje, and camp 2 on the river Strug, in Jasenovac. The elderly were separated right away for camp 1. There were also younger ones who volunteered to go there, and they were executed soon afterwards. We then went to the camp in Strug because the Jasenovac camp was not yet completed. There we found inmates from Croatia. We continued building the barracks. The fighting and the killing started. Every morning we had to go to work. We worked with shovels, transporting earth to the embankment.

We spent the first night outside. It was raining. The barracks were still not there.



*JAKOB ATIJAS as a youth*

The second day they organized us into groups, each of between 25 and 30 people, and we were put up in barracks.

As of the next day it started with the roll call and then going to work. We were given shovels, hacks, hoes. We were excavating the earth. About 45 inmates were accompanied by 7-8 Ustaša. The food was very poor: water, a few pieces of beans, very little potatoes, there would sometimes be a small piece of bread, and sometimes not.

On our return we were searched. We would leave our tools and had to go in between Ustaša as if through a tunnel of some kind. They intersected us and beat us up with gun butts or bayonets. Three or four days later I ran into a bayonet. There was no doctor, and the wounds did not heal properly as they were not sutured.

They had there what we called mouse-traps, made of barbed wire, about 80 centimeters high. A person was to go inside, but could not sit, rather had to take a semi-lying position. Once we spent the night in it. They said we did not do the work well and in the morning we were sent back to do it again. There were also non-Jews there, but less at that time than later. Later on Croats who did not support the regime also arrived, along with anti-Fascists and members of the National Liberation Movement.

I was there until the end of October; then, one day, we were lined up and asked what each of us could do, what our qualifications were. So they separated us by trades into carpenters, metal workers, and so on.

My brother stayed in camp 2 because they did not need plumbers, and I was taken to Jasenovac, to Lančara (the chain factory). Already at that time they started setting up the camp in the chains factory. I was assigned to Egon Fišer, from Koprivnica, a truck driver. We did not go to the Lančara camp. In the yard near the church there was a garage for the truck and we slept on the floor above the garage.

At the beginning of November a big transport arrived to the camp. The exhausted newly arriving inmates were walking on foot from the railway station to Lančara. They were massacred right away. I had to get out of the truck and with my hands make way for them, holding the still warm blood covered bodies so that we could go through with the truck. Behind us were horse drawn carts, collecting those who were massacred. It was mostly men.

The food was abominable. People got beans out of feces and washed them to eat them again. At that time, since they needed us, they gave us somewhat better food. I did not live under the same conditions like those who were in the camp. It was very difficult to steal some food in the camp. My brother paid for it with his life. The Jewish Community from Zagreb was sending food, but it was all robbed. Whatever good was there they set it aside for their army.

At the end of November I moved into Lančara, where the old craftsmen worked, only now dressed in uniforms. They produced chains, and some workshops were established to produce weapons, carpentry and other stuff.

In Lančara we slept in the attic, under the roof. There were about fifteen of us, including Jews, Serbs, Croats and Muslims. That was where I was until the beginning of December, when the camp in Stara Gradiška was set up. A group of us was set aside to go and assist in the kitchen and cleaning of officers' quarters.

We were among the first to arrive in Stara Gradiška. There were still inmates there from former Yugoslavia. When we met them, they were carrying chains and balls and were in shackles.

We were transporting construction materials and also possessions taken from inmates on their arrival. These things were taken to a warehouse.

The relations with the local population in Jasenovac were good. When I arrived there, there was still quite a number of the local population. Some of them openly showed empathy for us. There were also families who, for reasons of fear, took the side of the Ustaša. Later on Jasenovac was emptied. While we were still in camp 2, working on the embankment, the locals were displaced and evicted, I do not know where to, and thus Jasenovac was emptied and made ready for a camp. The location of Jasenovac is such that from autumn to spring there is only one road leading to it, and on all other sides it is surrounded by water. There was no way out of it. Some locals helped us, gave us food when they met us. By their faces and actions one could tell that they were good people sympathizing with us.

When we arrived to the camp, our heads were shaved, because of lice, although lice were such a pest that you could not get rid of it. We were not given any clothes. Whatever I had on when I arrived was all I had to wear: a suit, a shirt, and a vest that my mother knitted for me, and which after the war I had to get rid of since it was tight around the neck and that was where the lice persisted.

In Stara Gradiška I worked in the auto and motorcycle garage. I lived together with the cooks and food serving staff. We lived in the administrative building.

They liquidated the inmates who were there at the time, after which they started to set up the camp. They set up workshops: shoe-makers, tailors, etc. The tower was also being built. Among the inmates, mostly women, who came from Tešanj and Žepče in 1942, I saw my step-aunt and step-grandmother. They were sent right away to the tower!

In this part of the camp it was dominantly men, with some women working within the perimeter containing prisoners and inmates, sewing

uniforms, darning clothes, making shoes. As I was moving around the camp a lot, I had the opportunity to go into the tailors' workshop, where mostly women worked. That was how we came to know what was actually going on.

As the camp grew, the administration grew in parallel to it. We were moved from the administrative building inside the camp to a building called the hospital, to two rooms: the cooks, I, Švarc, and Feliks. That was where we slept. Below us were the torture chambers, in the cellar. Often during the night we heard sounds of fighting, beating. That was the place of beating, extortion. In that place called the hospital, or „Hotel Gagro“, there was an Ustaša, a colonel, his name was Singer. I do not know if he was a Jew. He was detained as well. There were also some members of the HSS and other politicians who were detained separately.



*Family ATIJAS in 1936.  
Jakob's mother, both sister  
and brother perished in  
the Holocaust*

One day a big transport came. Those who could not walk, the women and the children, were loaded on a truck, their things just thrown on top of them, and taken to the camp. They went straight to the tower. There were liquidations going on all the time at the tower.

I remember one night, a liquidation was about to happen. I do not how many women were executed on that occasion. I was at the tower when they emptied the rooms. The walls were flood stained after torture. They brought in a group of children. That group was put in on the ground floor, where there were holes made in the walls. Cyclone was let in through those holes and all those in the room were killed. We found out about it from the graveyard keepers who were loading the bodies of murdered children onto carts and burying them.

My brother, who stayed on in Jasenovac, was working and going out of the camp. One day, at the beginning of April 1942, he put a few potatoes into his pocket. He also had two or three corns on cobs that he found somewhere. On the way back they were searched, he was found to have these in his pockets, he was detained and two days later executed.

My grandfather, aged 72, was brought in from Žepče in 1942. He was hid in the infirmary; he lived for some six or seven months in Jasenovac until he was executed during one great “cleaning” campaign. There was a commission which came and the infirmary was „cleaned“ as well. A barrack was set up with nice clean beds, there were no pijamas, but the clothes were clean.

We were walking on foot from Gradiška to Okučani, where they put us onto carriages and in the morning we were in Jasenovac. We were to go to Gradina or across the river Sava, where liquidations were carried out. However, since a transport had arrived during the night, we were not sent there.

We were unloaded behind the administration building. However, since other inmates knew me too, they went to the manager Šomođi, a Croat from Osijek, and told him that I was there. There were also some other craftsmen from Stara Gradiška whom the inmates knew and also went to the managers of carpentry, metal workers, shoe-makers, to tell them. Those foremen tried to save us. So, a number of people were removed from the transport. I was put up in a workshop. The others were there until the evening, until they were transferred elsewhere and executed.

The father of the man who was my boss in Sarajevo was doctor Milan Jojkić. One day, as I was coming out of Lančara, I saw an Ustaša bringing in a gentleman. He was standing with him in front of the administrative building. I recognized my boss’s father. I managed to greet him and ask him when he arrived. He said: „Just now.“

He disappeared. I had no one to ask about him because he did not go in at any point, he had not even entered a barrack. He was brought in individually, with escort. I guess he was waiting to be entered into the records – and he was liquidated.

I was in a group consisting of mechanics: Maks Samlajić who owned a garage in Brod; Šomođi, a Croat from Osijek; Luka Đaković; Ante Miljković from Zagreb; Ahmed Ahmedić from Tuzla, and some others

We were protected to some degree because they needed mechanics. However, one day vehicles were used to go to a trial. An Ustaša was driving. With him was Luka Đaković, from Brod. He cut the throat of the Ustaša and invited Samlajić to escape with him. Samlajić refused. Luka Đaković did escape, and Samlajić went to the first house to report that the Ustaša was wounded. Ustaša from the camp came. The wounded Ustaša was taken



to hospital. Samlajić returned to the camp. We were not executed. In fact, we were not executed because Samlajić returned. They could not execute us because they did not have others who would maintain the vehicles. The punishment was that they put us in shackles, all twenty-five of us.

The next day we were to go to work. How can one get on a truck while in shackles? When they realized this, they ordered for the shackles to be removed, and that was how the escape of Luka Đaković ended.

Which methods did they use to kill? Knives. A pit would be ready, the inmate naked to his waste. One would strike the victim with a mallet on the head, the other would intersect the victim with a knife and cut his throat. They had a special knife for slaughter.

We, the inmates, were not aware of the scope of atrocities which were happening in the camp. But from the horrific images that we witnessed every day we could understand that this unreasonable and deplorable undertaking was devised to exterminate Serbs, Jews, and Roma, along with some progressive Croats and Muslims. The approximate number of innocent men, women and children who were executed in the cruelest of ways became known to us inmates only after the war was over. In terms of number it was Serbs who suffered the most, and they were here the most numerous people; the Jews were practically exterminated from the region; and the number of executed Roma has never been even approximately identified.

When the trouble with the shackles was over, we moved on with our work. At that time there was a new arrival: Adžija, a colonel, who served as driver of Maks Luburić. Dinko Šakić was Adžija's deputy.

Behind the Lančara there was a barrack where motorcycles were kept. I had in our group two or three very young boys. Ostoja Mijić, aged 13, was brought in allegedly to be an apprentice. Namely, in 1943 the discipline became a bit more lenient and the children from the Kozara region were brought in to allegedly learn a trade. There was another child from Hercegovina, named Mile Naletilić, also aged 13. In my group I also had two boys, brothers Svjetličić, from Pakrac.

Groups were set up. The Svjetličić brothers, one was a graphic worker and the other a metal worker, had parents in Pakrac who sent them food. In 1943 the groups of Croats from Jasenovac were being transferred to Stara Gradiška and subsequently to some exchange arrangement. I maintained the link with them. They continued to send me packages, via their nephews who served as staff in Jasenovac. When they left, there were with me still one Serb, named Jeftić, from Sarajevo, and Ahmed Ahmedić from Tuzla.

There were attempts in Jasenovac to set up an orchestra, but I never heard it perform. On Sundays sometimes one worked and sometimes not,

so one could wash his shirt and himself and that was all the „fun“. You could not get out of the “wire”.

As 1941 was turning into 1942 the Sava river froze and sledges were used to cross the river. At that time there were attempts that I later learned about to get the people united from Bosnia, from the camps and from Slavonija and to organize a rebellion and liberation. However, it somewhere went wrong. Allegedly, on the Slavonian side.

Inside the camp in 1943 there were the first efforts for political units to be organized. How? Doctor Bošković was committee secretary. Triads were set up. My contact was Šušković from Zagreb, a metal worker who worked in Lančara. And a Serb, Ilija, metal sheets worker. But, this did not amount to anything. Someone betrayed the scheme. Bošković was hanged along with ten or fifteen other committee members.

Apart from Serbs and Jews the camp was also detaining sentenced Ustaša, even officers: I remember, for instance, an Ustaša named Nemet, from Pakrac, he was an elderly man, wearing a beard. There was also another one from Zagreb, a driver. They were under disciplinary sentences, by imprisonment for up to one month.

I was in contact with the Svjetličić family, through their nephews who were in the camp and later, I suppose, released. They had contacts in the Ministry of the Interior. Two of them, who brought food for me from the Svjetličić family, came to the barrack that I was working in. They started talking about how the situation on the frontline had reversed. I said nothing. I talked about it with Šušković, committee member. I said: „I gather that they are in fact saying that they would want to escape from the camp, these four nephews, Ustaša. How should I act?“ He said that he would let me know as soon as he discussed it with other committee members. Later he said: „Do nothing, just listen and keep silent.“ So it was for about ten days.

The older of the two Ustaša who was preparing for the escape had a girl-friend in Pakrac and wanted to take her with him. He ordered boots to be made for her, and in the kitchen they gave him some 5–6 kilograms of foodstuffs to take with him. He was to go to Pakrac during the weekend. However, the Herzegovina Ustaša ambushed him at the railway station in Novska and brought him back – to the prison. He was sentenced for thirty days.

We were making plans with Šušković to establish a group of inmates and try to escape on a Sunday. It was on 14 March. On 15 March Maks Luburić was supposed to come. In the morning there was a roll call. The little Ustaša who was working in my workshop said he had to get everything ready for the line-up. He told the other Ustaša, Ostoja, to go to a different place. Then I went to Šušković and said: „I am going.“ He asked me how I would go, and I

said that one of these two would go and the other would wait for him somewhere near Novska towards Gaj. The following day, around noon, I sat on the motorcycle. The younger of the two Ustaša was sitting behind me with the tools, and that was how we got from Novska to Broćica. There were guards there. We stormed pass them and got out on the road Novska–Bjelovar. Now, something happened. The guard from Broćica called the camp, asking what was with the motorcycle that went by, saying that on the motorcycle there was a person driving and an Ustaša in the back.



*Even after six decades the exact scope of atrocities perpetrated by the Ustaša against the Serbs, Jews and the Roma have not been established, nor have sentences been pronounced for the unprecedented pogrom*

There were no more guards. I went through. A German division was withdrawing towards Bjelovar. I was driving along the edge of the road. We were stopped twice by military police. We had some tools with us, and I could speak some German, and they let us go. When I got to Gaj, in the direction of Bjelovar, I took a turn for the woods. I was close to Gaj, and the ramp there was down; behind the ramp was semi-liberated territory. I came up to a soldier; he stopped me. But, when I got to his post, I spurned on the curb, stepped on the gas, and speeded away!

The soldier got his gun off his shoulder and started shooting after us. We were lucky that he missed us. That was how I got to the Partisans.

When I joined the Partisans the atmosphere among them was optimistic. At moments of relaxation, they were even singing. I knew some of the songs, and I joined them happily. I owe thanks for knowing the songs to some workers who were with me and who taught me the lyrics and the melodies. For instance, I knew the „Internationale“.

One morning there came a man. He was looking at me and I was looking at him. His name was Carić.

„What are you doing here?“ he asked me.

„I have escaped“, I said.

He, too, had escaped, but a year before me, also from Jasenovac.

I also found another friend: Moric Montiljo, from Sarajevo; he had been through the Igman march.

If I had gone a bit further to the region of Brod I would have ran into Luka Čarković, who was escaping with a truck.

I later joined the 17 Slavonija Brigade. A month later I was a unit delegate, later a unit commissioner, but then I got sick due to exhaustion. I became distracted. Fear, insomnia, all of this manifested itself in my disorder, and I was hospitalized for fifteen days.

Afterwards I went to the VI Army Corps, where I worked in the workshop, in Psunj, and subsequently moved to Osijek in May.

I arrived in Zagreb on 11 June 1945. I married a woman who was also with the Partisans. We had a son.

There are not many people who survived Jasenovac. The day I escaped, I later heard, Šakić organized a search for me, going all the way to Gaj. I was not invited as witness for his trial. I also knew Ljuba Miloš and Brzica, I met them all the time. They too were tried.

In the camp there were also women Ustaša. In Gradiška I used to see Luburić's sister and Nada Šakić. Not that all priests were bad, but fra Ljubo Majstorović was an evil criminal.

My mother and my younger sister were inmates in the camp in Loborgrad, where they were transferred after Kruščica. In 1942 I received three camp post-cards from my mother. I can still remember their bluish color. You could write up to ten words per postcard. I received them while I was in Jasenovac. The first one I also answered. The second one I did not answer. Then I received the third, and that was all, I no longer received any.

In my post-card I wrote that we were fine, saying nothing about my brother. My mother and sister were there all the time until the camp was disbanded.

A man from Sarajevo, Moni Altarac, came from Loborgrad to Jasenovac when the Gestapo was preparing to disband the camp. He was not taken to

Auschwitz but was sent to Jasenovac. It was from him that I learnt about the destiny of my mother and sister.

I was searching for information about my mother, not knowing that they were in Auschwitz, because I was told that the Gestapo took over a part of the camp in Lobargrad. Only recently her name was found in the list of inmates of Lobargrad who were sent to Auschwitz. However, her name was not found in the list of inmates of Auschwitz.

The older sister Rikica, Rivka, married in March 1941. She moved away since they both worked and could rent an apartment for them. During the raid in their part of Sarajevo her husband and she were rounded up. She was deported to Đakovo, and he to Jasenovac. I found in documents that my sister did arrive in Đakovo, but I did not find her name in the list of those who were executed. The younger sister was with our mother all the time.

I found my grandmother and two aunts in the monastery St. Vinko in Sarajevo. By coincidence they stayed alive, because they fled to Mostar, and from Mostar to the island of Rab and later to Banija. They returned after the war was over.







### III

## ITALY, SWITZERLAND





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*Samuilo ALKALAJ*

DIARY  
Recorded during World War Two

– Excerpts –

*Samuilo Alkalaj was born on 21 February 1887 in Smederevo, of father Avram, teacher and priest, and mother Berta. He had five brothers – Aron, David, Isak, Moša and Nisim, and two brothers who died after birth. The brothers were born in Belgrade.*

*From his marriage to Lepa (Ermoza), née Afar, he has a son Albert and daughter Buena (Berta), who live in the USA. Albert is a renowned painter.*

*The author kept a diary during the years in which the key challenge was to preserve one's life and the lives of family members.*

Belgrade, 6/4/41. The alarm goes on at 3 AM. We are sitting in our apartment owned by landlord Isak Tuvi and talking. At 5 AM the alarm goes on. We return to our apartment and get undressed; it is Sunday, we can sleep all morning. Randomly I turn the radio on. I listen to the announcement to the German people. A war had been declared against Yugoslavia. I tell the news to my wife and daughter. But, being tired, they fell asleep. Awake, I wait. Around 6:30 AM the alarm is on again: this time accompanied by shooting. Belgrade is attacked by German planes. I wake my wife and daughter. We quickly go down to the basement, where neighbors are already gathering. Numerous blasts can be heard. Wounded people are getting in, and the first wave is over. Some acquaintances are walking the streets and telling us the names of casualties. The theatre building is on fire.

The second wave of bombing comes, even stronger than the first one. Buildings around us are hit. Women scream and faint, my

daughter among them. People go pale. The janitor and the worker of Tuvi, both Germans, comfort us by saying that there will be no more bombing: the bombing came from the need to punish Belgrade for the demonstrations of 27 March.

A little bit of bread for lunch. No water. The toilets are already clogged and the stench is spreading. Gendarmes are preventing the plundering of shops. At about 2 PM I go to the bank, escorted by the maid. The streets are deserted, the „Srpski kralj“ hotel and a number of shops hit along the Kralja Petra street, mostly Jewish shops and are now on fire. I stand helpless in front of the bank treasury. We go back. Now, we must think about where we will spend the night, there is no room for all in the basement. Suddenly, a car comes to pick up our neighbor, Mrs. Štajner. Everyone is begging the driver to take them, but he agrees to take only us. We have to go right away, without taking anything. I wanted to take at least the packed suitcase from the basement. But, in the hurry, I could not find it – someone was sitting on it. Women grabbed my hand, not letting me go. „Take me with you, I want to go along!“ I hardly managed to get out of their grip, promising that I would send the same car back. So, we left the house full of everything. While the car is racing along the Kralja Aleksandra street towards Grocka, we hear shots resounding.

In Grocka we see Mirko Polak with his family, on a wagon used to transport wood. They are all dusty and black with soot. Their house had collapsed on them, they hardly got out alive through the basement window. After a brief hesitation, Mirko agrees to spend the night in Grocka, provided that we move on in the morning together to Aranđelovac. A local farmer offers overnight accommodation. From his yard we watch Belgrade on fire during the night.

7/4/41. Grocka. The farmer wakes us up in the morning, as there is an alarm on. On the Danube, near the pier, a ship is sunk. We start across the hill with many other refugees, trying to get as far from the Danube as possible. All day long we move on along country roads avoiding the main road. German planes above our heads. The rain comes as a surprise. Completely soaked we arrive before evening in Dubona, where we spend the night with a local farmer.

8/4/41. We continue our journey through mud. As we pass Mladenovac, deserted, we see that it is not too badly affected by the bombing. Further on, on the way to Aranđelovac, comes the wind accompanied by a mixture of rain and snow. Half frozen we arrive and barely manage to find accommodation in the spa.

- 10–12/4/41. A rest in Arandelovac, the war is felt around us. No foodstuffs, all the shops are closed, the inns are full of troops, the streets full of refugees. On the first day of Passover, our lunch consists of a piece of sugar with bread that our friend Mariška Koen forced us to take.
- 12/4. Before dark rumors spread that the Germans are getting in. Fear everywhere. We spend the night – three families together, dressed, awake.
- 13/4/41. We are relieved this morning to see our soldiers getting ready to go. I advise a friend of mine Nisim Koen and brother in law Avram de Majo that we should go with our families to Bosnia. They refuse. We manage to get to the military train for Lajkovac. Some soldiers tell us that the German troops entered Belgrade from the south.
- 14/4/41. Travelling towards Užice in order to move on to Sarajevo. The train is getting longer and slower. Alarms going on all the time, as German planes are flying above.
- During the night we get to Pale, where we are told that Sarajevo was bombed. So, we decide to get off. Finding overnight accommodation was not easy at all. As we were knocking on the door of a vacation lodge where Mrs. Polak stayed the previous summer, I hear someone calling my name. Out of the dark came a head of a local villager who asked: „Who among you is Alkalaj?“ My wife told him. „I would want to do something for you, because dr Bukus Alkalaj (my eldest brother) saved me in the Military hospital while I was serving my military term“.
- 15/4/41. Only after much trouble we find some food. The colonel who is living next to our room advises us to go to Sarajevo: „Go and blend in among your own folk. I advise you as a friend“. We part with Mrs. Polak, who tells us that her husband arrived by truck, that they are going to Užice and that it is only us that they can take with them. Begged by Simona Romano not to leave her, we decided to go with them to Sarajevo and we are off for the railway station right away. In the distance I see a group of officers. I thought – maybe David\* is among them. I met the old dr Kujundžić from Belgrade, and hearing his advice we turn around and, instead of going to Sarajevo, we return towards Užice.
- We get off the train at Ustiprača. In the darkness we see nothing. We despair. Suddenly an officer comes close to me and asks me what we are doing in the dark. „Waiting for the train to Užice“. „Užice is

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\*Brother David Alkalaj, reserve officer, spent World War Two in Germany as prisoner of war.

held by the enemy“, he replied. „What should we do now!?,“ I cried in despair. „Do you want to come with me to Montenegro?“ „We would be glad to“. Officer Bojović issued an order to some soldiers with guns to push an empty wagon, which quickly filled up. Soon the train started in the direction of Pljevlja, but came to a stop at Rudo.

16/4/41. Early in the morning, captain Bojović sent his armed men to the road and they managed to bring three empty trucks. Numerous refugees quickly filled them up. I had never dreamed that I would see the huge mountains Komovi and go along the valley of the river Lim.

In an inn along the road and old Montenegrin told me: „Have you seen, dear sir, there has been no such tragedy since the battle of Kosovo!“ Very tired, in pitch dark, we arrived to Kolašin.

17/4/41. I meet a German Jew. He recommends that we stay in Kolašin and wait for the Italians. Ergas, who travelled with us, wanted to move on to Peć, but captain Bojović told us that there is heavy snow in the Čakor gorge and that it is impossible to pass through. He lets us have one truck and advises us to go towards the Italian troops. At parting, we kiss like brothers, exchange addresses, hoping to meet soon again. We moved on to Podgorica, and in front of it we saw an Italian troops' camp. We did not dare enter the town, but took a turn for Nikšić. We meet our army, completely disorganized.

Before night, we arrived to Nikšić, full of our army and refugees, still not occupied. We are advised to keep moving on, because otherwise our truck would be seized. So, we moved on towards Trebinje, where a young man travelling with us, Armand Amodaj, had a relative, dr Levi. During the night we are on a muddy road.

18/4/41. Arrival to Trebinje; the town is occupied since yesterday. In front of dr Levi's apartment a huge crowd. An Italian soldier asked: „Who are you, do you have any weapons?“ Stuttering I replied: „We are poor refugees from Belgrade“. „Do not get off, move on, here is a revolution“. I asked a man there what it was about, and he explained that the people gathered to look for flour from the military warehouse. I explained our situation as best I could to the soldier and he let us get off. Dr Levi found an apartment for us and recommended us to the hotel manager, a German, to give us food.

16/5/41. We stayed in Trebinje for a month. Our troops who were taken prisoners were arriving to the town and sent on towards Albania and Italy. One day at the local inn I saw a great number of our senior officers. Ergas told me that they arrived from Skopje.



Life in Trebinje was monotonous. All our troops were sent away as prisoners of war, and those originating from the regions where the "Independent Croatia" was established were let go to their homes. While in Trebinje, we spent all our time with the Ergas family, with whom we travelled from Arandjelovac. With them was a young Jew, who decided to return to Belgrade, to inquire about the Ergas' shop. He came back some days later and brought with him a letter by Albert\* written in the prisoners of war camp in Kumanovo. Albert threw the letter across the fence and asked the man to take it to me. The letter came to the hands of Aron's\*\* wife Finika. Albert was also concerned about us, he had lost his belongings. Using the same man as messenger we sent to Albert some money, clothes and food.

- 17/5/41. I went to Dubrovnik and there I saw many Belgraders. In the morning the town gates had exhibited swastikas. Without thinking, we take a car and move from Dubrovnik to Herceg Novi. There we found a great number of acquaintances and our friend Mošić. We take an apartment in Topla, outside of the town. A beautiful room and an even more beautiful garden. Our landlady is a kind, elderly lady Nasta Špirtović, with her unmarried daughter Mika and another daughter Milena, married to a Croat, but a good Yugoslav, named Martin Sager. The beach is close to the house which is on the road itself.
- 22/6/41. Sunday. I went to the open market in Herceg Novi, but found nothing. On my way back, a lawyer from Zagreb told me that Germany and Italy had declared war on Russia. Initially, I could not believe it. „If this is true, the victory will be ours“ – I said.
- 21/7/41. The refugees keep arriving all the time and they tell us that the Jews in Belgrade have to do forced labor. I learn that my cousin Alfred Hason junior was hanged; his brother was a doctor in Herceg Novi. I begged people not to tell him anything. A rebellion broke out in Montenegro. There is mistrust felt in Herceg Novi against the Jews because we "make life expensive", by paying the prices for food-stuffs that they are selling.
- 22/7/41. Suddenly, at night, we are arrested. All our money is seized.
- 23/7/41. We are taken in big trucks, escorted by a great number of carabinieri, to Kotor, where we are told that our money would be returned. However, instead of getting to Kotor, we are boarded on a ship „Aleksandar“ with many Montenegrins, women and children

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\*Son of Samuilo Alkalaj, famous painter, living in the USA.

\*\*Brother of Samuilo Alkalaj, Aron Alkalaj, also survived the World War Two as German prisoner of war.

- and some youth from Herceg Novi. They were all considered communists. We sleep on the dining room floor.
- 24/7/41. We move on to the ship „Kumanovo“, which stops in front of Tivat. The ship staff treats us much better. We are given boots. The Kotor municipality or the humanitarian organization “Kolo srpskih sestara” delivers food for us.
- 26/7/41. We suffer from excessive heat: it is impossible to sleep in the boots, so we sleep on tables in ship halls. Finally, the ship started. Once again we see Herceg Novi.
- 27/7/41. We were unloaded in Durres, loaded onto big and comfortable buses and headed for Kavaje. There we are packed into a big stable with beds in it, three of us on top of each other. Garbage is everywhere. The women are weeping, the children crying, especially those who believed that we were going to Italy. No water or toilets. The huge flees bother us so badly that one cannot either stand or sit down.
- 28/7/41. The overall cleaning of the camp begins, especially of the stables. Italian officers and soldiers who were so strict yesterday are much kinder and more cooperative today. They are complaining that they have to live in Albania under such abominable conditions. We take out a wagon full of garbage, including rats and frogs. So, somehow, we settle down: men separated from women and children. Flies everywhere.
- 2/8/41. The rain turns the camp into a mud. Food: macaroni soup, cans, and surrogate coffee in the morning. It all tastes quite good. At our request, they let one man go out of the camp to buy some fresh foodstuffs.
- 5/8/41. The cleaning of the camp continues, but we are suffocated by the dust caused by passing trucks. A separate covered toilet for women was put up. Many Montenegrins arrived today, and they are accommodated separately from us. They say that the rebellion in Montenegro had been silenced.
- 9/8/41. Today afternoon, I was learning Italian with dr Bauer. My daughter comes back from a walk and invites me to join her. „Go out for a walk, father, do it“, she was persistent. A thought strikes me that possibly Albert had come. I asked dr Bauer to excuse me, and as soon as I met my daughter, I asked her: „Where is he?“ „Where is who?“ „Albert“. „How did you know?“ „A foreboding, why else would you be calling me?“ „I saw him in front of the camp“. „Alone?“ „Yes“.

We approach the camp gate. An officer was talking with an intern, Rafo Konfortij, and then he came closer and asked: „You are Alkalaj?“ „Yes“. Then he orders a soldier to escort me and attend the meeting. Rafo joined as well. As soon as we were there Albert came out of hiding; he was hiding behind a thick tree. „Do not say that I am your son“, he said. We shook hands. I asked him why he came. Hastily, he told me that Germans in Belgrade executed 101 Jews, including Mikica B. Aron. Albert fled the following day with his friend Šalom.

As if out of spite, Lepa did not stop talking to others around us.

Then suddenly Avram Aladžem came, approached my wife and said: „Lepa, you are not telling me that your son has come“. „My son, what do you mean?“, my wife choked and fainted. We strived to bring her back and crying she criticized me for keeping her son's coming from her. I calmed down the people saying that tomorrow I will be seeing my son again if I manage to go out with Ergas to go to the green market, replacing Haler who was ill with malaria.

10/8/41. I managed to get out with Ergas, escorted by a soldier. I needed to think of an excuse to get away from them, while Ergas is shopping for vegetables. I asked them to let me go urinate. I ran along the main street. I go into a tailor's shop, but the young man does not speak Italian. I met two carabinieri, and asked them where the toilets were. They showed me a place more than 200 meters away. I went there, but I could not spot the business of Samuel Hajim, a tailor. I was almost out of the town. I asked another passerby. He had no idea. Finally I asked a third passerby, in Serbian: „Is there a tailor in this direction?“. He could speak some „Macedonian“, but did not understand the word tailor. Somehow we understand each other and I move on. There were no more houses by the road. In the distance I saw a rundown mosque. The thought of the guard escorting us to the market place crossed my mind. Ahead of me was a field. I went back. Ergas told me that the guard was asking about me all the time. I apologized.

11/8/41. Rafa Konforti, who was doing the tasks of a clerk, told the guard to take me to the tailor Samuel Hajim, to choose fabric for trousers to be made for Rafo. We went into the shop and Ergas, upon hearing that he was from Corfu, started a conversation with him in Greek, to buy time, hoping that my son would show up. They left me alone, at that time the tailor told me that Albert was in Durres and that he was sure to come.

- 12/8/41. We are forbidden from entering the town. Gloomy faces of officers. A commanding mayor came and ordered us to gather together. He made a speech, stating that he had evidence that we tried to make contact with the world outside.
- 13/8/41. Albert managed to come to the camp and talk to us.
- 26/8/41. Due to the heat, dirt, the stench of the latrines, and the uncertainty of our position, everyone is increasingly edgy. Conflicts happen over any tiny detail. As advised by the commander, everyone is writing applications for transfer to Italy. Initially, I refuse to do so, thinking that this place in the back of beyond in Kavaje is the best place for us Jews at that time. Ergas told me that Albert had arrived to Split, as is visible from a postcard that a Jewish company in Durres received from Nisim Ruso.
- 30/9/41. September is over and our position is still unchanged. When it rains, the situation in the camp is awful. One cannot go outside, while inside there is not enough room for everybody. The sick are sent to the hospital in Tirana or temporarily to the infirmary. A cable arrived and was read aloud to us under the condition that we listen in peace, without approval or protest: „Duce has granted the requests of Jews to be transferred to Italy, to a place which is yet to be determined“. There followed general joy, but a few days later it was substituted by despair. My son Albert arrived to Padua. He wrote that in Split he did not get any money.
- 5/10/41. Everyone is waiting to leave, but the leaving is put off all the time due to the fact that „there are no ships or convoys“.
- 6–8/10/41. We are leaving Kavaje and boarding a ship. Via Bari we arrived to the camp Ferramonti di Tarsia, in Calabria, where we are welcomed by the camp manager and a group of Yugoslavs, predominantly Jews. The families were given separate rooms; the single people went into rooms housing 25 to 30 men, or women, separately. The camp is built on a dried up wetland location. It is big, but it is being extended by constructing new buildings. There is plenty of water. Electricity is limited. Everywhere around is barbed wire and guards.
- 10/11/41. My money is gone, and one can do nothing in a camp without money. You pay for every favor or service right away. It is not like in Kavaje, where there was solidarity, a sense of a community. There are more than 1,000 inmates from different countries. Any language can be heard spoken, mostly German. German Jews decide most things around the camp. There are two synagogues; one for the Orthodox. There is also a school for children, German

being the language of instruction. Craftsmen pursue their crafts and work. Our arrival led to increased prices for everything, and we are constantly blamed for this. Conflicts are very frequent, but everything calms down and ends well. There is also a court, so that disputes are not addressed before Italian authorities. We found there a great number of Yugoslavs, but not a single family.

25/11/41. Albert wrote to me that in Milan he bought a winter coat and a suit and that he is living well in Padua. Then he went silent, he is writing no more ...

25/12/41. Although we are in the south, it is cold. We are each given an additional blanket. In the meantime, some people from our group managed to go to „confino libero“. The first to do so was Dača Azriel with his family, then both Bauer brothers. My son Albert is in prison in Vicenza. A friend of his from Padua wrote to me: allegedly Albert came to Italy to look for us, and when he found out that we were in Ferramonti he went and reported to the Questura in Vicenza asking to come and join us. Nobody knows what is happening with our relatives in Belgrade.

30/1/42. From dr Leon Koen, who managed to flee Belgrade, I received a postcard from Abacia, saying that my brothers Bukus and Nisim are at the „Topovske šupe“ camp in Belgrade. Nisim had an ulcer surgery and is now healthy. Nothing is known of Rafailo.

2/2/42. Albert arrived today before dark, to our great joy. We hear from him how much he suffered as German prisoner, how he saved himself and arrived to Belgrade, worked there and finally fled to Albania.

1/4/42. Our life has changed. We have established correspondence with friends who came out of camps and those who are interned in Italy. And with the arrested brothers, of course. Brothers are receiving packages from Belgrade and news from their families. Bukus is a doctor at the women's camp Old Fairgrounds (Sajmište). Nisim is a doctor of the hospital\* within the Jewish Women's Society in the Belgrade neighborhood of Dorćol.

In our camp there is a famous German painter Fingestein. Albert becomes his student. The camp grew with the arrival of refugees from Rhodes. These are Jews from Slovakia,\*\* who traveled by ship along the Danube past Belgrade going to Palestine. In the Aegean Sea they suffered shipwreck, were saved by getting to a desert island and days later were discovered by an Italian airplane. Italian authorities sent a

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\*That was the Jewish hospital. Jews were not admitted to other hospitals.

\*\*See the testimony by Frida Mel in „We Survived 2“.

ship which took them to the island Rhodes and interned them there. The authorities treated them well. There were also two groups of Greeks: from Tripoli and from the ancient Greece. There were also interned Chinese, mostly staff from commercial or passenger ships. They developed laundry within the camp.

30/6/42. My two applications for „confino libero“ were rejected. By now almost a half of the group of Kavaje has left the camp to go to different small towns across Italy. An industrialist, a Jew from Milan, who often comes to the Ferramonti camp and helps certain inmates, gives his advice not to leave the camp, because inside it there is a Jewish environment and Jewish life. Mirko Davičo was sought by the Gestapo. The authorities first put him in the infirmary and subsequently transferred him to the hospital in Cosenza, but the carabinieri got him and took him to the Germans.

30/11/42. Months are going by. We got the „confino libero“ for the province Pesaro, by the Adriatic. There are some of our friends there: dr Gruen and Geza Gedalja. Very few of our group are still in the camp, mostly in the IX barrack. Many managed to go to Spain. Arrival of Himler to Rome. Many were fearful that he came to demand the deportation of Jews from Italy. The camp priest travelled to Rome to inquire, and said later that a prayer to God should be held, as the danger for the Jews was out of the way.

20/12/42. We left Ferramonti on 17 December and went to Pesaro. Trains terribly crowded. We were escorted by a police officer. Without him, we would not be able to get on the train. The place of our confinement is Macerata Feltria.

In Macerata Feltria we found Geza Gedalja, who helped us settle at the hotel „Feltria“, the only one in that small mountain place. Soon we met the other interns: dr Majeron, an attorney from Ljubljana, and dr Levi, an attorney from Genoa, and also some women, one of which was a Jew from Trieste.

1/1/43. Last night we celebrated the New Year. The parents of dr Levi came from Genoa to visit their son, they treated us to cake, and the hotel manager got some sparkling wine. We sang „Hatikva“, as wished by dr Levi's father. We all felt encouraged by the UK-US successes in Africa.

11/1/43. A new inmate arrived, a count from Florence. A very intelligent old man, but frightened. His wife, and Englishwoman, came to visit him, she is hard of hearing. Dr Majeron is giving us English lessons. Brothers are sending me money since October although I wrote and told them not to.



- 28/2/43. An inspector from Pesaro came and promised a transfer to Pergola. My wife and I went there and found an apartment. Secretary of the municipality was very kind. He said he was surprised that the Jews were not converting to Christianity. He thinks that Jews are very intelligent and cannot understand that they are not converting although they are suffering so much.
- 16/3/43. Yesterday we arrived to Pergola. Among the inmates there were two Jews: dr Marco Hantwurz, pharmacist, an acquaintance from Ferramonti, and Leo Birnbaum from Frankfurt am Mein.
- 30/4/43. Everything is turning green. Our key enjoyment is the long walks. The local population is not avoiding us, but it is for us unpleasant to engage in conversation since we are being watched. Luckily, we get some books and we read.
- 31/7/43. There was excitement over the topping of the Mussolini regime, but it subsided quickly. Badoglio continues the war on Italian territory. Air raids give cause to panic among the local population. Everyone is listening to Radio-London.
- All attempts to get news about our sisters in law taken away from Belgrade are unsuccessful. I am thinking of what a young Polish Jew was saying in Ferramonti: that trains were bringing into Poland Jews from France and Belgium who were suffocated on the way.
- 30/9/43. Germany occupied Italy. I advise my family to go, but Lepa won't hear of it.
- 1/12/43. Today I met Miša Adler in the street. He told me he was on the run. An order has arrived to Pesaro to arrest Jews, but he did not know if it referred also to those who were interned already. He has a fake identity card that Geza got for him for 100 Italian lira. He recommends that even without documents we leave right away for Rome, because it is easiest to hide in a big place. We stayed on, confused.
- 2/12/43. In the morning Aldo came and told me that there was a radio announcement ordering arrests of Jews. But, of course, he did not know if it applies to inmates. In the afternoon a lady came to us begging us to flee wherever we can.
- Right away we started getting some things packed. Then came a young man from the post office looking for Marco Hantwurz. A bit later came Marco, telling us that a cable had arrived to arrest all Jews.
- Immediately we leave towards Montesecco. We climbed uphill, and heard steps behind us. We quickly turned into the bushes by the

road thinking that it was carabinieri on bicycles. But someone was shouting: „Alberto, Alberto“. It was Camerini with his two sons in law. They were in Pergola, they found the house closed, so they started for Montesecco. We told them what we heard and advised them to leave Montesecco the same evening since everyone in Pergola knows that he took an apartment there. Camerini did not accept us going with them, since they were already many. He advised us to stay overnight in Sterletto and afterwards move on. We found accommodation in a house by the road.

3/12/43. At dawn we started towards Caudino, a place where Caverni, a trader from Pergola, had a house. I and my wife had to take a rest every hundred meters. Although it was cold we were all in sweat. Albert knew that the house was under the hill Santo Angelo. We come across some boys and they first took Albert to the house, and we followed. A farmer, Santino, did not have the key to the apartment and could not let us in without the boss's permit. A young man, a miller's son, went on his bike to Pergola, carrying Albert's letter to Caverni's son. It was already afternoon when he got the reply that it would be risky to move into the house because an officer, his cousin, was hiding in it.

Then we called the priest Don Domenico Roga, and told him that we were refugees from Yugoslavia. We asked him to recommend some accommodation for us with the local villagers. The very kind young priest told us to go to Bocanero, to a villager whose house was prominent on the hill top like a castle. The owners however refused our begging and could not welcome us since masons were reconstructing the house. They told us to go and check with the Bussi. Off we went across the worked fields, downhill. Albert had to serve as support to his mother so she would not fall into mud. It was already dark by the time we arrived at Bussi house. We told him that the priest was sending us, and he gave us a hearty welcome.

4/12/43. Today is a Catholic holiday. Lepa has bleeding and she stays in bed. I am begging the villager to let us stay for some days.

10/12/43. We are leaving Bucci's. Don Domenico gave us some names of priests in San Giani to help us find an apartment. We stop tired in front of a house by the road and we ask to be taken in. The woman refuses, as there is no empty room. Albert and Marco go to see the priest. The woman finally got some chairs for us outside and later let us inside to warm up. The husband also came by and explained

that they are not refusing us for dishonest reasons but due to lack of room. He offered the stable.

- 20/12/43. We move on to San Stefano. But we met a woman who told us that the Fascists had arrived to kill three Jews who were staying with her cousin. Albert and Marco went searching for an apartment in the vicinity all the way to Don Domenico, in order to look for fake documents. The day before yesterday Don Domenico stopped by to see us. He could not get the documents. Yesterday Albert and Marco came back. The result of their search: Bucci accepted to take us in but only for 10 days, provided that we come into the house when dark and not leave the room during daytime. Lepa cannot walk.
- 21/12/43. As soon as we set off, it started to rain. In the village of Ciamerano we found shelter in a house. They recognized and said they saw us passing by two weeks before. We had to move on. Heavy storm, mud up to our knees. We ask to be let into a stable by a house until the rain stops. The host offered us dinner and gave us overnight welcome.
- 1/1/44. We spent the Christmas together. Last night we celebrated the New Year. I am sleepless. Where to go, it has been ten days and we still have no idea about where to go. Poor Albert is desperate, does not know where to take us. He arranged with the Bussi's son to take us to the top of the hill San Angelo, to look for accommodation. However, overnight heavy snow came down, more than one meter high. Now they cannot send us away, at least not before the snow melts.
- 5/1/44. North wind melted the snow. The roads are changed into snow ponds, and across these ponds Don Domenico went to Costa but did not manage to find an apartment: the priest's niece was against us moving in. Then, Don Domenico said that we move into the house Caverni. He gave Albert the key and Albert and Marco went there at night to see how it is.
- 30/3/44. We stayed in the Caverni house for full three months. Closed shutters, closed door, but still careless enough to light a fire the first two days. Many people saw the smoke and asked the villager who was there. He said that the smoke goes from his chimney into the chimney of his boss if there is no wind. There is plenty of fuel wood and coal. At daytime we sit with our winter coats on and we warm ourselves on the embers that the villager's wife and the miller's wife bring for us. Their families are the only ones aware of our being there. We wait for darkness to come and for the villager's signal of three knocks against the ceiling and only then we light the fire. Albert and Marco then go down to the villager to take some water

ready for us and to hear the news. Don Domenico comes to visit once a week. He brings books, tells us the news that he hears on the radio, and buys for us food and medicines. Caverni send food through the villager: bacon, pasta, etc. We buy ham via the villager and the priest. We also bought quite a quantity of potatoes. Caverni said we can use up all the food and wine in the storage. In the dark, I get out with my daughter and we walk in the darkness behind the house. While snow lasts, nobody comes except a person here and there to the mill to have flour milled. We walk around the house in slippers and talk by whispering in order not to make audible noise. Months go by. The priest suggests that we need to move. There are Partisans in the hills. Once again Mario came and said that we need to leave the house, since German raids will start soon. We ask: where to? The priest suggests that we occupy an empty house, later a mill, and finally join the Partisans on top of the San Angelo hill.

- 11/4/44. Exactly at the time when we were to leave the mill and the villager, the villager tells us that in a nearby little house, on the other side of the hill, there used to be a room for rent. So, Albert and I go off, and after much talk we managed to make arrangements for us to move in the following day, and to bring also some things from the Caverni house. The house is under the hill, lonely, hidden behind green trees.
- 3/5/44. It is now almost a month since we have been with the Atili family, and we have become friends with the family. The estate is not theirs, but of their relative who lives with his daughter in Cabernarda. Both are miners. They are all very kind to us and curious about who we are.
- 31/5/44. The whole of May has been miserable for us. Armed Fascists often came from Cabernardi to our region, to take eggs, chicken, rabbits, and sometimes arrest someone. I and daughter Bojana keep guard all day long. As soon as we see one of the timber workers walk by the house we all hide.
- 6/6/44. Last night I asked a villager: is it true that Rome has fallen. He confirmed but told me in confidence that the following day the Germans and Fascists will make raids looking for conscripts. This he tells me because of my son. I tell him that my son had gone off to Milan, to the University.
- 16/8/44. Albert and I decide to see the priest. He was not at home, he was with the villagers building a wooden bridge, under supervision by Partisans. In the priest's house we talked to two soldiers. They told

us about the devastation the Germans left behind them in Abrucca. They encouraged us and comforted us that our misery shall end soon.

- 17/8/44. This morning we were alarmed by the news that Vilma told us about the Allies leaving Palazzo. Atilio was working on repairing the bridges on the road in front of the house, Albert wanted to flee across the hills to Arcevia. At that moment the sexton of the church in Palazzo passed by and said that the English were still there this morning. Then Atilio came and said that he heard nothing about Palazzo being abandoned. It was Sunday. We decided to go to Palazzo and see the doctor. The Doctor told us that the Allies had broken through the front in Betagna and that the Russians are making rapid progress.
- 19/8/44. We can still hear the cannons. The Allies had taken over Sterletto and Pergola. Scandelari is back. With him and his wife I went to Arcevia because a governor had arrived there.
- 20/8/44. The Governor welcomed us kindly. I read to him in English who we were and what we want. He ordered that our whole family be transferred by car from Palazzo to Arcevia, that we be given the best food and accommodation in the local inn, all at the expense of the Allied Military Government. There was no one happier than us. Today in Arcevia we experienced the first disappointment. The Governor is smiling, but there was an American who would not hear of municipality covering the costs for us. But that was nothing compared to the scene that we were watching all the time. Countless cannons and military vehicles passing through Arcevia. It was only then that we could understand the force with which the Allies were making progress.
- 10/9/44. We moved into a private apartment, we have two rooms and a kitchen. Albert went to Pergola to find some things and see what is going on with his girlfriend Victoria. Life is rather monotonous. Almost all the troops went through and Arcevia was once again a small provincial mountain place on the top of the hill. A doctor of the American Red Cross came today. He told us to go right away to Rome, where we will have an apartment, food and pay. He agreed to take us to Pergola, and we explained that we have to pick up our things and take our son. We packed hastily and went to Fabriano in a hospital vehicle. We went into a hospital which was without doors or windows. We were freezing at night on the floor made of stone plates.

- 12/9/44. Around noon there came that Italian, working for the American Red Cross, and asked: „Are you ready to go?“ „No“. „Then you will stay in Pergola“.
- 20/9/44. Soldiers from Polish legion came and blew up all the bridges that the army had fixed. Pergola became cut off from the rest of the world. We receive news from the front by means of a radio installed in a nearby mill. There is no water or electricity supply in town.
- 31/10/44. Anytime anyone from the army comes to Pergola, we ask them for transportation. They all make promises, but no one is actually helping. We still have money enough for a couple of months. Through private links I sent a letter to the Yugoslav office in the Vatican – no reply. Lepa is sick; Bojana had appendicitis and had to have a surgery. We wrote two times to the A.M.G. (Allied Military Government) in Urbino, asking for monetary assistance for refugees and transport costs to Rome.
- 30/11/44. Mayor of Pergola managed to get for us a small truck which belonged to a green grocer to take us to Ancona, so that we could continue by train to Rome. Aldo and Marco went first and took with them the pass for the trip. The grocer refused to drive further... The Governor then finally left Pergola, and we stayed on to spend the winter there.
- 31/12/44. Dr Angelo Anav wrote to us saying that the staff of the Yugoslav consular office has been replaced and that my wife and I will be receiving monetary assistance, but not the children, as they need to report for military service and that he would come personally to explain everything to us. And he actually came before Christmas and explained that there was nothing in fact in terms of assistance. I gave him letters for „Delasem“.
- 21/1/45. The whole month we were starving, waiting to be given half a pig that our advisor Camerini promised to sell to us. We had difficulties with Mrs. Ginevri, whose son is requesting that we should pay rent for four months since they gave the apartment to us for free, thinking that it will last three or four weeks. Of course, now that there is no danger of military requisition, please leave or pay.
- 28/2/45. We also had a conflict with Mrs. Barbanti. She came with her son, daughter and maid from Rome and requested that we move into some humid rooms, in which she was keeping food. There was a hassle. The municipality also interfered, and we stayed there sharing the kitchen and the bathroom. Soon we became friends, after they realized that we had nowhere to go and that we did not bite.



- 31/3/45. I was desperate over lack of money. We were trying to sell our watches, to be able to pay Camerini, but this failed. One day in March, while I was taking a worried walk, Bojana came to me and told me that a long letter had arrived from dr Amodaj. Camerini brought it. He was writing in response to the letter sent actually to Avram Mošić, saying that ever since the armistice he was in Rome, that Ergas is there as well as many other friends; that they had thought that we had perished; that some friends are now in America, and some already in Belgrade. At the same time he wrote that he had sent 5,000 Italian lira to us and that his son Armand will come for us to pick us up and take us to Rome. We agreed with Mrs. Barbanati that we should go together. Now we are all hopeful again.
- 22/4/45. When God gives, he gives abundantly. Some American officers came to Pergola. Albert met them and they came to us and purchased paintings worth 30,500 Italian lira. Now, we had good capital. Amodaj wrote again to say that we should not waste any more time and should hurry up and get there. It was difficult to find transport. Somehow we managed to get the permit from the military authorities. Again, it was our good fortune: a vehicle came to the grocer and unloaded oranges, and the same car was returning to Rome. At 6 PM we made the deal and in the morning at 5 AM we were ready to go. We travelled all day. The drivers passed all check points smoothly saying that they were transporting Allies. So, here we are in Rome. Amodaj informed us by phone that my brother David had arrived to Belgrade. Is Rome going to be the end of suffering or are there new challenges ahead?

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*Kornel NEUMANN*

REMEMBER?\*

*Kornel Neuman was born in 1918 in Osijek, of father Arpad and mother Serena, née Ajhner (Eichner). Father owned a business manufacturing cattle salt. He had two elder brothers – Egon and Fredi.*

*In Osijek he completed his elementary school and real grammar school and in Zagreb he graduated from the Technical Faculty – Civil Engineering Department.*

*In the Holocaust he lost his parents and many other members of his direct and wider family.*

*Kornel lives in Switzerland, with his wife.*

To this very day, forty-six years after fleeing Osijek and going abroad, whenever I meet any of my “Esker” friends (people from Osijek), practically every sentence begins with „Remember?“

I would not even mention it if it was not for my wife, who is not a Yugoslav, who every time reminds me of it. Equally, she sometimes says that in those moments, the whole of Yugoslavia seems to her to be an extended village where houses are structured along the main street where everybody knows everybody else.

I suppose that there are not many people now in Osijek who remember me. I was the youngest son of the late „Salz-Neumann“ from what used to be the Županijska street number 12, born in 1918. I lived in Osijek until my high school matriculation.

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\*Text read at the meeting of the Coordinating Board of Women’s Sections and the celebration of 40 years of revival of the Jewish Community of Osijek, 23 – 25 October 1987 in Osijek.

Although it has been half a century since that horrendous time (1941–1945), in my thoughts I often go back to the place where I was born, where I went to the Jewish public school, in the then Kolodvorska street, and then to the grammar school in the Fortress (Tvrđa), and finally the Technical Faculty in Zagreb, from 1937 to 1941. That time has been preserved in my memory as pleasant and harmonious, although even back then many things were not actually such. Yet, that is human nature: the bad and the unpleasant are often suppressed into oblivion ...

Quite a few people smile with a sneer when they see in our apartment the photographs that I made some years ago of the Županijska street, the Fortress, the confluence of the Karašica river, the winter port, the district church. Apart from these, the walls are also decorated by a brick and a small iron door of my parents' home. I, however, am not ashamed of becoming sentimental when the seeds of *Mirabilis jalapa*, the flowers that my wife collected in our former home, come to a fragrant blossom.

I remember: director Zonenšajn (Sonnenschein) of the Jewish public school as he scolds us in his sonorous voice; also the teacher “Šternovica”, as she gave us sometimes poor marks, or Noci (Natan Schwartz), the religious teacher telling us about the creation of the world ...

I remember: the parties that our friend, girl named Mauzike Špicer (Mausike Spitzer), organized in their home in Aleksandrova street.

I remember: my father, somewhere in 1926, taking me one Sunday for a ride on a new electric street car from Zeleno Polje and back.

I remember: the arrival of the new young rabbi, dr Šalom Frajberger (Freiberger) to Osijek, to follow into the steps of dr Ungar.

I remember: how I hopelessly protested in 1931 against having the „Bar Mitzvah“, as I thought that it was unjust, since my two elder brother did not have to do it ...

I remember: how while in high school, apart from some bad marks, I sometimes also got the second rate in religious studies, and once (on 21 February 1934!) I was even formally reprimanded by my class teacher, among other things, for „not observing religious duties, not attending regularly religious classes and the temple ...“

I remember: that the worst punishment for me was when my parents would not allow me to go to the daily promenade in Kapucinska street in the evening, from 6 to 7:30 PM.

I remember: my father, at that same time, going to the inn „Rojal“ to watch others play bridge.

I remember: the many Jewish shops and businesses in the main streets of the town: Makso Bihler (Büchler), Šalgo (Szalgo), Rausnic (Rausnitz),

Kraus & Nojman (Kraus & Neumann), Aron Heler (Heller), Steel Works Goldštajn (Goldstein), Brothers Han (Hahn), tailor Mišo Vajs (Weiss), Maler (Mahler), Pharmacy Fuks (Fucks), Binstok (Bienenstock – bicycles), Gereg (Görög – Grand-Hotel), Bela Fišer (Fischer), Adler & Blum, Šajber (Scheiber – grocery store), Fuks (Fucks, grocery store), photographer Sege (Szege), stationery and printing shop Sekler (Szekler), Šternberg (Sternberg), Krešić, Špicer (Spitzer), Auferber (brush factory), Fogel (Vogel – metal worker) and others.



*The house  
where Kornel  
Neuman was  
born in Osijek*

I remember: the numerous doctors and attorneys – Vajsman (Weismann), Herlinger, Kraus, Margulis (Margulies), Oton Fišer (Fischer), Alfred Fišer (Fischer), Lorant ...

I remember: that in the fifth grade of grammar school I had to repeat the year as, apart from other poor marks, I had an unsatisfactory mark in biology, because I could not distinguish between the dandelion and the sun-flower ...

I remember: that at age sixteen I had to go for half a year to attend school in Vukovar because during the summer holidays I went to dance at the Grand, which was strictly forbidden ...

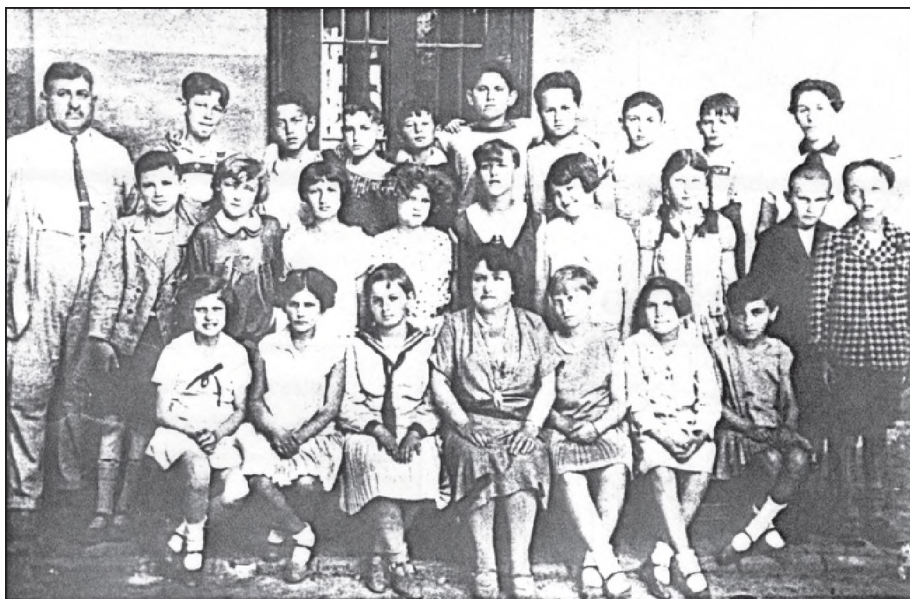
I remember: that for five years I attended the dance school with the teacher that we called Trišlerica ...

I remember: that already at the age of twelve I started courting Mira, the younger sister of my brother Egon's friend ...

I remember: the many „great“ loves that followed, not necessarily just one at a time (!) – Ivanka, Rozina, Blanka, Ada, Maca ...

- I remember: how enthusiastic I was about my membership both in the sports society Sokol and in the scouts (I was a group leader) and the rowing club „Neptun“...
- I remember: our picnics that we went to: Milan Kolar, Tito Vajs (Weiss) and I, on foot or by bicycles, to Kiš-Darda, Valpovo, Čepin, Našice, the confluence of the river Karašica, the town park and to other places, usually taking with us a tent and supplies.
- I remember: how in summer we would go and spend time at the Regiment swimming facility, and in winter we would skate at the “tennis-platz” in Regeš ... (Švaner bathing facility was not to our liking!).
- I remember: how we rowed on the river Drava, in kayaks while still younger and in an assembly boat that we built on our own and that my brother Egon and I were terribly proud of ...
- I remember: the many tea-parties in the Officers' Club, at the Commercial Academy and the Sokol Hall.
- I remember: my father, after one such tea-party, waiting for me in front of our house with a policeman next to him and a carpet beater in his hand, because I came home half an hour later than usual (!), the reason being that I, enamored, walked home a girl named Cana ...
- I remember: my parents' friends: the family of Bela Fišer (Fischer), trader of metal screw goods, and the family of Karlo Kolar, wholetrader of miscellaneous goods and toys, later a co-owner of knitting factory „Mara“.
- I remember: my uncle Aron Heler (Heller) who had a vinegar factory in the Desatičina street, while his family lived in Kolodvorska street (later renamed to Braće Radić).
- I remember: my closest friends – Milan Kolar, Tito Vajs (Weiss), Đuro Rajnić (Reinitz), Vlado Ginzberg, Branko Krešić, brothers Kockar, Miro Matijević, Ivica Franjić, Zdenko Bihler (Büchler) and others.
- I remember: that my parents let me go and study civil engineering in Zagreb although in high school I was always a poor student.
- I remember: that initially father gave me 750 dinars per months but later, when he had less, I started earning money by making drawings and designs for other students.
- I remember: that as a student in Zagreb I ate at the Jewish mess, in Kraljice Marije street.
- I remember: how self-conscious I was when I went “to study” and “prepare for exams” at the coffee shop „Minjon“.
- I remember: that everywhere I lived there were always bed bugs!

I remember: yes, I remember a lot of things, but then, at the beginning of April 1941 the bombing of Belgrade began and we, students from Osijek, went back to our homes.



*Teachers and pupils of the Jewish School, 3rd and 4th grade, 1928:  
Upper row: Principal Sonnenschein, Pišta Kraus, Ripp, Turi Ferber, Lippert,  
Fischer, Kornel Neumann, Hugo Zuckerberg, Paul Moret, Tirca Rotbart, teacher.  
Middle row: Milan Kolar, Boriška Szege, Hela Mismar, Mausika Spitzer, Zlata  
Stein, Mira Mahler, ?, Boskovitz, Feri Kohn.  
Front row: Suzi Šalgo, Edita Szilard, Luli Kramer, Šternovica, teacher, Lederer,  
Lang, Krakauer.*

I remember: the days when we with suspense anticipated the attack of Germany against Yugoslavia, listening to the news and discussing among friends all the possible options, what was going to happen and what is in store for us, Jews ...

I remember: that my brother Fredi (Fredy), our niece Gerda Švarc (Schwartz) and I wanted on 10 April 1941 to go as volunteers to the army barracks at Gaj Square but, apart from the guards, there was no longer anyone there ...

I remember: that many of those who until then were my friends from the scouts and the Sokol athletic and rowing club „Neptun“ were now suddenly walking the streets armed and wearing uniforms of Ustaša or the German Kulturbund...



- I remember: that upon seeing this, Fredi and I decided to flee „to the south“, hoping that we would succeed somewhere to join the Yugoslav Army, if not in the territory of Yugoslavia, then possibly in Greece, Palestine or Egypt. We did not get further than Sarajevo, where the German troops overtook us and some days later we returned to Osijek.
- I remember: that we, meaning Tito Vajs, Đuri Rajnic, Bandi Kan (Kahn), Tibor Rausnic (Rausnitz) and I, after that, started breeding rabbits in order to get some work and earn some money.
- I remember: how about thirty of us young boys went at that time every day to the barracks to do forced labor for the German command, arranging the German war prey which was then to be sent to the Eastern front.
- I remember: that Milan Kolar and some other Jews were detained as hostages by the Ustaša, to be executed in case that there is an assassination somewhere that would call for it.
- I remember: that at the beginning of August the Ustaša on three occasions arrested a greater number of Jews – Zdenko Bihler (Büchler), Kornel Lorant, Pali Cimerman (Zimmermann), Buki Finci, Ernest Dirnbah (Dirnbach), Oto Rotman (Otto Rottman) – and deported them to the camp in Gospić, and that some of them did not get out of there.

Broj bloka: 21 Broj stranice: .....

G. Kornel Neumann **Potvrda**, na poziv Zapovjedništva  
za vojničku prednabrazbu i radnu službu omladine, prijavio se je.

Škola: / Razred: / Fakultet: tehn. Odsjek: građev.

U Osijeku, dne 27. srpnja 1941.

Upisao: [Signature]

ISPOSTAVA  
Zapovjedništvo za vojničku prednabrazbu  
i radnu službu omladine  
K. S. JER

*Confirmation that Kornel Neuman responded to the invitation for military preparation and labor service by youth*

- I remember: that a clerk of the Jewish unit of the Osijek Ustaša police came to our house one day in August and warned us that the three of us

were now on the list of hostages, so the following day he got passes for us (without passes at that time one could not travel anywhere) for holidays in Makarska. That clerk was Krunoslav Đurić. I knew him from the scouts' organization. Later I heard that he was executed in 1945.

I remember: that we played bridge in order to somehow shorten the time to fleeing.

I remember: our parents telling us that we, the younger ones, have to flee, and hide somewhere whereas nothing is going to happen to them, the elderly ones ...

Predstojništvo redarstva  
u Osijeku

**Propustnica** 410

Vrijedi 10 dana

za Neuman, rođen 1918 u Osijeku

zavičajan u Osijeku u kojemu se dopušta putovanje iz Osijeka u Makarsku radi

s pravom povratka – bez prava povratka. Putuje u civilu – u uniformi

Ova propustnica vrijedi za putovanje uz predočenje lične legitimacije providena sa fotografijom imenovanog

PREDSTOJNIŠTVO GRADSKOG REDARSTVA.

Osijek, dne 12. Avgusta 1941.

Predstojnik gradskog redarstva: [Signature]

*The pass allowing Neuman to travel from Osijek for vacations*

I remember: my uncle Heler (Heller), giving each one of us individually 1,000 dinars for the road, since father no longer had any money.

I remember: the three of us before eve on 12 August 1941 driving in a carriage to the railway station and taking the night train to Zagreb. There were about ten of us in the train – including Tito Vajs, Milan Kolar, Djuri Rajnic, Bela and Vili Han (Willy Hahn), Lulu Rozenberg (Rosenberg) with wife, Leo Mismar with wife, and Hela Mismar.

I remember: some boys from Osijek at the Zagreb railway station telling us that it is not possible to go via Plaso, which was the demarcation line, towards Sušak, which was occupied by the Italian troops. Namely, the Italians had established strict control of pas-

sage which was the reason that most of them decided to travel to Makarska via Sarajevo and Split. Nevertheless, we decided to try to get through to Sušak via Plaso. At that time there was no knowing which was a better decision, but subsequently it turned out that the three of us were incredibly lucky as we managed to get away from the Ustaša!

I remember: how, by mere coincidence, we fooled the carabinieri in Pleso, by jumping over the fence by the railway station unnoticed, after which partly on foot and partly by bus we arrived to Sušak.

I remember: us hiding for months on Trsat above Sušak, sustaining ourselves on help that we asked from Osijek Jews who, like us, managed to save themselves by coming to Sušak or Rijeka.

I remember: one day being arrested by the Italians in the street, being detained in a cell of the Rijeka prison where there were also two persons from Osijek\*: Kornel Bauer and Fredi Štajner. Two days after the arrest we were transferred to Bakarac, the boundary line of the occupied territory and the Independent State of Croatia, where we were taken over by an old member of the home-guard, who told us: „Gentlemen, consider that I had never seen you. Good-bye!“ Upon hearing this we went back in the evening to Sušak, after we bought some meat in Kraljevica, since there was no meat in Sušak.

I remember: that at the beginning of December 1941 we illegally crossed from Sušak to Rijeka and continued by train to Trieste, and two days later we moved on by train to Milan and a week later to Como, where for several days we were hiding in a villa of a senior Fascist officer. Without his knowledge, of course.

I remember: that we first tried to get into Switzerland, I think, on 20 December, but after 25 hours of marching and two days spent in prison the Swiss once again returned us to the border: we were to go back to Italy, where we came from! Three years ago at that place I came across a sign reading: *Benvenuti nel Valle di Muggio*. That sign was not there in 1941!

I remember: we returned to Switzerland, this time via Monte Generosa after thirty-two hours of walking. This time the Swiss kept us in prison for two months – however, the key was that we saved our lives.

I remember: that subsequently I was interned with my brothers in a hotel, and later in different camps, until the autumn of 1943, when we received support and I continued my studies at Lausanne.

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\*Eseker = person from Osijek

I remember: spending two months in remand prison in 1944, because I was advocating Tito's Partisans among the Yugoslav civilian and military refugees ...

Fol. 3103-98. 2.  
194.....  
Obavješćujete se ovim da je danas kod Vas obavljena pljenidba vrhu duga na javnim daćama od Din 6141.-  
para..... Ako u roku od 8 dana tu svotu ne platite prodat će se stvari javnom dražbom.

**Gradski porezni ured**

U Osijeku, dne 1. IX 1941. Orhovoditelj:

Ime dužnika:  
Arpad Šajman.

*Confirmation of seizure of assets for debt purposes, with possibility of sale thereof in case of failure to enforce the order of the tax authorities*

I remember: how many dear and good people I met during this long calvary of mine, people that I will be thankful to for the rest of my life, because at that time they made me know that life is worth living ...

I remember: that in many critical situations I was always repeatedly lucky, and it is luck that I should be thankful to for having survived.

I remember: that my dear parents did not survive, because they were taken by the Ustaša in the autumn of 1942 to the camp on the Tenja Road, after which I never heard anything about them (except for an information by the Red Cross of Slesia, from a person called Jan Michalik, that the „Nojmans are no longer staying with him“).

I remember: all the other relatives and friends who, just like my parents, perished in the camps in Poland, in Jasenovac or Stara Gradiška, or who had, like my niece Gerda Švarc (Schwartz), lost their lives while with the Partisans in autumn of 1941.

I remember: the disappointment after the war every time that I came to Osijek finding not a single relative or friend there. My wife kept saying: „When in the streets, look at the people of your own age, not at those who are in their twenties!“ only once I met Janči Kraus, Laci Šajber (Scheibera), the gardener Goldštajn (Goldstein), the photographer Sege (Szege), Lilika Gereg (Gereg), Maks Rogar.

I remember: the joy I felt every time when, once in two or three years, since 1967 until the present time, I would meet in Israel people who used to live in Osijek: Mira and Olga Auferber (née Heler), Milan and Hanzika Kolar Pšerhof (Pscherhof), Branko and Slavka Krešić, Eško and Agika Labunjec (née Sternberg), Turik and Marika Fer-

ber (née Štajnberg), Bandi and Margita Han, Kornel and Mira Lorant (née Rajs), Zlatko and Zlata Vamošer, Šandor and Rožika Lang, Miša and Zlata Tabori (née Bihler), Luj and Mina Montag, Lacika and Lea Sternberg (née Frojndlih) and many others.

I remember: other people from Osijek, living in Osijek and outside of Israel, whom I meet or used to meet from time to time, such as the dear Ljerka Komplita (née Adler), Emil Kiš, the late Edita Vajzner (née Artmann) and others.

I remember: thankfully how we have always been heartily welcomed every time we went to Israel by the families Kolar, Auferber, Krešić, Labanjecov, Ferber, Lang, Lorant, and others.

I remember: the excitement and the joyous shouting by our people from Osijek living in Israel when I, many years ago, showed them the two films about Osijek: „Look at that, that is Desatičina street, and Kapucinska street, that is Henglovac, and the Fortress, the boys' and the girls' grammar school, the Officers' Club, Kišdarda, Čingilingičarda, Golibar, Ružina street, the Francensgase, di Anagase...“

I remember: how once Rožika Lang, „the honorary consul of Osijek to Jerusalem“ full of pride, treated us to beans soup, made with beans that she got from the gardener Goldštajn from Retfala ...

I remember, again and again, with gratitude, my wife and my family, who accepted me and made me a part of their circle, and all of our Swiss and Yugoslav friends who showed me that my homeland is now here.

Even today, forty years after the disaster that we were all caught in, I remember with sadness all those who have in the meantime left us forever. Here I will mention only a few from my own generation: my brother Egon, Branko Krešić, Agika Labunjec (née Šternberg), Kornel Lorant, Luj Montag, Lacika Šternberg, Edita Vizner (née Artman).

Sic transit gloria mundi!

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*Isak-Iso FINCI*

I REMEMBER NOT MY PARENTS,  
I KNOW NOT MY SAVIORS

*Isak Finci was born in Sarajevo on 27 June 1937, of father Cadić-Cezar and mother Tamara-Riki Finci, née Ergas. He was the only child in the family.*

*During the war he lost his father, mother and many other family members and relatives.*

*He has been living in Israel since 1951, where he immigrated as an orphan of the Children's Home of the Jewish Community of Belgrade.*

*He is married and has two sons and a daughter.*

I was four years old when the war started. Everything that I know of that period I have heard from those older than me.

I remember that I used to walk with my mother in Đakovo between the fence and I remember that there was a lot of snow. They told me that I slept a lot. I think that I was sick. When I woke up, my mother was not there, and I was in a hospital near Osijek. They told me that my aunt's daughter took me with her when she escaped the Đakovo camp, her name was Cilika Altarac. It was her friend Mihail Atijas who was doing forced labor in Đakovo who persuaded her to flee. They fled together with me. Mihail put me under his army coat and cooled me down with snow as I had a high fever.

According to that story, Mihail was the one who planned this escape. He waited for the moment when it would be snowing so that the new snow would hide our trails once we get out of the Đakovo camp. Near Osijek they put me into a hospital; I do not know which one. Cilika arranged with a nun



at the hospital to hide the data about where I was coming from and who I was. She told me this when we met again later.

I do not remember when I got well again. I remember very few events and images.

All of a sudden I was on a truck, in a refugees place. There were a number of trucks into which we children were loaded and these trucks made up the children's home and that was where they took care of us. Namely, the Partisans had liberated this territory short after I was left at the hospital. So, I was in a children's home housed in trucks. We were all the time given orders from couriers about when to continue moving. I remember that there were many of us refugees.



*Children of the Children's Home „Lag baomer“ in Belgrade in 1946, including Isak Finci before immigration to Israel*

Cilika told me that many children had already died of typhoid fever in Đakovo before our escape. That was when my mother told her: „Take him! So, he would either die on the road or you will find for him a hospital or a doctor.“ I never again saw my mother; she perished in the Đakovo camp. When I went to visit Đakovo, I did not find her grave.

In Đakovo there was as an inmate my mother's sister Elza, née Ergas, married Altarac; Cilika's mother. She was buried in Đakovo. According to the lists contained in a book, it seems that I also died in the same camp, although it is not so.

We were in fact in a group of refugees with the Partisans. I remember that one of the drivers fled with a truck and we were all moved into another truck, and that it became very crowded in there, there was no space. That was what the nurses who took care of us told us, my memories are more a remnant of their stories.

16. IX. 8.

PRILAZNIK OTKAZU I ZAKAZ.

Beograd.

U Beogradu dana 08. Septembra primljeni su dva otokovi  
naše narodni učenici, rođeni cirilski na ispravama i iznaloženja  
i to :

- 1/ Finci Isak sin Čedaka i majke Isakove rođjene Isakovice, rođen 27. VI. 1937. u Sarajevu ;
- 2/ Isakov Judica, sin Avraha i majke Anuše rođjene Isaković, rođen 11. VII. 1934 u Sarajevu ;
- 3/ Vojskić - Horis - Stijepo sin Isakova i majke Isakove rođjene Isakovice, rođen 23. IX. 1938 u Sarajevu ;
- 4/ Isaković Štefan sin Isakova i majke Isakove rođjene Isakovice, rođen 24. IX. 1936 u Beogradu ;
- 5/ Isaković Albert sin Isakova i majke Isakove rođjene Isakovice, rođen 26. IX. 1936 u Beogradu ;
- 6/ Albert Isaković sin Isakova i majke Isakove rođjene Isakovice, rođen 20. XI. 1935 u Beogradu.

Svi se prijavili otkaz da rade u našim školama i da im se priloženim dokumentima prijaviti.

Šta je Isakova - otokova porodica !

Prostorno izdati

*[Signature]*

*Two documents showing that Isak Finci was a protégé of the Children's Home of the Jewish Community of Belgrade (up) and that his name was included on the list of children who made Aliyah in 1951 to Israel*

Broj	Ime	Ime Oca	Ime Majke	Godina	Mesto	Opis
100	48	Finci	Isak	1937	Beograd	Prilaznik. Prilaznik ispravama i iznaloženja
100	48	Finci	Isak	1937	Beograd	Prilaznik. Prilaznik ispravama i iznaloženja
101	53	Isaković	Štefan	1936	Beograd	Prilaznik. Prilaznik ispravama i iznaloženja
102	11	Isaković	Albert	1936	Beograd	Prilaznik. Prilaznik ispravama i iznaloženja
103	54	Isaković	Albert	1936	Beograd	Prilaznik. Prilaznik ispravama i iznaloženja
104	47	Isaković	Albert	1936	Beograd	Prilaznik. Prilaznik ispravama i iznaloženja
105	14	Isaković	Albert	1936	Beograd	Prilaznik. Prilaznik ispravama i iznaloženja

I do not know how long it lasted, but I do remember that I started moving from one war orphans' home to another to finally arrive to a home in Banja Luka. Later we moved to the region of Lika. We were to get to the airport and be transferred to Italy. But, that failed. I was transferred to Venice. There were many Yugoslav refugees there. I suppose that Venice was un-

der occupation and we were put into a convent. We were cared for by nuns. One of them became very attached to me, her name was Sebastiana. She told me: „You are not a religion, you are a people.“ In the convent there was plenty of food and clothes. After all the fleeing, that was heaven. She told me that she had been educated in Jerusalem and that there our brothers were waging a war and getting our country ready for us. She „inflicted“ me with the Zionist ideas, although at the time I was only five years old. When I was just six, I came up with a conclusion that I must be a refugee because I was a Jew. It was normal that I should move around children's homes in which the treatment was rough, because in them there were children of different religions, who often remained orphans after bombing. But, getting to know nun Sebastijana, who gave me love, painted everything differently. There, in the Venice home, they started teaching us the Hebrew alef-bet.

When the war was over, Yugoslavia requested that the orphan children be returned home. That was how I got to the children's home in Banja Luka, and there were children there of all nationalities and minorities. That was when I made contacts with relatives from Sarajevo. It was my uncle Josip Ergas, one of my mother's sisters Dora Ergas Matko, and the grandmother who survived – Rahel Ergas. She was also in refugee with Cilika, and they both survived. Cilika had lived in Israel until her death in 1999.

My family took me from the home and took me to Sarajevo, where I lived in my parent's home, in Hadži-Durakova street 8. My family in 1948 learned about the Children's Home in Belgrade. I moved there and from 1948 to 1951 I lived in the home in Visokog Stevana street 2. My family was in a financially very dire situation and that was why they put me up in the Home. Anka Štajn, the manager, planned to take me to Israel. She had found a family which cared for me since my arrival there. It was people from Sarajevo, dr Mojše Alkalaj, his wife Reni and their son David, two years older than me.

In Israel I was right away received by them through the organization Aliat hanoar in the Hama Apil kibbutz, near Hedera. Of all the children from Yugoslavia it was only two children who got there, I and a girl named Zdenka. Half a day I worked and half a day I learned, although I was very young. That was the system of education in a kibbutz.

I understood that I had come to a country surrounded by enemies. Under an accelerated program I graduated from an agricultural school consisting of a ten year program. After graduation I moved to another kibbutz, where I became a full member, the kibbutz Ein Dor, meaning the Source of Generations.

In 1956 I joined the Army, the parachuting units. After the Six Days War I left the kibbutz and since then I have been living in Kiriat Ata. I worked for

27 years for the telephone company „Bezek“. In 1973 I married Lili Halali, a Jew born in Iraq. We have two sons and a daughter.

Many people from my family perished in the war. My father was taken to forced labor right away in 1941. He was accused along with others of being a communist and was executed in Kovačići, near Sarajevo. I do not remember my father, I do not even have a photograph of him, and even if I were to find one I would not recognize it. Grandmother used to tell me that he was sentenced in the Sarajevo Council building. I remember that my mother took me there in her arms and said: „Say hello to daddy.“ I was surprised, I did not like the image of the man with a beard behind the bars. I wanted to leave the place, and that was the last that we saw each other.



## IV

# HIDING IN THE TERRITORY OF YUGOSLAVIA







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*Dr Estera MRČARICA*

THE NEIGHBOURS DID NOT BETRAY US



*E*stera Mrčarica, née Musafija, was born on 24 January 1933 in Sarajevo, of father Meir Musafija and mother Frida, née Šnetrepl (Schneetrepl).

*E*stera had a sister Perla-Biserka, born in 1938, who passed away in 1978. Her brother Albert, born in 1929, is living in Oregon, USA.

*A*ll members of her direct family survived the Holocaust, while many close relatives perished.

*S*he spent the war hiding in Sarajevo. After the war, she completed her elementary school, the teacher training school and the Teacher Training College (group for biology and chemistry) and later, in Ljubljana, graduated from the Faculty of Biology in 1957. She did her master's degree in 1974, and her Ph.D. in 1979 in Sarajevo. She retired in 1998 as full-time professor of the Medical Faculty in Niš.

*S*he was married to Momir Mrčarica, electrical engineer (passed away in 2005), with whom she has a daughter Vesna, professor of mathematics, living and working in Niš, and son Željko, engineer of electronics, living with his family in Zurich, Switzerland. She has four grandchildren.

The language of my mother's family was Yiddish, and of my father's it was Judeo-Espagnol. We spoke Serbo-Croat, and if the elders wanted us children not to understand what they were saying they would speak German. My parents were not especially religious, but the family did observe all the great holidays, especially the Passover and Purim. Our mother and the

whole family observed the Shabbat; she lit candles every Friday evening, even during the war, when possible, and also after the war.

Since my mother's father died quite young, my father was the one to read the Kiddush for Shabbat and the dinner was made also for my mother's family. Father was the central male figure for both families. After my mother's father died, along with the death of her brother in the World War One, my father became a sort of the person who gave everyone advice. My mother became the oldest child of the family with many younger ones. She feasted for Yom Kippur.

Sarajevo had a developed Jewish life. A Sephardic temple was built before the war, the most beautiful one in the Balkans. My whole family was going to that temple, as going to the temple was also a feat of social life. The most attractive and enjoyable was the celebration of Passover. It was an opportunity for all every spring to do the big Passover cleaning. The Seder was a true celebration. Father, a good singer, always sang songs and prayers, Haroset was his favorite. There was always matzo, and everything was pleasant and ceremonious.

And while I was growing up and still a child I felt some kind of anxiety, almost fear. I remember once going along the street, a skinny thing, and someone from the group going behind me shouted the derogatory local jargon word for a Jew:

– Čifutka!

I ran all the way home to feel safe.

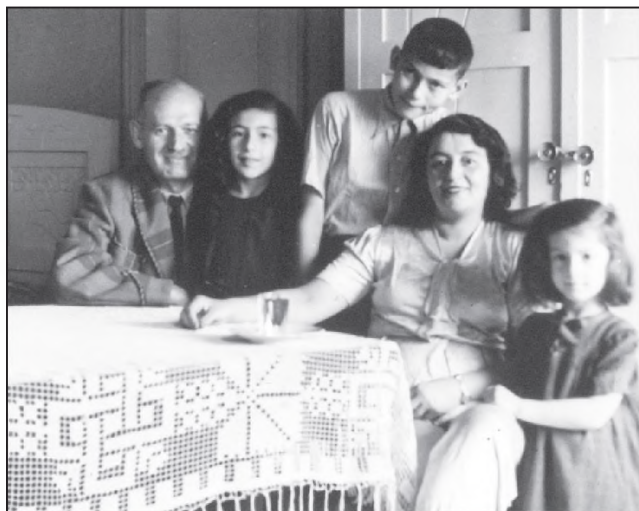
I remember the destruction of the Sephardic temple in 1941, with the sudden onset of euphoria against the Jews! I even remember that they even took off the copper plates from the temple's roof, plundering and taking whatever could be taken away. It was simply an attack on the temple. The Ashkenazi temple still exists to this day.

I was in second grade when World War Two started. All schools stopped operating, as they were turned into barracks for the mobilized troops. Even my father was mobilized, although he was fifty. But, he soon came back. The uncle, who was mobilized, ran away and we gave him civilian clothes in order not to be arrested. In that chaos many people were fleeing in similar ways.

After the coming of Ustaša to power, anti-Semitic decrees were adopted. My parents were given the yellow armbands and the badges with the black Magen David. They were prohibited from going to certain places. Jewish children were officially forbidden from continuing their education beyond the fourth grade of elementary school. Jews were immediately forbidden to possess a radio or a telephone. Ours were seized right away. And that was legal! Even today, when I think about it, it seems impossible that nobody in the world

reacted or did something against such torture against the Jews. There were rumors that something abominable was happening to the Jews, there was fear.

My grandmother, aunts and uncles came to our home, they talked and were upset, and I am sure that nobody could even assume what was to happen. No one had an idea of what was going on in the camps. They were all thinking about what to do. Father was already sick, mother was not in the best of health, my sister was only three years old. Fleeing implied a great risk, as it led to uncertainty. Sarajevo was full of the military, making fleeing difficult and risky. We were not among the affluent families who could get counterfeit documents and travel with them somewhere. But, nobody was fully aware of what was in store for us.



*Family  
MUSAFIJA: father  
MEIR, daughter  
ESTERA, son  
ALBERT, mother  
FRIDA, and  
ESTERA'S  
younger sister  
PERLA-BISERKA*

We were living in a four room apartment and we had a lodger, don Mato, a Catholic priest, a good man, from the island of Hvar. We put our valuables and jewelry in his part of the apartment. Mother later donated some of these things to the Museum, because that was all we found in the apartment when we returned.

In 1941 we were not yet used to being citizens of a lower rank, and we lived normal lives. The first one to be taken away was my mother's youngest brother, the youngest of the seven children. His name was Uriel. I think that he was taken away as a communist. Possibly, he was executed right away, but I do not know when and how it happened.

The Sarajevo Jews were being gradually taken away through the so-called raids, which happened at irregular intervals all the way until 1943. As far as I know, it was the most prominent Jews that were taken away in the initial raids, those with the greatest influence in Sarajevo, especially the rabbis.

During the first raid my mother's brother David Šnetrepl was taken away; he had just married the rabbi's daughter Estika. He wrote to us from Jasenovac. As member of the Hashomer Hatzair he completed the apprenticeship for metal worker and applied to immigrate to Palestine. Thanks to his trade, he stayed alive for quite a long time, and he sent postcards from Jasenovac, but finally he perished there.

Still, we did not have a full understanding of what was happening with the Jews. One nice Sunday in November all five of us were getting ready to go for a walk. Mother took longer to get ready, so father and my brother went out earlier, and my mother, sister and I were still in. That was when they came for us. There were two agents in civilian clothes and one Ustaša. They did not treat us brutally, and mother did not put up any resistance. The agents spoke German with my mother. The Ustaša looked very plain and he followed every step my mother made. We took with us some food, clothes and blankets. Our apartment was sealed and the three of us went escorted by in a tram to an old barrack dating back to Austrian times. That was a collection centre. The yard was already full, as many Jews were already brought there. In the evening they put us in the premises on the ground floor. We were put on the bare floor, and already that night all the men were transported to Jasenovac. There was terrible crying heard. It turned that it was a very good coincidence that father happened not to be at home. There we stayed for some days, guarded by armed guards. In order to reunite families, people moved other people across the room over their heads. I do not have clear memories of it all. We were to be transported further.

I remember very well one day. It was evening, it was dark. They grouped us, in order to put us onto rail carriages. The atmosphere was tense. But, that day there was another raid in Sarajevo and new groups of Jews were brought in. My mother took a risk and moved us into that group which was just brought in. Thus, thanks to the unsystematic work of the Ustaša, we avoided the transport and sure death. Since many Jews were brought in, they took us with another group of Jews to a different collection camp – a small Jewish temple in Bjelave. Again, we settled ourselves on the floor, putting our blankets under us. They were not guarding us too watchfully. We were counted every morning. We could receive food and clothes if it was brought for us, and grandmother and aunt did this, and father was hiding with my brother. It seems to me that the Jewish Community still operated and that we received from it a bag of apples, every child got one. My mother was sick, she had a bile attack.

A friend of my father's, Muharem Kundurović, was a police doctor, in charge of controlling the health among the inmates and father asked him to help us. While doing a round of the camp, he told my mother to act sick, and he told the German camp commander that there was an outbreak of typhoid;

therefore the sick should be separated in order to prevent the potential outbreak of disease among the German soldiers. The German commander ordered the sick to be taken out and liquidated in order to prevent the outbreak of disease. We were separated from the group, along with a group of women and children, and taken together with them to the hill Bakarevac. There dr Kundurović enabled my mother, sister and me to escape. It all last-

ed for three or four weeks, so by the end of 1941 we escaped the camp.

We came to my grandmother's, but since it was too risky, we split. I was with my parents' friends, the family of Vejzil-bey Čolaković. They lived in Koševo, in a small ground floor house with a big garden. He was living with his wife; only the two of them, his son was a writer and lived in Zagreb. That was where I hid, without leaving the house and garden for about half a year.

My brother was at the ophthalmologic clinic. Mother took him there in order to protect him from being taken to camp. The clinic director was a Catholic. My mother told him the truth that my brother was Jewish, and the doctor



*ESTERA with brother ALBERT in Sarajevo in 1938*

helped him at the clinic for a long time.

Father slept in the bank building. He worked illegally in the bank, for Asim-bey Dugalić, who was the bank commissioner. We lived on father's earnings in the bank.

Mother was with her mother, along with my little sister. Her single sister Rahela was also there. Half a year later, in summer of 1942, Dugalić, who had close links with the authorities, managed to remove the seal from our apartment. There were no valuable things in the apartment and we were selling whatever could be sold.

We lived in our apartment until the end of the war.

All our neighbors were aware of us being there, but they did not tell on us. Whoever could and wanted to was helping us financially, and those who could not they did not disclose us. If it was not for the liberation of Sarajevo on 6 April 1945, and if the then authorities remained in power any longer, we certainly would be executed on the anniversary of the declaration of the Independent State of Croatia, 10 April, because they certainly would have discovered us and would have executed us without taking us to any camps.



My grandmother and aunt Rahela were taken away in 1942 and I do not know where they perished. One of my mother's brothers – Izrael Šnetrepl, was hiding in Sarajevo, but in 1943 he was discovered and taken away without any subsequent trace of him.

Date	22.8.50/91	
Name	K U S A F I J A , Estera Musarova	File No.
BI	BP Sarajevo	Nat. Id.
Next of Kin		
Source of Information	Unknown / GIC New York	
Last kn. Location		Date
CC/Prison	Arr.	lib.
Transf. on	to	
Died on	in	
Cause of death		
Buried on	in	
Grave		D.C. No.
Remarks	returned to Sarajevo in 1945	

7.1.49

Name	K U S A F I J A , Estera M.	File No.
BI	BP Sarajevo	Nat. Id.
Next of Kin		
Source of Information	Unknown / GIC New York	
Last kn. Location	Sarajevo / Yug.	Date
CC/Prison	Arr.	lib.
Transf. on	to	
Died on	in	
Cause of death		
Buried on	in	
Grave		D.C. No.
Remarks	[Handwritten notes]	

*Copy of document inscribing ESTERA MUSAFIJA in the Memorial Museum Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, 1945*

I had two aunts, my mother's sisters, who lived in Turbe, near Travnik. They were married there. Roza Mandelbaun was taken with her husband and the just born son in 1941 and she perished, with her son, in the Đakovo camp. Grandmother was still not taken away when information came from the Jewish Community of Osijek that she had perished. Her son Cvi was executed right after arriving to the camp. Grandmother did not know this; they hid the news from her. The other aunt, Hensika, married Štajner, together with her husband Aleksa and daughter Zlata, managed to escape. For a while they were hiding in Livno, then moved to Split, and joined the Partisans.

Since the aunt was pregnant, she was transported together with her daughter to El Shat, where she gave birth to her second child, Perla, who is presently caring for her 95 year old mother.

Today, at this age, and after so much time, I still cannot understand how the whole civilized world failed to react to the way in which the Jews were treated.

I did not mention here my father's family, because they were not living in Sarajevo and I was not in contact with them. Father's two brothers were saved by their wives. One lived in Zagreb, the other in Zavidovići. Father's step sister Blanka, née Musafija and married Musafija had five sons and they all perished, I do not know where.

Later in my life I never had any trouble due to my being Jewish. I am still proud to belong to this nation which has given the world so many intelligent men. My father, devastated by the suffering and poor living conditions, died in 1954.



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## Natalija KOVAČEVIĆ-TAJTACAK

### A LONG RACE WITH DEATH\*

**N**atalija Kovačević, née Tajtacak, born in Kruševac, of father Moric and mother Rebeka, née Adut. After the war she lived in Belgrade.

*The whole family Tajtacak (mother Rebeka, sisters Sultana, Sofija, Natalija, and brother David) were saved thanks to Krtsa Novaković, the then President of Municipality Kruševac, and villagers from the surrounding villages. Father Moric, who took part in World War One, got sick and after treatment in Switzerland, died and was buried in Zurich. After her husband's death, mother Rebeka alone raised the four children.*

*Natalija graduated from the girls' crafts school. Before the war she worked in Mladenovac as teacher in girls' crafts school. She died in 2002.*

*For the help extended to the family Tajtacak, the President of the Municipality Kruševac, Krsta Novaković, was awarded the charter of the Righteous Among the Nations in 2004.*

In April 1941 I was in Mladenovac and I was sitting in my room full of fear. The town was shaking under the German tanks and the noise of the trucks. The Kingdom of Yugoslavia was collapsing ... What am I to do? I am a Jew, and the stories of how Germans treat Jews have reached me. Whatever was happening with Yugoslavia happened so quickly and so unexpectedly that I did not manage to take any steps. And what could I do anyway? Where could I go? My predecessors have been in Serbia since who knows when. I

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\*The testimony about saving the family of Natalija Kovačević was recorded by journalist Milorad Simić.

know that at the end of the XIX century my grandfather Anđelko Tajtacak moved from Belgrade to Kruševac. He was married to Sultana. I do not know my grandmother's maiden family name, but I know that Anđelko and Sultana had sons Moric, David, and Avram, and a daughter Kalina. With time, Moric had stayed in Kruševac and had continued his father's trading business, and the other two brothers went elsewhere following their jobs, while Kalina got married and went with her husband during World War One and ended up in Switzerland.

Moric, who was living in Kruševac, was married to Rebeka, the daughter of the Belgrade trader David Adut. They were my parents. Moric and Rebeka had a son, David, and three daughters: Sultana, Sofija, and me, Natalija. Father went to World War One, all the way across Albania with the Serbian Army, got seriously ill, and with the help of his sister Kalina went to Zurich in Switzerland for medical treatment. Regretfully, there was no cure. Even today in the Zurich cemetery there is a stone saying: "Moric Tajtacak, serbischer soldat" ("Moric Tajtacak, Serbian soldier").

After World War One was over, my mother was in Kruševac, without a husband, and with four children that she was to raise. She did not know about cereals trading and could not pursue her husband's business, and she was not capable of running the silk plant which my father also had. So, she did the best she could: she mortgaged the properties with a bank. With the money paid her she turned them all into apartments that she rented. There was not too much money, but it was enough to make ends meet. Time went by and David completed the commercial school, Sultana completed the matriculation course, and I completed the senior girls' trade school. So, everyone went his or her way: David and Sultana to Smederevo, I to Mladenovac, and Sofija stayed with our mother.

Now, I wanted to go back to Kruševac, but how? We are under occupation. From my documents it is not difficult to conclude that I am a Jew, and without documents it was impossible to get a pass for travelling, and without the pass one could not buy a ticket to travel. That was why I continued to sit there and wait. I believed that my mother would somehow manage to get for me the necessary papers. And I was right: mother soon came, bringing for me the documents with a new name for me – Ruža. We also had a new family name – Anđelković. So, mother became Sofija (which was my sister's name), and my sister got a new name. Mother got the counterfeit documents with the help of Krsto Novaković, the pharmacist who was elected before the war President of the Municipality of Kruševac, and who continued to perform the function under the order of the occupier. Mother went to see him. They had known each other, both came from old families in Kruševac. Krsta understood the difficulty of the only Jewish family in Kruševac. Mother did

not know how he managed, but he did get her the papers and she came to get me. Soon, we arrived safely to Kruševac.

My mother, sister Sofija and I stayed quietly at home and worried about what was happening with David and Sultana, who were working in Smederevo. And, one day, there they were. It was two or three days, maybe more, after the awful explosion in Smederevo on 5 July 1941. The explosion resulted in a general confusion, passes for travel were issued without any checks or verification, and they arrived in Kruševac. Mother urgently went to see Krsto Novaković, who provided counterfeit papers for them as well. Now, they too were Anđelković.

As Anđelković family, we lived peacefully until the time when the first bigger groups of refugees began to arrive to Kruševac. Among them there were also Jewish families, including families who knew us. Who would know what happened in that chaos – but in any case we found ourselves on the list of Jews and we were given the yellow armbands, the visible marking of Jews. And then one day a message came for my mother from Krsto Novaković. The message said that we should flee town. We were at risk. The Germans were about to do something. David was the first to go, as they would first be rounding up Jewish men. But, Krsto Novaković said, David should not join either the Chetniks or the Partisans: he should work towards helping his mother and sisters to survive. “The people from the forest” are already there and Krsta anticipated that they would be antagonistic to each other. There had already been a strict division between Chetniks and Partisans. And Jews under such circumstances have enough danger to deal with from the side of the Germans. As I remember, Krsto’s message arrived to us a day before a German officer came to our place. He had some military rank. Mother told him that David had gone to a village to buy some food. The German looked at her and said something that she could not believe was happening: the German asked my mother what we were waiting for and didn’t we see what was happening? He added that he would be coming every day to inquire about David, and David should take care of himself. This conversation between the German and my mother took place in one of the rooms. David was in another. He heard and understood everything. Yet, he was not ready to leave Kruševac.

The following day a truck full of Jews stopped in front of our house – it was Jewish men. David saw them through the window and stormed out by the back exit. He found himself in an alley behind the house. There he was noticed by Kosa Petrović, who worked in a coffee shop. She understood what was happening, gave him a sign to come in and he was in the neighbor’s house. In that house there were single lodgers Mica Vasić and Jelena Veljković, from Donji Krčin. Pupils. They rented the room with the woman

coming from their region. All three of them accepted David and forged a plan how to get him out of town. Once they had the plan, they went along with it. A villager came from Donji Krčin to Kosa's place with a horse-drawn wagon and put David onto it. At the bridge he presented the fake document made out to the name Anđelković and – everything went well.

A day later mother received a message from Krsto to get her daughters away, as the Germans were about to collect also Jewish girls ... We did not waste any time. It was the sister Sultana who first left town. She was taken out by Vidan Maksimović, and Sofija and I left with another villager, again from Donji Krčin. This man, too, was an acquaintance of the woman from the coffee shop. The next one to leave was our mother. Thus, our mother, us three sisters, and our brother David were all in Donji Krčin. We all had counterfeit documents which did not show that we were Jews. In the village they gave us a house to settle in, and some days later came Vidan Maksimović bringing for us the food rationing cards. They were sent by Krsta Novaković. As President of the Municipality he had people in the administration and he managed to pull this through.

Under the name Anđelković we lived in Donji Krčin, in a house close to the road. When the villagers notified us that the Germans were coming, we would flee to Srednji Krčin or Donji Krčin, other parts of this settlement, or to another village in the vicinity. It was a constant race with death. Some villagers kept us continually informed about the dangers, we fled, others took us in and put us in safer places. They were aware that we were Jews and that by helping us they were putting themselves in danger. Despite this, they took the risk without a word. We repaid them by David helping them do the work in the fields, Sultana was giving private lessons to pupils, and mother, Sofija and I were knitting and sawing. In return for this, we got food.

And thus the days went by, and weeks and months, while the war was at its peak. Somewhere in spring 1944, a villager from Donji Krčin, a railroad worker, walked into the local inn. He was angry for who knows what reason, maybe he heard something, who would now ... but anyway, he said out loud:

– I will now go to Belgrade. And I will report those Jews ... Should our whole village suffer for their sake?! ... The Germans will kill us all!

The villagers tried to calm him down, but – no use. He just kept repeating: the Germans will find out about these Jews ... he finished his drink, paid for it and left. The villagers were confused. Some ran to us and told us about this sudden trouble. Immediately, we left the village, going as far as we could.

It was getting dark when the railroad worker got to Stalać. There he was, as an engine driver, to meet the train coming from Niš and continuing to Belgrade, and his colleague was waiting for the train coming from

Belgrade and continuing to Niš. According to their working schedule, the second one was to go to Niš, but he had some urgent business to attend to in Belgrade. So, he asked his colleague to change shifts. The man accepted. Why not? There is time, he would report those Jews the next time he goes to Belgrade. And, he got on the train for Niš. However, there was shooting when the train got to Đunis: the Partisans attacked the train. There was only one victim in the train: the railroad worker from Donji Krčin!

The man was buried, and we went back to Donji Krčin.

We were fortunate to still be there at the end of the war. We were faster than death. Thanks to all those whom we met along the road: starting from the President of the Municipality to the last villager.

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After the liberation, the District Court in Kruševac, by its decision KT 26/46-ST 20/46 of 15 June 1946, sentenced the pharmacist Krsto Novaković, a municipal counselor, to death. This decision was replaced by a sentence of imprisonment and forced labor for twenty years. He was released twelve and a half years later.

Krsta Novaković died. The burial ritual for him was held by the Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

As a sign of recognition for his assistance to family Tajtacak, Krsta Novaković received from Yad Vashem the charter of the Righteous Among the Nations.







V

PROTECTED  
BY MIXED MARRIAGE





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*Berta POSTRUŽNIK*

## HALID MUFTIĆ – SAVIOUR OF THE JEWISH FAMILY



*B*erta Postružnik, née Fišbah (Fischbach), was born in 1909 in the place Sokolik in Galicia, of father Lav (Leib, Lajbiš, Leon) and mother Sofija-Soša, née Finkelman.

*She had three sisters: Klara, Lota and Tila, and a brother Jonas,\* a doctor of internal medicine.*

*In her first marriage she was married to Draganić-Vrančić, who soon died. From her second marriage with Oto Postružnik she has a daughter Eva.*

*After the war she worked in the publishing business and a copyright agency.*

I was five years old when the World War One broke out. At that time us five children were living with our parents in a place called Holodenka (Poland). Until the war we lived peacefully as Jews under the Austrian administration.

When the Russians occupied our town, the expelling of the Jews started and we fled to Bukovina, place called Radauc, which was still under the Austrian rule.

During the winter 1914/1915 the Russians took over Radauc, and we children with our parents once again returned to Holodenka. In the meantime, father went to Vienna for business reasons.

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\*See testimony by dr Jonas Fišbah in the chapter about Jasenovac, Pg. 196.

During the war our little town frequently changed hands, from the Russians to Austrians and back again. Once, during the Russian occupation, there was a rumor that Russians were going from house to house and slaughtering Jews, which they actually did!

Due to the constant war conflicts in this area, our father, having in the meantime returned from Vienna, decided that we should flee again, but I do not remember where. We went by our horse and wagon.

We came to an Austrian refugee camp with lots of Jews. The accommodation and food were very poor. That was in 1915/16.

Jews from that camp were scattered around into various places. Along with a hundred other families we were instructed to go to present-day Slovenia, at that time Austria, to a place called Golovic, in Slovenske Konjice. We could choose between that place and Vienna. Father rather opted for the smaller settlement where he was hoping there would be more food, and we starved less than those in Vienna. We arrived to Slovenske Konjice, and it was now about getting settled and finding our living there. No one cared about refugees.

We found a small house in Slovenske Konjice in which we could live. My brother went to Vienna to grammar school, and lived with relatives there. Since we moved from a village, my sisters started attending school and they tutored me at home, so the following year I could start regular school as well. Anti-Semitism was quite strongly felt there and we felt different. We were accused of spreading the scarlet fever and we were moved out of houses and flats.

In the meantime, father went to Bosnia. It was already 1918, the World War One was coming to an end. Father found employment in Turbe, near Travnik, as an expert in saw mills. We were waiting for the war to be over and only then moved on to join him in Bosnia.

The elementary school was just opened in Turbe, first and second grade only. Although I had completed the third grade in Slovenske Konjice, in Turbe I went again to second grade, because I had to go to school. My brother was attending the grammar school in Travnik, and my sisters in order to attend school had to walk seven kilometers every day until the time when we moved to Travnik. Brother graduated from grammar school there.

My mother Sofija-Soša came from a very poor and religious family. Grandfather, reb Finkelman, was a very learned man, he studied the Talmud every day. He was not a formal rabbi.

Under the influence of her father, my mother was observant of all the kosher rules during the war, and she kept it after the war as well. On Friday evenings she would light the candles and with her head covered pray over

them. To please her, father would put on his talet and tefilin; he was in love with her until the end of his life.

We observed all the high holidays at home and we also went to the temple.

There were two synagogues in Travnik, a Sephardic and an Ashkenazi one. I also went for religious school. Travnik was a multicultural place which accepted us well. We socialized equally with the Muslims and the Serbs there.

Our family lived in Travnik until 1926, when we moved to Zagreb. While we were still living in Bosnia, my sisters found employment. The eldest, Klara, worked in a bank in Žepče. There, she fell in love with Halid Muftić. It started as great love, but later my sister wanted to flee Žepče and run away from him, and she went to Zagreb. However, Muftić could not come to terms with losing her, he followed her and finally they got married. And, in fact, it turned out that Halid Muftić saved all of us! His brother was the infamous mufti – Ismet Muftić.



*BERTA'S  
parents – mother  
SOFIJA-SOŠA and  
father LAV-LAJBIŠ*

Upon arrival to Zagreb I continued my education, my sisters were employed, brother was finishing his medical studies. When I graduated I married for the first time. My husband's family name was Draganić-Vrančić. He soon died. That family name written on the door to our apartment saved my life in 1941. When the Independent State of Croatia was declared, in April 1941, I rented an apartment in the "Cvjetno naselje" and put the plate with the name Draganić-Vrančić on the door, after my late husband. That was where I lived with my father, sister Tila and my dear friend Branimir Fridman, a communist. In June 1941 the Ustaša took my friend Branimir to Jadovno, where he was executed.

From 1931 I was employed as technical interpreter working for the well known US company „Standard Oil Company“. On 1 May 1941 I was fired, just like the other Jews, Serbs and some Slovenians working there.

My sister Tila was still working, she was a technical interpreter for the German language. She continued to go to her office, she was not fired because she was much needed.

One day the Ustaša came and took my father. I followed them while he was taken away and so I learned where they were taking him. I immediately told Halid about it, and thanks to his contacts he managed to save him. Since that time father lived without a residence permit with Klara and Halid. Life under stress and constant fear were the key cause of his heart attack and death just a month before the end of the war.

I and my sister Tila stayed on in the same district, the “Cvjetno naselje”. One day Ustaša came with an order for her arrest. Since she was not at home, they wanted to arrest me instead. I managed again to let my sister Klara know about it, and she managed in good time to get Tila from her office to Halid’s office in the Ministry. I ran away from the Ustaša and also came to Halid to his office, where both my sisters Klara and Tila were. „Now, even you!“, said Halid. He was desperate.

I asked what we were to do. I got the idea to take my sister to the Merkur sanatorium, and I did so. I was lucky when I got there to run into doctor Hitrec, who studied medicine together with my brother Jonas, and I asked him to admit her to hospital. I was so persuasive in telling dr Hitrec how seriously sick my sister was that he finally did admit her to hospital.

I no longer dared return to the apartment in “Cvjetno naselje”. For a while I stayed with a friend of mine and then, finally, I did go back to “Cvjetno naselje”.

We somehow got through these turbulent events of the first months and we were already into July. One day, I think it was 10 July 1941, I saw a poster listing the first ten citizens that were executed: among them there were six Jews, two Serbs and two Croats. I could not help crying out loud, and I was afraid that someone could have heard me.

Every day new posters were displayed. And there were always numbers of people executed – Serbs, Jews, and communists – executed due to anti-state activity. I read those every day.

In September the same year the landlord terminated my rent, telling me that we Jews were outside the law.

Subsequently I lived with friends and with my sister Klara.

As I was on the list as a Jew, although I was not obliged to wear the yellow armband, I never felt quite safe. I was fed up with Zagreb and everything



else and I decided to go to my friend Nevenka in Makarska, thinking that maybe in Dalmatia I could meet with my friend, painter Oton Postružnik, who was living on the Pelješac peninsula and who offered this earlier.

When I wanted to travel to Makarska in October 1941, Klara received a telegram telling her that on 15 October in Sarajevo Jonas and his family as well as sister Lota and her husband were all arrested. Since I could do nothing to help them, I was persuaded by Klara to leave for Makarska.



*BERTA in her youth*

agreed to speak German among themselves, and instructed the little one to pretend that she was deaf and dumb. They dressed up in elegant clothes, boarded the train and kept asking all kind of questions of the ticket collector in German. The staff greeted them, saluted, not asking for documents. They were just sitting there peacefully, until my sister in law Bjanka was recognized by a woman, but Bjanka did not respond. So, they nicely arrived to Zagreb.

In Zagreb they went to their sister Klara Muftić. My brother's wife afterwards fled to Split, and sister Lota stayed the whole time in Zagreb, sleeping where she could, with different friends. Her husband was in Jasenovac, and she sent packages for him. The little sister Rutica stayed with my sister, with the Muftić family, for two years. Then her mother, who was in Split, asked that her eight year old daughter should come to be with her, and she did get to Split travelling via Bosnia with a paid smuggler.

That day, when they were to be taken to Jasenovac, there were not enough rail carriages, in fact there were enough only for the men, thus it was my brother and my sister's husband who were taken away; the latter stayed in Jasenovac for a year and was executed. My sister Lota, my brother's wife Bjanka, and the little Ruta first stayed in the camp for two weeks, and were then released, because those who brought them there did not know what to do with them, and were thinking that they would later bring them in again.

My sister, my sister in law Bjanka, and the little Ruta took a train without any documents. They

Rutica later told me that she can remember that journey, every detail of it, such as how scared she was when the train stopped somewhere. Her escort said:

„You stay put here, I will go and get something to eat.“

And she stayed there alone! She did not know where her escort was, but he came back soon enough.



*Wartime  
photograph of OTO  
POSTRUŽNIK,  
BERTA'S husband,  
to the right*

My sister Lota stayed in Zagreb with Klara, who was protected and safe through her husband Halid. Although he was part of the Ustaša movement, he soon realized what the Ustaša movement was, but could no longer get out, because with them there was my father, little sister Rutica, and my brother from Jasenovac. Halid was an advisor in the Ministry of Forestry.

As I only later found out, Halid had a visit by his brother Ismet, the great Mufti. At the very same moment the little girl Rutica was coming in and going out. The Mufti asked his brother, in derogatory terms:

„Why do you need this Jew in your home?!“

Halid stood up, he was twenty years older than the brother, and said:

„Brother, I do regret if there is something in my home that you dislike.“

And that was how they parted.

The Mufti was executed after the war.

After my arrival in Makarska I started exchanging letters with Postružnik, and in December I went to Pelješac and remained there with him.

Jonas was, by that time, in Jasenovac.\*

Some months later Oto, too, was conscripted to join the army. He went to Zagreb trying to get exempted from this military obligation. He went to

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\*See testimony Jonas Fičbaha in this book, on pages 196-205.

see a good friend, the conductor Lovro Matačić, at that time an Ustaša colonel, wearing a green Ustaša uniform, asking him for help so that he would not be sent to the Russian front. Matačić replied: „Well, it is all very well there. You will have wonderful scenery, you will be able to do excellent paintings.“ Despite this, Oto managed not to go to the military.

I too was trying to go to Zagreb, because I wanted to see my father and Jonas who was released from the camp in the meantime. I only managed to do so in May 1942.

Namely, Jonas was arrested in Sarajevo on 15 October 1941, but he had already before that time volunteered to participate in the campaign suppressing the endemic syphilis led by Professor dr Vuletić. Yet, he was taken away to the camp. Doctors who applied for that campaign were to be protected against being taken away to camps. While Jonas was in Jasenovac, sister Klara continually made efforts for his release, which she finally managed to accomplish. With the help of Klara's husband Halid Jonas was admitted to hospital as he became sick with typhoid. Once he recovered, Jonas again went to Klara.

Since Oto was exempted from going to the army, we were to return to Dalmatia, but we needed passes which were hard to come by. With much skill and good luck we managed to get to Pelješac, and we stayed there until September 1943, when the Germans arrived and we joined the Partisans. We moved from one island to another. After a chance encounter with Mato Jakšić, a pre-war diplomat, we were sent to the island of Vis because Oto, as an already reputable painter, along with other artists (Detoni, Tiljak) was to be protected.



*BERTA'S photograph for ID, with the seal of the Independent State of Croatia*

On the island of Vis, in Komiža, based on radio-news I wrote reports about the status of the battle-fields, which were disseminated to soldiers so that they knew what is happening in the world. This went on for several months, and at that time Augustinčić came with his family, and according

to the orders issued by Josip Broz Tito he was to be in charge of getting all people of distinction to Italy.

We arrived to Bari and were given a villa near Monopiglio to use for accommodation. That was where Oto and I got married. With us were Tijardović, some writers and painters, about twenty of us altogether.



*BERTA'S niece RUTICA FIŠBAH  
was incarcerated as a seven-year  
old girl*

I was the house-keeper and in charge of receiving guests, Allied officers. Since I could speak some English, I talked with them and played chess. Oto already had a room full of paintings and we organized an exhibition. The exhibition and the artist Postružnik were photographed and displayed in the US newspapers.

In the autumn of 1944 Oto and a group of painters and writers returned to the country, to the liberated territory around Topusko.

I was pregnant at the time and I stayed a bit longer in Bari, and soon afterwards the HQ of the base was closed and we, accompanied with our mothers and children, returned by boat to Split.

I arrived to Split. My sister Tila was there, the one I saved. After the hospital she managed to flee to Split and live there. A friend in Zagreb gave her all her documents, including her ID card, and under the name of Štefica Ravnogajac she was living in Split.

In April 1945 in Split I gave birth to our daughter Eva. At the end of 1946 we moved back to Zagreb, again staying with my sister Klara.

Oto was a free-lance artist, and I started working only in 1956, initially for a publishing company and later for the copyright agency.

We were very fortunate that Jonas was saved, thanks to the efforts of dr Vuletić and Halid; we were also fortunate that I could save Tila by manipulation, that I had a friend in Dalmatia, and later also that I had Postružnik. That was how all members of my direct family survived.

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*Dr Lucija RAJNER*

FOR THOSE WHO HAVE LONG BEEN GONE



*Primarius mr. sci. dr Lucija Rajner was born on 2 August 1934 in Belgrade, of father Ladislav Rajner and mother Antonija Rajner, née Piringer.*

*She finished her education and graduated from the Medical Faculty of Belgrade, after which she completed her medical residency and specialized in pneumophysiology, and completed post-graduate studies in cardiology. She practiced medicine in Belgrade, in the Belgrade Institute for Pulmonary Diseases and Tuberculosis, where she founded the Cardiology Department, and later worked at the Institute of Pulmonary Diseases of the Clinical*

*Centre of Serbia in Belgrade, where she retired after full years of service from the post of head of department and the title of chief physician – Primarius. From her marriage to Dušan Pirec, doctor of economics, she has a daughter, Vesna, also a doctor, a specialist in psychiatry and Ph.D. of medical sciences, who lives and works, with her family, in Chicago (USA).*

*Lucija Rajner has been actively socially engaged in medical associations of Belgrade and within the Jewish Community of Belgrade.*

I was born in Belgrade in a big family in which it would only seldom happen that there would be less than ten or more sitting together at the table for a meal. In my grandfather's and grandmother's family (whom I called "otata" and "omama"), apart from four sons of whom my father Ladislav, called Aco, was the oldest, there would always be others – friends



or colleagues. They were all young people, just making their start in life. In that home I was the only child, the first grandchild, the beloved niece ... And I felt very well in the warmth they gave me ...

However, I am not writing these lines for my own sake, although by coincidence I survived numerous hardships of life from my earliest childhood, of which there has never been a shortage until the present day. Despite all the hardship I am still living today. These lines are for those other people that I hold dear but who have been gone for a long time. That is why I will begin my story a bit from afar, from the past.

The family of my paternal grandfather, Alojz Rajner, comes from regions which used to be part of the then Austria-Hungary. By coincidence they changed their place of living in areas that were later to become Yugoslavia (initially called the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, and the region later had different names).

The predecessors of my grandmother, Marija Jelinek, originate from the regions of sunny Italy. They also changed their places of living and ended up in the regions of that same Yugoslavia. That is how my grandmother and grandfather met and had their family.

They, too, changed places of living, staying the longest in the region of Slavonija – in Slavonski Brod, later in Sarajevo, and finally in Belgrade, where many of them ended their lives but not by natural death – they perished by the force of monstrous times.

To get back to my story.

My father was the oldest of the four Rajner brothers and was the first to get married. After a long romance with my mother, Antonija Piringer, and despite many transitory obstacles and prejudices (my mother was not a Jew), they concluded the marriage in which I was born. My father was a lawyer, a director of a private commercial company. I grew up under very good circumstances of a bourgeois family of those times. Doctor, engineer of tech-



*Parents of LUCIJA RAJNER'S father,  
ALOJZ and MARIJA, née JELINEK, in  
Sarajevo, around 1908*



nology, economist, senior professional – director in foreign trade, director of a major private company: those were their professions. The sons, one after the other, built their own families and left the father's home. Uncle Ernest, an engineer of technology, went to Zagreb, married and his name was for many years linked to what was to become the pharmaceutical company „Pli-va“, or at that time „Kaštel“. The close links among the others who stayed in Belgrade and the connection through the grandfather's pleasant home in Zадарска street were daily traditions that lived on until the fatal 1941. Directly before World War Two, uncle Egon, as a young doctor doing his military service, was arrested right away. He survived as a prisoner of war. Subsequently, as an intern specializing in neuropsychiatry he lived and worked in Sarajevo and Tuzla, where he passed away surrounded by his family.

The other members of the Rajner family who stayed in Belgrade were not as fortunate.

Since at that time I was a child of six and a half I cannot be certain about the accuracy or the sequence of the events that I will describe.

Right after 27 March 1941, shortly before the war, father was summoned as reserve to military service. I remember very well the bombing of Belgrade on 6 April. That terrible morning I was alone with my mother when through the window of our apartment in Jovanova street I saw the numerous planes dropping upon the city the plentitude of ellipse-shaped objects, which made the whole building shake and everything around us was thundering. Somewhat later, I remember this well, the whole neighborhood was enveloped in a cloud of smoke and flames. It seemed that the Jovanova street was on fire for days on end. We did not flee anywhere – we spent all the time in the basement of our building, with the few neighbors who likewise were not ready to leave. Were not ready or had nowhere to go.

I cannot say accurately how many days later, but soon afterwards, I heard that the house of my *omama* and *otata* in Zадарска street stayed intact, although the library in its direct vicinity was burnt down to its foundations. All members of our family in Zадарска street were alive. Uncle Ivan too with his family was not hurt. I remember the bare streets of Belgrade of those days, full of ashes, remnants of fire, the dead bodies, the damaged buildings. Even today, when I smell fire, I remember the Belgrade of that time.

My father's office in Cara Uroša street was destroyed and burnt down completely. Some employees survived and some were killed.

On an April day, during the initial cleaning up of the city, my father came – during the bombing of Belgrade he was doing his military service somewhere in Serbia. He came back pale, very thin, with deep set in black bags under his eyes, dressed in villagers' clothes which he managed to get in some village to change his clothes, namely – he took off his uniform in order

not to be taken as prisoner of war. Thus, he returned to the occupied Belgrade, to his family, but in fact he returned to real danger... Since the office had burnt down father did not work for a while, but I as a child was happy about this as I hoped that finally father would have more time to be with us, with me and my mother.



*Four sons of ALOJZ RAJNER, of whom LADISLAV (sitting) was the eldest, in Slavonski Brod, around 1928*

That childish joy was short-lived. Very soon I was surrounded only by very concerned and serious faces of everyone around me. Unusual behavior, talking in soft voices, absence of smiles and joy, no laughter at all in my vicinity – all of this turned me from a much cherished and even spoiled child into a very serious one. I did not dare ask any questions. I could hardly understand all the public announcements that kept coming up every day, the reporting, registrations, the yellow armbands and the Magen Davis signs on suits of all my family, but the overwhelming serious conduct of all my family and the fear in my mother's eyes stopped me from asking for any explanation. I did understand that something abominable was happening. I was no longer

the centre of attention of everyone in the house and around me, they spoke among themselves quietly and of things completely incomprehensible to me. Then, during the summer of 1941, there was news about the huge explosion of arms and ammunition that happened in Smederevo. Along with many other Jews, father was summoned and taken right away to go and clear up the debris in Smederevo. I cannot accurately remember how long it lasted. Many years on, when I went for the first time to Smederevo, I recognized the areas where my mother and I used to go to visit father. My memory went back to that summer and the year that I shall remember as long as I live. At that time we did, now and then, get letters from Smederevo, or notes from father. What were the channels through which he sent them I do not know,

but some of them still exist today and I donated some copies to the Jewish Historical Museum in Belgrade.

I do not remember accurately when father returned to Belgrade. The atmosphere in my surroundings was becoming increasingly tense. My grandfather and a close relative, Željko Kac, were taken with the first groups of „hostages“ (the word I heard then for the first time, without comprehending it fully). From the initial prison, they were soon taken away somewhere ... Nobody gave any explanation to a child who, by this time, was seven years old. Everything around me had become changed and frightening. Again, I did not ask questions, which under normal living conditions I certainly would have done relentlessly until I was given full explanation. But now, I did nothing of the kind, although I did understand that grandfather was no longer with us. I heard the words *Sajmište*, but I knew from the past that that was the venue of air-shows that I heard about from my grandmother's brother, mechanical engineer Karlo Jelinek. Yet, now the word carried with it a different feel. The next thing mentioned was *Banjica*, and it was becoming increasingly clear that these were the names of some camps, or prisons. In October 1941 all I heard was: ...„they were taken away in open trucks...“ The word *Jajinci* was mentioned. I had no idea where that was, but I soon understood that they were taken away on a journey of no return.

Briefly afterwards it was my father and the youngest uncle Ivan who were taken away and detained. They were taken to the camp „*Topovske šupe*“. Awareness set in that everywhere around me something awful was going on. Mother would not let me even a step away from her. I often went along with my mother, her clenching my wrist tightly, in the direction of *Autokomanda*, which I got to know quite well. The corner surrounded by barbed wire behind which one could see the shadows of inmates passing – that is an image I remember well. Presently, that area looks quite different. Back then, the two of us would often stand across that corner, waiting to see the well known faces. The street was not as wide as it is at present. On occasions, I would see the faces of my father or uncle Ivan. Sometimes mother would hurriedly take me to the other side of the street, closer to the wire, and someone would manage to get to us some notes intended for us and others on this side of the fence. Many times I saw the German soldiers exposing the inmates to rough treatment, as they like birds of prey came down on inmates who were trying to get closer to the wire. „*Los, los!*“, shouted the German soldiers pushing away by blows the inmates further from the barbed-wire fence. The whole street was resounding with those words and the sound stayed with me much longer. Sometimes we would get the letters or notes written by inmates at the gate to the camp, although I do not know what kind of camp rules of regimes

caused the change. Some of these I still have today, and I gave copies to the Jewish Historical Museum in Belgrade.

Sometimes I managed to see father through those wires. He was greatly changed, thin, pale, very serious and never looking straight at us. Not a trace of a smile on his face. In the past, though, we used to laugh so much together. I followed my mother quietly, speechless, as a fearful little bird trying to keep up with her long steps. And thus the days went by. My mother's health was deteriorating on daily basis. She coughed badly and had a fever. On that November day, fatal for us, mother could not go for her daily walk to the camp, due to her very high temperature. The following day, 15 November, she did go, this time alone. She returned very soon, in tears, very pale, speechless, and the moment she entered our home where I was waiting with a neighbor of ours, she fainted. That image I still remember to this day, along with the horror that came over me. „They took them away yesterday...“; was all that she told us after she regained conscience. She was not talking much the following days. She was more in a state of great confusion due to the shock and the illness and the very high temperature. She had a severe case of pleura inflammation with water accumulation, which at that time took long treatment and was not easily treated. I later understood that from other women experiencing the same suffering as her she had heard that on that day, 14 November, the transport consisted of the younger and healthier men. My father was 31 at the time and the uncle only 26. That knowledge made my mother hopeful that they were taken away somewhere ... possibly to do the most demanding labor ... Such information and thinking gave her and me some thin hope that they may survive and some day return. That irrational thin hope did not leave my mother till the end of the war, even longer.

That year, 1941, in the little apartment in Jovanova street, my grandmother was also with us, as I mentioned earlier. She had to leave her flat in Zadarska street, but for a while she could stay with us. Sick and with difficulties in moving due to her badly healed broken hip bone, she was bed ridden most of the time, although she was only 55. She could stay with us until early 1942, when she was forced to be admitted to the Jewish hospital situated in the building of the present day Faculty of Defectology, at the corner of Visokog Stevana and Tadeuša Koščuška streets. We were allowed to visit her. One day in February I saw a truck fitted tightly into the hospital entry door. My mother pulled at my hand, without a word she took me to the other side of the street, and we went home together in tears. I never saw my *omama* again. Whether at that time I understood all that was happening – I am not certain – but I later came to understand that the truck was in fact – a gas chamber. Even now I do not like going to that city district, passing by that building, or along the beautiful Zadaraska street in the Varoš kapija district.

It brings back memories which are too painful. Yet, when I do sometimes go by that building in Visokog Stevana street, I am terribly bothered by the fact that there is not a single word written there testifying that that was the location of the Jewish hospital, one of the last places of refuge for the numerous Jews of Belgrade.



*LUCIJA with parents, mother ANTONIJA and father LADISLAV, 1940*

mother's brief absences. I was not living like other children, with some age appropriate freedom. However, I interpreted this „lack of freedom“ as a sign of my mother's strictness, which I sometimes even took against her. I attended school when classes were resumed in the occupied city, but I never went unattended. Never alone. Well, I was a young child and it was wartime. Still, I could notice that some children did move around with more freedom, they did play after school, which I was never allowed. Later I understood that it was not due to my mother's strictness, rather it was due to the immense fear of the woman who had been left alone with a small child in the atmosphere of daily uncertainty about what the day may bring.

Children from mixed marriages whose mothers were not Jewish, were spared under the German rules, but the Germans, the occupiers, were never to be trusted. Only after the war I learned that with the consent of my

Since that February 1942 it was only my mother and I. Completely alone, without anyone our own. Frequent searches of our apartment, at day or night, going through our belongings in our home, had become an integral part of my daily reality. Different uniforms of the Gestapo or other German troops would be replaced by members of the Ljotic's guard or other forces subordinated to the occupiers. Always looking for someone or something. What??? Who, when there was nobody left anymore???

My movement at the time was very limited. Mother would not let me go anywhere alone and without her. I was never to open the door to anyone if I were left home alone during my



teacher and the then school principal of the elementary school „Kralj Petar I“ which I attended, next to my name in the class register there was no entry made regarding my father's name, nationality, or religion. Not a single information was written which could have indicated my Jewish origins. That was how I attended school in semi-contained conditions of the occupied Belgrade. Without actual childhood, preoccupied by sadness and worries not appropriate to my age. The severe reoccurrences of my mother's illness, along with everything else, contributed to me becoming serious and responsible at a very early age. It was only after the war, in talking with my class teacher from fourth grade of elementary school that I fully grasped the conditions of my education during the occupation. I have always felt the traces of such a childhood; I still deeply feel them today. When I speak of my life I always divide it into the pre-war, war, and post-war years. The truly beautiful memories are linked to the shortest of these three periods – the years before the war. By far the longest period of my life was the post-war years of my growing up in deprivation as many others, maturing, studying, later doing the work which I love, bringing up my only daughter and focusing on her, and later, thanks to destiny, enjoying my granddaughter which I still enjoy today. Yet, I have always lived until the present day with the indelible scars in my heart and the understanding of life which was imposed on me by the hardships of the war and its consequences on my family. I grew up with a caring mother, but without many others whom I loved endlessly and whose love as a small girl I briefly enjoyed. Most importantly, I grew up without my wonderful father. They perished under the force imposed by others without even a grave left behind them.

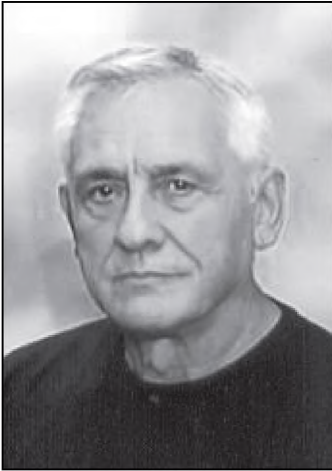
When I first visited Munich, as a doctor, I left without telling anyone to Dachau. I went there in desperation. I had an irrational feeling that I was going to visit the graves of the people I loved most.



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Ivan NINIĆ

## THE PERISHING OF MY DEAREST



*Ivan Ninić was born at the end of 1932 in Belgrade, of father Miodrag Ninić and mother Irma-Jelena, née Rosenzweig. He grew up in Belgrade and Novi Sad under the watchful eyes of his maternal grandparents. Ninić witnessed the German bombing of Belgrade on 6 April 1941 and the atrocities of January 1942 during the Novi Sad Raid perpetrated by the Hungarian Fascists.*

*He was the only Holocaust survivor in his family, all others from his mother's side perished in the Holocaust.*

*Ninić lives in Israel.*

I am writing this as a 73 years old man as memories of a 12 years old child who had no previous opportunity to evoke and revisit these memories with adults, since the whole family died or otherwise perished during the war.

In the mid 1980's I visited Eugen Verber in Belgrade in the Maršala Birjuzova street. He had just moved there from the Belgrade district of Zvezdara. Looking around his apartment I took a look through the window into the street. My eyes were stuck on the building across the street. I was looking at it for so long that Verber asked me: „What are you looking so hard at?“ I said: „That is the window of the room where I was at the onset of World War Two. That was where my bed was at the moment when the bombs started to fall down on the city on 6 April 1941.“

Kosmajnska street 45, second floor, the apartment to the right. The apartment of Josip and Margita Rosenzweig, my grandfather and my *omama*. In

March the school was interrupted „due to the war“. As I was growing up with my grandparents I wanted to spend my vacation at their place. I came from Novi Sad to Belgrade. Mother obviously did not think that the war was so close and she granted my wish.

Irma-Jelena Rosenzweig, whom everyone called Manci, my mother, had lived for years in Belgrade, where she met my father, Miodrag Ninić, known among friends as *Lepi Bata* (the handsome Bata). That was where I was born at the end of 1932. The marriage, however, did not last long and my mother, at age 22, sent me to my grandmother in Novi Sad. However, in March 1940 she married a wonderful man, Oto Zahnbauer, and she came back home and grandfather moved to Belgrade. He was a representative of a factory producing carpets from Banat. His other, younger daughter Valerija lived in Belgrade. She was married to Rudi Fassbender, an Englishman, who worked for the UK Embassy.

*Four generations  
of the family with  
whom destiny  
played a cruel  
game*



On 27 March I was walking on the Belgrade main square Terazije with my grandfather. I remember the shouting „Better a War than the Pact“! More important than the demonstrations for me was to persuade my grandfather to buy for me the attachment to the children’s illustrated magazine *Politikin zabavnik* about Captain Green, the hero of my boyhood imagination. In those days aunt Vali came to us and begged *omama* to let me go with them to England. The UK Embassy was preparing to evacuate. Only a few members of the staff were to remain in Belgrade, among them my uncle. *Omama* had said that she could not let me go, as my mother would be displeased. To this, my aunt responded with her somewhat bitter tone: „Mother, do you understand that there is going to be a war?“ The answer was: „Yes, I do“. But it is clear to me today that she did not at all understand what was to happen in the coming days.

On Sunday 6 April 1941, I woke up to terrible noise. The German aircrafts were coming down on Belgrade. Bombs, counter aviation artillery, and Hitler's roaring on the radio made me fully awake. *Omama* was asking grandfather „What is this?“, to which he briefly responded „Must be some exercise“. For many years I wondered whether he believed what he said or whether he was just suppressing the reality. That was why at a very early age I started to show interest in international politics. My whole life I have been listening carefully to news on the radio in order to stay well informed about what is going on around me, so as not to find myself surprised some day as they had been. During the year 1944 the Allied forces continually bombed Europe, and already at that time I was following the news on the radio *Luftlagemeldung*. The attack also included Novi Sad. Neighbors would ask me, somewhat jokingly: „Hanzi, will there be bombing today?“, as if asking whether it would rain.

*Omama* said: „We are going to the basement“. I was surprised at the number of people in the basement. They were sitting there, in a stupor, looking blankly around themselves and at every new arrival. There was no longer sufficient room for sitting down, but people made room for us to get in. The bombing went on the whole day. People were arriving in with horrifying news. Fire everywhere, many dead in the streets.

The following day, Monday, we started on foot to Mali Mokri Lug. Along the Sremska street, via Terazije to Aleksandrova street, and along the boulevard to the village. I cannot say how long this took, but I do still to this day remember the horror which I saw. Destroyed buildings, ruins, dead bodies, dead horses. I walked on as if through a nightmare, with heavy steps, disbelieving what I was seeing.

Another cartoon that I was fascinated by at that time was about the Head of Steel, after the Serbian folk story. I always wondered whether there really existed creatures with eagle and snake heads. Walking along the Aleksandrova street I was also wondering if what I was seeing was real. Until that time my life was so simple and boring, always with my grandparents and their friends, who always asked „How are you, Hanzi?“.

I remember Mali Mokri Lug by the tiny house that we lived in and slept on an improvised bed on the floor. There were many children there and I liked that. They let me drink black coffee, and I felt „as if grown-up“. We were watching in the direction of Belgrade and seeing the fighter planes drop bombs on our city. It was as if it was raining.

When the bombing stopped we stayed on for some time in the village and then someone informed us: „The Germans are in town“!

We returned to Belgrade. Along the Aleksandrova street, at Terazije square I saw men hanged in front of the hotel Moskva.

At home, the door to our apartment was broken, all windows but one were shattered, the one with the canary was still intact, and so the canary survived the bombing. The food preserves in our pantry and all the food were gone, everything was upside down.

Grandfather got sick, and to me it seemed that the reason for it was all the change, the new reality. Although optimistic all his life, he was suddenly depressed. We just stayed at home, there were notices everywhere about Jews having to report to the authorities, or otherwise ...

The doctor who was treating grandfather was telling us how his house was destroyed in the bombing. Grandfather said: „Well, move in here; we will be going to Novi Sad. I refuse to go and report to the authorities “.

They took with them only as much as two elderly persons could carry. Their whole life stayed on in that house. Doctor Jovanović moved into our apartment and I do not know what happened with him, or with our belongings. All that was left to me from my grandmother and grandfather were two albums of photographs and a prayer book, *Tefilot Israel* (Izrael imadšagai), by Feredi Ignac from 1899. It was a present to Margita Handler, which was my grandmother's maiden name, by someone in Vienna, dated 10.9.1900. The albums and the prayer books happened to be with me. I remember that every evening before going to sleep I had to say a prayer with grandmother and to say the names of those that I want God to keep.

We travelled to Novi Sad by train. We had to get off at the Petrovaradin station, as the bridge on the Danube for Novi Sad was destroyed. However, at the check point, during the checking of documents, the Hungarian authorities did not let my grandparents enter the occupied Novi Sad. We did not know what to do, so we were closed in the office where passes were issued. We were sitting in a corner alone, my grandmother, grandfather and I. I was watching them, looking helplessly around themselves, and at me. Grandmother was the model of tidiness. I remember her always punctually and completely setting the table for me every morning at 8 AM, as if it was an important ceremony. I think that that was the reason why grandfather was always either travelling on business or going hunting, mother was working far away, in Belgrade, my aunt married at an early age and left home, and uncle Victor did his studies in Zagreb. The 8 o'clock breakfast stayed in my memory as a symbol of the family getting together, discipline and tidiness, and it was now all gone during this trip from Belgrade under the German occupation, via Srem which was governed by the Ustaša, on the way to Novi Sad which was taken by the Hungarians! Two state borders at a distance of only about 70 kilometers.

At 8 in the morning, after a sleepless night, we were looking around us, terrified, not knowing what was going to happen with us. Clerks come into the office and through the window they were issuing passes for Novi Sad. All

of a sudden, unbelievably, it was as if I heard my mother's voice. I jumped, went to the window, and really I saw my mother! She was coming back from Belgrade, where she went to get me, but we were already on the way to Novi Sad. Good luck for me! The Hungarians let me get through to Novi Sad with my mother. But, where would grandmother and grandfather go? The only option for them was to go to the village Mandelos, near Ruma, where grandfather was born. He did not know anyone there. I never found out why it was that a Jewish family would settle in a place like that. All I knew was that grandfather had a sister living in Budapest and was married to a supporter of Bela Kun, and he also had a brother but I did not know where.

Parting with grandmother and grandfather was very sad. I would have been devastated had I known that it was the last time for me ever to see them. I grew up with them. I never lived with my father, I spent only weekends with my mother, as she used to come on weekends from Belgrade to Novi Sad to see me, between her age of 21 and 28.

The fact that I was to go with my mother to Novi Sad was great happiness for me. I was very happy that we would be together. My step father was prisoner of war.



*From boyhood days –  
IVAN NINIĆ with  
relatives*

It was, I think, the month of May 1941.

We were living in a family house that grandfather bought in 1939. The garden was a true rose-garden: twenty-two rose bushes! Omama always talked about it with pride. Later on they got out some bushes and grew grass out in order to make room for me to play. When grandfather went hunting I was always in the garden hunting sparrows, instead of pheasants. Grandfather took me hunting with him only once, but I was so loud that it was also the last time.

The house in Novi Sad, where I used to live with my grandparents, had four bedrooms and a dining-room which was connected to three rooms: theirs, the one for my mother and me, and Viktor's. Viktor was my mother's



younger brother, born in 1914. He studied first in Belgrade, but he had to leave the city due to his leftist activity, and he moved to Zagreb. There, he continued his political activity and the Yugoslav police arrested him on 30 March 1941, before the Ustaša came to power, and he was detained in the camp Kerestinec, where he was executed on 9 July 1941 along with Božidar Adžija, Otokar Keršovani and seven other intellectuals. He was the youngest among them; he was only 27 years old.

Viktor was restless. He read a lot. He wrote poetry published in the magazines in Belgrade, Zagreb and Novi Sad: *Glas omladine*, *Časopis živih*, *Naš život*, *Vojvođanski zbornik*, *Letopis Matice srpske*. This was how his associate and friend, writer Živan Milisavac, in 1945 described his restless spirit: „Viktor Rosenzweig is one of those young men who struggled with his inner controversies, vague aspirations and desires, unrealistic in his attempts to get closer to reality, in his striving to solve the major problems of man and of society on his own. He read feverishly, took part in strikes, got into prison, founded reading-rooms, started his studies in Belgrade and continued in Zagreb, moved from technical to veterinary studies, took part in organizing the youth movement and finally parted with his friends with whom he cooperated for a long time. He was always overwhelmed with plans to resolve problems exceeding his individual capacity. He strived to present himself as an unusual man, different from others, both through his appearance and his inner life. Actually, he was a serious young man with a shadow of melancholy about him, who was ahead of his generation. Yet, he could not make use of his strengths in the circumstances around him, nor would he build links with the older ones who had more knowledge and experience. Thus, in his struggle with himself he found himself isolated from the events and surroundings that he grew up in. His collection of poetry *Naš život* (Orbis, Zagreb 1939) illustrates the inner battles and torments of a person who lost old friends without having found new ones“.

My favorite pastime, apart from chasing sparrows and reading cartoons, was looking through Viktor's collection of books, and going through his drawers with his personal possessions. The first thing he would ask me on the rare visits home would be: „Have you been touching anything?“ He seemed to me somehow strict. He wore a wide-brimmed hat which to me seemed mysterious. I remember one occasion when we were sitting together at a table over lunch, omama asked him why he was not eating, and he replied that he could not eat while his comrades were starving in prison.

At the beginning of July 1941 we had a visit by Žigmund Žiga Handler, my grandmother's brother, a well-known attorney and a Jewish activist from Novi Sad. Franja Ofner once told me that he was the one who brought Zionism to Novi Sad. Žiga Handler, as an officer of Austria-Hungary in the



World War One, was taken as prisoner of war by the Russians and while in Russia he learned a lot about the Jewish nation, not only religion. After the War, in January 1921, together with Bargjor Brandajs he initiated the publishing of the magazine *Judisches Volksblatt* (Jewish People's Magazine), in the German language, because the majority of Jews in Vojvodina at that time were not fluent in the Serbian language. He got together young people who managed the magazine around political, social and economic issues. The Handlers lived nearby, in the Nikola Tesla street, on the side of the hotel Park, while our house was in Riterova bašta 5 (renamed after the war into Paje Jovanovića street). My life for the most part happened between those two streets, because in my earliest childhood I was cared for mostly by my great grandmother, the mother of my omama and Žiga, and she lived with the Handlers in a courtyard building. She was a piano teacher. She died aged 93 in 1939. There are many photographs of her in the album that I kept.

Žiga Handler was always serious, almost gloomy. Two days before that day, on 7 July, there was a funeral of our cousin Alfred Rosenzweig, who committed suicide. What made him do it?! The Hungarian police initially took him for Viktor, and once they realized their mistake they asked him to tell them whatever he knew about the Novi Sad intellectuals: who they were, what were their political beliefs, and the like. Since he did not intend to tell them anything, and he was not certain whether he could sustain it if he were exposed to torture, he decided to commit suicide. He was a well-known pre-war poet, he wrote under pseudonym Nenad Mitrov. His poetry was published in three literary magazines and in three collections of poetry: *Dve duše*, *Kroz klance jadikovke*, *Tri prema jedan za poeziju* (with poets Leskovac, Vasiljević, and Mikić). His legacy included five collections of poetry and the so-called Zagreb Diary. Two days after his funeral the family Rosenzweig was faced with another tragedy. Žiga Handler told us that he received information that the Ustaša had executed Viktor, along with ten outstanding Yugoslav intellectuals. Mother was dumbfounded and was just staring at her uncle.

The sons of Žiga Handler, in Teslina street, had everything that I did not have. While I was growing up with grandparents, without parents, his three sons Josi, Dodi, Valti – seven, six and four years older than me – grew up in a wonderful home, surrounded with parents and friends. The children's birthdays were true feasts. Ruža, Žiga's wife, was always kind and with a smile on her face.

Žiga had another son – Deške – from his previous marriage, who lived in Budapest and occasionally came to Novi Sad. Franja Ofner told me that he was his *intimus*, the best friend from his days in grammar school. That whole world, my childhood, perished half a year later in the Novi Sad Raid.

I will never forget that January of 1942. It was 20 degrees Celsius below zero. We were sent back home from school. Mother asked a friend of hers to have her son sent over to our place and play with me. She told me not to say anything. Soldiers came, asking for my mother's documents. The step father's German name seemed convincing; they looked into the room where my friends and I were playing. They did not ask me my name. My bicycle document, the only ID that I had, stated that my name was Ivan Ninić. Had they seen it, it would certainly have raised suspicions and additional questions. Just when we thought that everything was fine, a neighbor came and told us that the Handlers were taken away – Ruža and her three sons. My whole life, even today, I wonder what it must have felt like to have stood there on the *Štrand* waiting to be executed. Žiga was not with them. When he heard about the executions in Šajkaška street, he went to Pest to ask for interventions by authorities, but obviously he failed. I never saw him again, nor did I hear anything about his destiny. For me, and especially for my mother, it was as if the whole world had collapsed! She knew nothing of her parents in Srem, or of her sister who was on her way to England, her brother had been executed in Zagreb, and her husband (my step father) was released from prisoner of war camp and soon afterwards mobilized by the Hungarian Army. And now the Handlers were gone, our closest relatives, with whom we were together on daily basis! We had many more relatives in Novi Sad, of whom I had lost sight over time, and with whom our contacts during the occupation were not as frequent, at least according to my memory. We avoided socializing. In fact, we were living under false identities. I remember my mother and I once met a relative of ours in the street and she asked my mother: „Aren't you wearing the star?“, implying the armband with the yellow Magen David that Jews were obliged to wear. Mother just said: „I have no intentions to wear it.“ The only Jewish woman that we were in contact with during the war, who was not our relative, was Mrs. Viner, the aunt of Klara Bek from Jerusalem. She also had a non-Jewish husband, and we saw them from time to time and agreed on how we should act and what we should do.

In the summer of 1942 there was a new shock for us. Neighbors from Srem sent information to my mother that her parents, my omama and grandfather, had been killed by the Ustaša. We did not know the circumstances of how it happened. We knew nothing except the fact that they were dead. Only many years later, somewhere during the 1980's, Ruža David, the mother of Miša and Filip, mentioned in the presence of Ana, my wife, that during the war she had been in Mandelos. When Ana asked Ruža: „Did you possibly know the Rosenzweigs?“ She replied „Of course I did“, and added „they were the only Jews in the village apart from us.“ After Ana had said

this, I wanted to know the details of how my grandparents had perished. She told me that in Mandelos and the surrounding settlements some locals who during the day went about their usual business would during the night form some para-military units taking the power into their hands and entertain themselves by killing Serbs and Jews. People would flee to the forests at night to hide. The Davids and the Rosenzweigs hid in this manner as well. One night, grandfather simply said: „I will not flee any longer” and the two of them stayed at home.

In order to make some income for survival in Srem my grandfather learnt how to make woven wicker baskets. I recently read the book *A Short History of Myth* by Karen Armstrong describing how the Neolithic men started to develop different trades, including weaving of baskets. My grandfather's example demonstrates how Nazism simply forced men of the 20th century to go back into prehistory!

The publication *Zločini okupatora u Vojvodini* (The Crimes Committed by Occupiers in Vojvodina), Volume 2, pages 303–315, described the action by Viktor Tomić and his improvised illegal court in Srem. In the Archives in Sremska Mitrovica I saw an announcement nr. 1553-42 from Hrvatska Mitrovica dated 8 September 1942, stating that „Josip Rosenzweig, aged 56, and Margita Rosenzweig, aged 52, were proclaimed guilty for fleeing into the woods where they used hunting guns and pistols to fight home guards, Ustaša and the German Army “.

The mobile courts of this kind convicted them to execution before the firing squad on 24 June 1942. The conviction was enforced on 7 July 1942.

I subsequently read about the crimes committed by Viktor Tomić in the book of memoirs by Mirko Tepavac. He had committed such atrocities that he was even disowned by the Ustaša authorities and his unit was no longer led by him. Tomić then disappeared and some years later died in Budapest, where he became an alcoholic and died as a result.

In my childhood I had linguistic issues. My omama, Margita Handler Rosenzweig, a Jew from Vojvodina, was born in Parabuć. She spoke Hungarian, German, and her Serbian was her weakest language. Grandfather Josip, born in Srem, spoke German and Serbian, but no Hungarian at all. My mother, aunt Babi, uncle Viktor, nicknamed Bubi, were born in Ruma and spoke German and Serbian. The common language for all in the family was German, thus my mother tongue was German as well. The earliest children's books that I read were in German. I was subscribed to the children's magazine *Politikin zabavnik* to help me learn Serbian. I was enrolled in the preparatory school year with the Jewish Community in Novi Sad. The classes were in the building next to the Temple, on the other side across the street from the present day municipal administration building. The window over-



*Both perished in their youth: Ivan's mother IRMA with brother VIKTOR ROZENCVAJG*

looking the street. All my classmates were in more or less the same situation. At home they spoke either German or Hungarian, so they were enrolled in order to improve their command of the Serbian language and be ready for regular school. I was enrolled in school in 1939. I was speaking Serbian for two years when the war started. They then made me learn Hungarian. I was by no means to disclose the fact that I spoke German because, if I am not a German and I speak the Ger-

man language someone could conclude that maybe I was Jewish, irrespective of my family name. I remember my friend Viner telling me, right after the war, when I was to enroll in school: „Sign your name in Cyrillic, so that I can see if you have forgotten the Serbian language“.

In our house, living with us, was a woman Etuška, with her son. Her mother, nanny Ana, had worked for years for my omama, so I knew her already at the time when she was a young girl. She took care of the house and me during the war, especially after my mother got sick and went for treatment from which she was never to return. When she was leaving for the hospital she told Etuška: „Take good care of Hanzi, he is so naive“. I lived with her and her son for a while even after the liberation.

At the time when the executions of the occupier's collaborators and those who were reported by someone started, I heard a neighbor say: „Now Hanzi has the best pedigree: half Serb and half Jewish“. I smiled, and the others looked at me with sympathy.

That is why I continue to be convinced even today that multi-ethnic communities are viable. People can also be good. Evil comes from certain regimes.



## VI

# IMMIGRATING TO PALESTINE







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*Stela ŠVARC*

## A LONG JOURNEY TO THE PORT OF SALVATION

*E*stera-Stela Švarc was born in Belgrade on 8 November 1925, of father Leon and mother Mirula-Mila Sid, née Manojlović. She had a younger brother Marko Sid who died in November 2005.

*Of her direct family those who perished in the Holocaust include two of her mother's sisters and a grandfather; on her paternal side, in Pirot, three brothers and two sisters perished with their families. They were taken by Bulgarian Fascists in 1943 to the Treblinka camp.*

*In Belgrade she completed the private elementary school and the private German school and enrolled to study at the Commercial Academy which she attended until April 1941.*

*After arrival to Palestine, in 1942, she completed the two-year agricultural school and lived in kibbutz Ganigar. She worked in Jerusalem in a saccharin manufacturing plant and at the same time learned to improve her English and typing. From 1948 she served in the Israeli Army and from there was invited in 1951 to work for the Yugoslav Consular Office in Jaffa. For seventeen years she worked as translator, translating the Israeli press into the Serbian language, and as an English correspondent.*

*Subsequently, until her retirement in 1994, she worked in the gas industry.*

*She was married to Mark Švarc, a Bulgarian Jew, who died in a traffic accident. She has a daughter Hedva (living in the USA) and son Amnon, and two grandchildren.*

While in Belgrade, we lived in the neighborhood of Dorćol, often visiting grandmother Klara-Veza and grandfather Josif Manojlović, who lived in the Rige od Fere street. We were also close with my mother's sisters.

During the bombing of Belgrade, which started on 6 April 1941, we hid in the shelter of the Main Post Office building. Seven days later we returned to our house, in Jevrejska street, which was partly damaged by bomb shrapnels, but we could continue to live there. Until April 1941 we had a good life and in good relations with our neighbors. I did not really feel too comfortable in the German school. But, as it was a private school, I could not transfer to the public school.

Already in school I could feel the signs of anti-Semitism. The school principal was a very kind man. While Hitler's speeches were broadcast, when the whole school would assemble in the music hall to listen, the principal let me go home. The images of children going to the music hall and the voices of those speeches still resound in my memory.

For two years I was the best pupil in that school. The school principal once invited me to his office and said: „You know, I cannot hand to you your certificate in front of the whole school“. It was not a big school, it had one class for every grade. More or less, the pupils were children of the German “fifth column” people from regions of Bačka and Banat, close to the German embassy. My classmate was the daughter of the German Ambassador, Barbara fon Heren. We were friends. The pupils did not treat me bad, but I did feel bad since I knew what was happening in Germany, especially after the Crystal Night.

I remember very clearly: it was a very good school. It was located below the restaurant „London“, two blocks away. At that time we had a swimming pool. The reason I attended the German school was because my father had thought that I would not go very far knowing only the Serbian language, that I was intelligent enough and that I should learn languages. My brother did not go to this school. Namely, when I started it, it was still not bad. I started learning the German language already in kinder-garten.

At home we mostly observed Jewish traditions. I went to Ken. I realized that the friends from school were not really right for me so I joined Hashomer Hatzair. From that time I remember Lilika (Sarina Alkalaj). There were about six or seven of us girls, Lilika was 4–5 years older, and she was our madriha. We met on Sundays, and always had a lecture on different topics. We went for outings, walks, there was much to do. At the time I was between 12 and 14 years old. In summer we would go for vocations in Slovenia for two weeks, camping in tents.

At home we spoke Serbian, and with our relatives the Judeo-Espagnol, which I still speak well to this day. There would be special meals for Passover,

the Community distributed matzo and bojus. It was some kind of hard pie which we grated. We were not strongly religious. Two times a year we went to the synagogue, for Yom Kippur and Passover. We all fasted. I remember that my parents observed the kosher rules. We children would also buy ham, and mother instructed us not to put it on plates, but keep it wrapped in paper. Grandmother also told us the same, not to mix it with other food. At that time I did not realize why it should be so.

During the bombing of Belgrade we hid in the shelters of the Main Post Office. Once a day we were given bean soup. It was distributed by the Red Cross. At that time I was chubby, but due to the fear and the poor conditions, I lost something like five kilos. All day and night long we were sitting there in darkness. The sanitation was very poor, no water. Toilets on the floors above were clogged. So, all week long we were given a plate of bean soup per day and we did not starve, but we did not feel like eating.

We returned home. Waited to see what was to come. In visible places the Germans posted their decrees. According to one such decree all men were to report at Tašmajdan. Father went to register, but he complained of his sciatica and he was let go. It was still possible, at the beginning, to be exempted.

So, April and May went by, and June came. At school I was sitting next to the daughter of the secretary of the Bulgarian Embassy. Her name was Milka Vasileva. Her father called my father and told him: „You were born in Pirot. Go back there. We are organizing a train to send our people back to Pirot, to Bulgaria“. When father came home and told us of this call by Vasilev, I was jumping with joy and cheering: „Lets go, lets go!“. „But how can we go, and where?“, asked he while I was persistent with my „Let's go, let's go!“. We had two suitcases packed, we took a horse drawn wagon with one horse and in the morning at 4 o'clock we went to the railway station. Our names were on the list of the Bulgarian Embassy. I think it was the last train. There were many people travelling on it, fleeing the war. Many people were returning to Pirot, even Serbs. Germans and Bulgarians were Allies and did not get there as enemies, as was the case in Serbia. We left the house to my mother's sister Cana, Sarina Tajtacak.

If I remember correctly, we travelled two or three days, via Niš, sleeping on straw. There were no check points. We were afraid of the Germans. It was in cattle wagons that we travelled, stopping at every station until arrival in Pirot.

My father's brothers were overwhelmed with joy that we had come. A month later we rented a small apartment with small tiny rooms. Since he was fluent in foreign languages my father got a job with the Bulgarians.

Since he was taken by the Bulgarians as prisoner of war during World War One he spoke Bulgarian. He worked as secretary of the Jewish Community.

While still in Belgrade we had a little sack to which father would sometimes put some money, the so-called „Napoleons“. I took the sack with me when we were leaving for Pirot, and placed it below my skirt waist, next to my skin. If they had checked me I would not have kept it. But, they did not, and we used that money from time to time and we did not starve.

We were given a hearty welcome in Pirot. School started. I enrolled in the fifth grade of grammar school and I met Jelena Đorđević. Her father was killed by the Germans when they came to Pirot. He had a shop and he protested against something, so ... Jelena had two sisters and their mother. At that time I was wearing the yellow Magen David armband since the Bulgarians requested it. While walking the streets, Jelena put her arm around me so as to cover the star, since the town was full of Germans.

Bulgarian officers could not aspire for better positions if they could not speak German. My teacher recommended me to teach them German, so officers came to our place for lessons, and that was additional income for the whole family. Ten lev per lesson. That was how it was in 1942.

We managed to get into contact with our uncle and aunt (on my mother's side), Avram and Raša Majer. The uncle was a clerk of the French-Serbian bank in Belgrade and some years before the war he was seconded to Turkey to work for the subsidiary of the same bank in Ankara and that was where they were when the war began. The Sohnut moved to Turkey, which was a neutral country, to assist as much as possible in saving the Jews. The aunt managed to get two certificates for the „Jugend Aliyah“, for my brother and myself, so with a small group of five children and youth we managed to get from Bulgaria first into Turkey and continue to Palestine.

In Pirot I also had some Bulgarian friends. The daughter of the head of district went to school with me, I taught her German. When we were leaving, her father made a permit for my parents to accompany my brother and me and see us off in Sofia, where we had relatives. My father's mother was a Bulgarian Jew, grandmother Stela, and I was named after her. We left for Palestine on 10 November 1942.

The five of us children came to Istanbul, and subsequently we travelled to Halep in Syria, where we were met by a Sohnut representative. From Halep we continued to Beirut, and from Beirut by taxi to Haifa. Those who travelled together with me were: Izi Percec, 16, from Sofia; Rahel Beraha, also from Sofia; Jona Alkalaj, a relative to my aunt's husband; my brother Marko and I. Marko was 12 and I was 15. My date of birth was changed so that I could qualify for that Aliyah, and I am still registered as born in 1926.

We came to a place called *bet olim*, a home for the immigrants. We were met there by Henrieta Sold, an important person in Sohnut of that time. We were sent to the agricultural school, to Ben Shemen, where we learned Hebrew and how to work the land. Life was very good, in groups. The influence of political parties was already being felt there. Every time that an Aliyah arrived he or she would enter a party. I became member of Mapaj, the present day Avoda, with Shimon Peres. It was a center party. Hashomer Hatzair was more to the left. However, we knew almost nothing about it at the time. We stayed at school for two years. We learnt the language quickly. Half a day we would work and half a day study. I became qualified for the chickens, to operate the incubators. And my brother started studying for a machine operator. He became member of Hevrat Jeladim, a children's society, while I was with the Noar, the youth.

We were concerned for our parents. Every day we listened to the news that the Bulgarians would expel them. And truly, the Jews from Pirot were rounded up in March 1943, at 2 o'clock after midnight.

My parents had a different destiny. Father explained how they were saved.\* We were reunited with our parents in February 1943. Since I was sick, my brother went to Haifa to meet our parents who arrived via Turkey to Palestine. They settled in Jerusalem, where they had a small shop and worked very hard. Near the end of their lives they came back to Haifa and lived with my brother. Our mother died aged 70, and father lived to be 81.

After two and a half years in Ben Shemen, I spent two or three months in a kibbutz, and moved to Jerusalem to help my parents.

In Palestine we did not know much about the war, we did not know that there were death camps in Europe. It was only after the war was over that we heard from those who were coming to Israel what was going on in Europe.

I registered for the Army, and was scheduled for the artillery, where I served as a major's secretary. We were making plans of how the army should be structured. Two years later I was invited by my boss who told me that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was asking for me, that they wanted me specifically due to my knowledge of Serbian and that he had to let me go. They tested me to do a translation of a Hebrew text into Serbian. I was employed at the Serbian representative office, to work for the first envoy to Israel, I think his name was Milutinović. I stayed in that service for seventeen years, until 1967. A new envoy would come every two or three years, and I was said to be their "inventory".

The most difficult moment for me, and the happiest at the same time, was when I was saying goodbye to my parents in Sofia, knowing that by do-

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\*See the testimony of Leon Sinda in the fifth edition of "We survived ... 5".

ing so my brother and I would be saved. That also meant being saved from being sent to Niš, where horrendous things were happening. I always remember the scene: my brother sitting in my mother's lap and crying. He was 11. I was sitting next to them, feeling very, very sad, but we were leaving ...

What could be my most difficult moment during the war in Belgrade...? I remember two events. The Germans were in the streets. Getting food was very difficult. There were no foodstuffs. Everything was very scarce. SO, I went to the banks of the Danube. It was said that people were bringing bread for sale from the other side by boats. I did not manage to get any, because a young man standing behind me was behaving very indecently. I ran home without any bread. That moment I cannot forget.

And another one. Again it was about bread being sold. Near the Jevrejska street there was a bakery. A German soldier was distributing numbers for people standing in the queue. I got an idea to make use of my German. The soldier was looking at me wondering how come a small girl could speak such good German. He gave me a number, and I did not want to take anything and again I was running home, because as a Jew I was not entitled to even stand in that line, although at the moment I was not wearing the yellow star. He followed me. I came home and told my mother that the soldier was following me. I was not wearing the yellow armband. Mother took me immediately to my grandmother's place in Rige od Fere street. The following day the soldier came to my mother and entered the house. They could enter wherever they wanted. He asked my mother if she had a cooling device for ice. If we had had one he would have taken it away. My mother thought that he was well-intentioned and she asked him why they hate Jews. He said: „We do not, but it is those above us who tell us that we should hate Jews“. So, I stayed with my grandmother for ten days. One day someone was knocking at the door – it was that same soldier! He was going from one room to another, I stood behind the door, terrified, glued to the wall. Luckily, he did not see me. That was why, once we receive the invitation to go to Pirot I was jumping with joy and saying: „Let's go, let's go!“

Thanks to that and other favorable circumstances all four of us managed to be saved.



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## Cvi RAAM

### A LONG WAY TO SALVATION IN ISRAEL



*Cvi was born in Vinkovci in 1928 of father Oto and mother Ružica, née Nojman (Neumann). He was the only one of the family to survive the Holocaust.*

*The family moved from Vinkovci to Zagreb in 1934. In Zagreb Hari attended the Jewish school in Palmotićeve street, and continued in the real grammar school.*

*He left for Palestine in February 1943 and lived in kibbutz Shar Haamakim, where he completed the technical school.*

*Cvi served in the Army and worked until his retirement in the publishing house „Sifrijat ha poalim“ (the Workers’ Bookstore) in Tel Aviv.*

*From his marriage to Belgrade-born Mirjam Jaroši he has three daughters – Nili, Efrat and Karmela, and five grandchildren.*

While in Vinkovci, we lived with the family of my maternal grandfather Adolf Nojman (Neumann). Grandfather was a baker. When the big bakery was to be built in Zagreb in 1934, which could employ all members of our family, we all moved that year to Zagreb. Unfortunately, the business did not take off well. Grandfather’s nostalgia for Vinkovci was so great that he and grandmother returned there. Every year after the school was over for summer, I would go to stay with them for the summer vacation.

At home we spoke Croatian. I think that my parents also spoke German because as a child I went to the German kinder-garten but I did not like

the language. Until the war I knew nothing of anti-Semitism; any fighting among us children was just the usual children's play. I went to the Jewish school in Palmotićeve street, but I do not remember the teacher's name. I remember only the name of the religious teacher – Šamika Romano Samuel. Since age eight I was member of the Hashomer Hatzair, my menahel at that time was Tirca Broclavski, and later Bar Leva. The older members met us at school and we enjoyed being together in the organization.

Father worked for „Unitas“, the first national thread factory. In early 1940's the factory moved to the new premises at the outskirts of the town. Father supervised the construction and was in charge of installing machines so, in order for him to be able to invest more time in his work, we were given an apartment within the factory grounds and we moved out of the town to the Rapska road.

We heard about the beginning of the war on the radio. I remember that it was Sunday and that we were appalled to realize that a war had broken out.

I no longer went to school, I do not know if it was due to school vacations or due to the war. When classes were resumed, there was a notice on the school door saying that Jews could not go back to school. It was the second boys' grammar school. I was already aware that the war had started, that the Independent State of Croatia was proclaimed and that many things would change.

Since the outbreak of the war we had no news from Vinkovci. Until leaving Yugoslavia in 1943 I did not know what was happening with grandmother and grandfather that I was very much attached to.

My family continued to live next to the factory where father worked. He was fooling himself that he was protected, since he was working in a factory producing for the military industry. There were also some of our relatives living in Zagreb, and one of them fled to Dalmatia in a timely manner. From there he sent a man to deliver a letter asking us decisively to pack the essentials and flee. But father reacted to this by stating that that was nonsense and that no one was going to inflict any harm to him. There were three Jews working in „Unitas“: the director, G. Broclavski; the chief textile engineer, Papo, who was later found to be a communist; and my father. Immediately after the well known bomb diversion at the main post office building, retaliation measures were taken. Papo was already on the lists as a communist, and when they came to take him away from the factory they also took my father. I never saw him again. All that I know is that he was among the first inmates in Jasenovac and, as I heard from others, he managed to stay alive until just before the war was over. He was relatively young, strong, he had been physically active all his life ...

He was first detained in the prison on Savska street. I went there with my mother to visit him. We took food and other necessities, but we never actually saw him. We would come to the prison, but were not allowed inside. One day we were told that he was no longer there.

I think that we received on several occasions postcards through the Red Cross – these postcards could contain a maximum of 21 words.

Life was difficult after father was taken away, although the factory treated us fairly. For a while we continued to live in the same apartment, and later we were transferred into room built for factory guests, in the basement. There were shared toilets. We lived there until 1943, until my leaving for Palestine.



*CVI with mother RUŽICA, 1942*

In the meanwhile I was hiding for two or three months in the village Rača or Ruče, I do not remember the exact name, close to Velika Gorica. Namely, my mother had a brother, Šandor Nojman, married to a Catholic, Milica Cajner. Her family lived in the village. They gave me hiding although they were aware that I was a Jew. My uncle survived the war, because he was part of the home-guard units. He played in the fire brigade orchestra and later in the home guard's band. There was, actually, an order coming from authorities that fire brigade orchestras should be transferred to the home guards units. He was very much appreciated by his colleagues although it

was known that he was a Jew, and his fellow musicians agreed to this order and made a condition that this transfer happens „en bloc“, so he too was given home guard uniform and documents. This, however, did not save him from being evicted from his apartment. The Germans liked his apartment and they took it away. Uncle and his wife moved to Savska road.

The Jewish Religious Community was active throughout this time. They opened up a school, but I do not remember how many classes it had. Three, I think, for children of different age. The school was in Trenkova street number 7, on the upper floor, while the Community was on the ground floor. Behind my back, in the classroom was the cupboard where

the Torah was kept. That was where we prayed, but I was not religious and did not attend the prayers. All the teachers were volunteers. My class teacher was Zeev Glik (Glück), a psychologist by profession. We were lectured by dr Emil Švarc, his present name is Šomroni, a veterinary and secretary of dr Frajberger; and Mr. Frajberger himself taught us biology (Freiberger). He was there all the time. We also had calculus, but I no longer remember the teacher.

One day in 1942 we were told in school that Aliyah would be organized for children aged up to 16 and that those who wish to go should register. The transport was to consist of about eighty children, and that was the number registered in the original list. However, we heard nothing about it until the end of the year. Emil Švarc later told us that they tried to intervene via Hungary and inquire about the outcome of our certificates. It turned out that one transport of children had already left Hungary using our names. My subsequent inquiries about this intervention demonstrated that the whole thing was initiated by Mrs. Marija Bauer, who was living in Istanbul, as she wanted to save her family if at all possible.

Marija Bauer was born in Vinkovci, where she had a sister, married Tajtelbaum. They had a son, Hari, born the same year as I, a boy that I played with.

Our parting with our parents and the Rabbi Frajberger, whose son was also leaving with the group, was organized in Trenkova street. The parents were not allowed to see us off at the railway station. We were escorted to it by a nurse who had with her all our documents. I found out later that she was selected to escort us to the Hungarian border, because she was a communist.

When our group of eleven children arrived to Hungary, after travelling for three days, another goodbye ceremony was organized, at which all the names were read out aloud. The name of my friend Hari Tajtelbaum was called out as well. Hearing his name I jumped up, because I knew him. I was very much surprised to see instead of him another boy whom I did not know at all. The group which started from Zagreb included: Vera Alt (presently Dina Maestro), Rahel Atijas (presently Rahel Rotem), Ester Dojč (presently Ester Nir), Šimon Vajs – Šimon Cahor, Ruven Frajberger (died in the army, in Israel, in 1956), Dan Levi (deceased), Cipora Išah, married Hiršl (deceased), Jakica Maestro (deceased), Mira Mecger, living in Haifa, Nomi Štern (presently Nomi Cfoni), and I. Under the name of Hari Dajtelbaum there was Moše Rotem, from Slovakia. On the border between the Independent State of Croatia and Hungary there was a man from the Jewish Community of Budapest to meet us. We were instructed in the Jewish Community of Zagreb not to give anyone any information. I heard later that this

man complained later for this kind of conduct on our side: „What kind of children are they, I could not get a word out of them!“

In Budapest we stayed for three days. We were put up in a building and were not allowed to move freely. We were given some money to buy what we needed. As we moved on, the transport was made up of about one hundred children. We were taken by train to Bucharest, staying in the train all the time, kept warm at night by the engine. In Stara Zagora, Bulgaria, we were guests of members of the Jewish Community. A small section of our trip in Greece was highly problematic because that territory was occupied by the Germans and the SS.

At the border with Palestine we were met by Hilel Livni (Slavko Vajs) who took us under his auspices. We were taken to Haifa, to bet olim, where we stayed for two days, and subsequently we went to Shaar Haamakim, some fifteen kilometers from Haifa. More than fifty percent of Jews in that kibbutz were from Yugoslavia. Nomi Štern had an elder sister there.

We were treated as a youth group – studying half a day and working half a day. That idea was good for those who finished grammar school, but not so much for us younger ones because we did not manage to study enough. Thanks to the efforts of our teachers we were given an extra half year to study.

I was attending occupational education for an electrician, under the mentor Marko Koen, from Belgrade. I was working as electrician, tractor operator and driver. I was in Shaar Haamakimu since 24 February 1943, two weeks after leaving Zagreb. In early 1946 we were all mobilized for a Palmach group, the underground Israeli military. The military service lasted for two years. At end of 1947 most of the group was released, only about 15 percent stayed on as regular troops, including myself. I had the lowest military rank and a date was scheduled for me to go to officers' school, but I was injured and had to leave the army.

I returned to the kibbutz where I married Miriam Jaroši, daughter of the academic painter Anton Jaroši, born in Orahovica in the region of Slavonija. He had studied in Berlin, and fled with his family first to Budapest in 1933 and subsequently to Belgrade. My wife's father was an inmate in Mauthausen concentration camp and he survived thanks to his being a painter and painting portraits of all the Germans in the camp. Miriam and her mother, who were living in Belgrade at the time, had counterfeited documents and fled to the village Vapa, near Čačak, where they lived with a local family which was not aware of them being Jews.

Our two daughters, Nili and Efrat, were born in the kibbutz. In 1957 we left the kibbutz and went to Tivon, a place north of Shaar Haamakim. Our third daughter Karmela was born there. I worked as tractor and bulldozer

operator. After the great crisis in Israel in the 1960's we returned to the kibbutz. My wife died in 1975, after which I left the kibbutz. The daughters were already grown up. I continued to work in Tel Aviv until my retirement in the publishing house „Sifriat hapoalim“ (The Workers' Bookshop).

I wish to say in the end that all of us survivors from the Yugoslav group have maintained close links until the present times. Although we all have our families we also feel that the group is our extended family.





## VII

# FORCED LABOUR IN AUSTRIA





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*Ruža LIHTNER KRNDIĆ*

PEOPLE OF NEGOTIN, THANK YOU FOR  
SAVING MY LIFE!



*Ruža Lihtner Krndić was born on 23 February 1920 in Osijek, of father Emanuel, and mother Ljuboja-Iboja Lihtner, née Varjaš. The family had four children, two elder brothers and one younger brother.*

*The father, the middle brother Vilim, and the youngest brother Drago were taken from Jajce to Jasenovac, where they perished.*

*The mother, the eldest brother Josip-Joži, and Ruža survived.*

*She graduated from the University of Belgrade where she studied German and French and world literature. After graduation she worked in Jajce as professor, and moved to*

*London, where she stayed six and a half years. From London she returned to Jajce and moved to Germany. The family returned to Yugoslavia, specifically Belgrade, in 1985.*

*From her marriage to Ratomir Cvetković she has a daughter Mirjana, and from her marriage to Branislav Krndić, an engineer of technology, a daughter Irena. She has five grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.*

*Negotin, a provincial town in Timočka Krajina,  
saved a little Jewish girl*

I lived in Jajce, at that time a small town in Bosnia and Herzegovina; after the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia it is a town in the state

of Bosnia and Herzegovina. I had three brothers. We were a good, united family, socializing with others and having many friends. On Saturdays and Sundays we went for picnics and organized outings.

My mother's sister, my aunt Mira, lived in Negotin, in eastern Serbia. My uncle, Milan Stevanović, was a pharmacist. They had no children. I was four years old when I went with my father to Negotin to visit my aunt and uncle. My uncle came to love me, they say I was a smart and pretty girl, and the uncle proposed that my father should leave me with them in Negotin for a while and they would bring me back to Jajce during the school vacation. Father went back to Jajce without me, and I stayed on in Negotin and was gradually getting used to my new life. They enrolled me in kinder-garten, and subsequently to elementary school. I made friends with the children in the neighborhood, played with my brothers, and when the vacation was over, I would return to Negotin.

I was good at school, especially at reciting poetry and I read clearly, and my aunt and uncle supported me in this. My aunt, a Jew, after marrying her husband, converted to Christian Orthodox church, and observed the Orthodox religious traditions, but she did not forget her Jewish origins. She always fasted for Yom Kippur and she felt good in the company of our relatives in Sarajevo, Subotica or Arad, among her brothers and sisters.

When I started grammar school, during the first religious class, the priest (professor) told me that he is not entitled to teach me like the other pupils; and told me that I could either stay for the class or leave. I was surprised by this, I did not understand what this was about, but I did take absence from his lessons and took walks with a number of friends who were Catholics and who also took absence. They had regular classes with their priest and took the class exam, meaning that I would have to do the same. My aunt explained it to me when I came home. I got the books and was getting ready to take the religious class exam. At the end of the school year I took the exam with the Rabbi in Niš. During vacation I read books on the history of the Jewish people, I talked to my father and I started fasting for Yom Kippur, together with my aunt. Apart from the mandatory lessons from the curriculum, the rabbi talked to me and explained many things related to Jewish history. I developed an interest in the history of Jews. I felt that I belonged to the Jewish people, but due to the influence of my uncle, who was a loyal soldier of the Thessalonica front, I also felt as a Serb. I think that at that time Jews were described as Serbs of Moses' religion. This reflected well our feelings.

I studied hard and was among the best pupils in the grammar school. I spoke French, German, played the violin, had a talent for acting, and sang

well. My best friend was Božidarka, from a modest farming family, and her mother gladly welcomed me and with them I felt at home.

I am dwelling on this because that was what saved my life, the fact that I socialized with everyone and did not act as a spoiled girl.



*RUŽA in 1939*

The situation in Germany was becoming increasingly serious. We heard about it, we listened on the radio to the speeches of Hitler and Mussolini. My aunt was very much concerned, and we younger ones did not fully comprehend how serious the situation actually was.

In the meantime I enrolled to study at the University of Belgrade, studying Yugoslav literature, and I completed my first year in 1939–1940. In September 1940 my uncle suddenly died. I went back to Negotin to be with my aunt. The following year, in 1941, the country was occupied. Everything changed overnight. Aunt and I had to wear the yellow armband. We were not to go out after

8 PM, and were not to go at all to shops and the green market. I was not allowed to work in the pharmacy. Under such circumstances we realized who our true friends were. The pharmacists who worked in the pharmacy every night set aside an amount of money taking care that it was not noticed by the commissioner appointed by the Germans to run the pharmacy, and had this money sent secretly to my aunt. My friends continued to come to our place and socialize with me. The time that I spent with doctor Branko Milosavljević turned into a romantic sympathy. Everyone was kind to my aunt and me.

I remember one evening, while listening to Radio London, a police officer suddenly came in. The two of us froze, and he just said: „Doesn't matter“.

One day, in mid November 1941, a clerk from the municipal administration whom I did not know sent a message to me to come there as he needed to speak with me. I went there fearful. His first words were that I should hide right away, as Jews would be rounded up and arrested! My aunt was not at risk; she was married to a Serb and was an Orthodox Christian. I hid with a neighbor, in a room overlooking the garden, not visible from the street. Nobody asked about me and some days later I returned home. I lived

a normal life, but I packed a small suitcase with some essential things, in case I need to go and hide again or flee.

One morning, several days after my first hiding, while I was still in bed, I heard a voice from the pharmacy that was having difficulty pronouncing my name. Čeda, the pharmacist, opened the door to my room and said aloud: „Ruža, Ruža“, while with his hand he was signaling me to run. Quickly, I put on my aunt's dress and barefoot, just in home slippers, ran to the neighboring house of my friend Slobodanka Janković, married Pešelj. Her husband was a surveyor and they had a one year old son. That was in December 1941. Slobodanka did not understand what was going on, she was not used to seeing me in slippers and a dress which was not mine, but she did not say anything. We sat down, she made coffee for me and I told her about what happened. She turned serious, I understood this and I did not take it against her. Hiding a Jew in one's home was a huge risk. In a moment, she collected herself, told me to stay and watch the baby which was sleeping, and she went to her husband to ask for his advice. Her husband immediately went to see doctor Branko, whom everyone considered to be my fiancé. She came back and told me that I could stay, her husband and doctor Branko will decide what to do.

After that, Slobodanka went to the pharmacy to ask for something for the baby, who was allegedly coughing, but actually she went there to tell doctor Branko to come by and have a look at the boy. Her second task was to go to my aunt and take my clothes and shoes and other things that I needed, without telling her where I was. The aunt immediately understood and kissed Slobodanka thankfully.

In the meantime doctor Branko found Slobodanka Florojkić, a good friend of mine from elementary school, who lived on the outskirts of the town and who right away agreed to take me in with her. It was good for me to be there, I was hidden.

Doctor Branko often visited and comforted me, and he hid from me the bitter truth that all adult Jewish men from Negotin had been rounded up, including those who were hiding in the surrounding villages.

In Negotin, apart from German troops there were also Bulgarian troops, and the municipal administration was looking for accommodation for them. They came to Slobodanka to inquire and they asked her to turn her shed and small room into a kitchen. They ordered her to get those empty as soon as possible. I was to move somewhere else to hide. My new host was Boca Lazarević, the brother of Bora Lazarević, the president of the municipality. Boca's parents were friends with my aunt and uncle. Boca had a nice estate on the road to Badnjevo. They put me up in their guest room and I felt safe there. I stayed with them in their part of the house, and when someone came to visit



I went to my room. Boca was living with Cveta, a woman who used to be a singer. She was a good housewife, a woman from the country. She was in fact running the whole household, taking care of the poultry, the livestock, working the land, making preserves for the winter. This was another example of how much people from Negotin loved me and took care of me and how humane they were. I was with them from February, it was a cold winter, and I was closed indoors. I only went outside into the garden in front of the door, always wrapped up around my head in scarves.



*RUŽA with the family who took care of her – uncle, aunt and friends  
in front of their home in Negotin*

Spring came and Cveta started working in the fields. I was bored and Cveta suggested that I should go and work with her. She dressed me in local villager's clothes, gave me tools and we worked the yard together. We were careless, because there were people from Negotin passing by who recognized me. Boca came back all excited about our carelessness and right away called doctor Branko to discuss with him what to do next. It was obvious that I was to leave Negotin, although at that time nobody was looking for me. People from Negotin once again showed their courage and humanity.

Very soon, and without any complications, some friends, really good people, got together and organized everything. Velja Trtuš Mikulić, who was working for the district administration, had identity documents made for

me in the name of Olga Ilić. My ID document was fully authentic, with an authentic signature and seal. Doctor Branko organized a railroad worker to escort me to Niš. I was with him in his official compartment, as his wife, with my head in bandages, pretending to be going to the hospital in Niš, to have an eye surgery. The railroad man, whose name I forgot, took along also his son, a four year old boy. Whether that was smart or not I am not sure, but I was concerned all the time that the boy could say something inappropriate if asked by someone. However, all the way to Niš, nobody even came into our compartment.

In Niš I said goodbye to the railroad man, he wished me luck and left, and I stayed on to wait for my train to Kragujevac. This time, alone. In Kragujevac there was a man, he was the best man at my aunt and uncle's wedding, a pharmacist called Milivoje, and I used earlier to come to their place to visit. His wife, Vida, was very dear and likeable, and I was sure that they would receive me kindly. But, I was wrong. When he saw me, Milivoje just opened up his eyes wide. His wife Vida did not say anything, but she did not invite me to settle down. They acted as if I just came over for coffee.

There was a German commander accommodated in one of the rooms in their house, a senior officer, who also ate with them. Milivoje had studied pharmacy together with my uncle in Graz. He introduced me as their best man's daughter, mentioned my uncle as his best friend, and mentioned their studying together and their friendship in Graz. He said I was a literature student and commended my German. When lunch was over, Milivoje asked me in a serious tone: „Where do you intend to go?“ I understood that there was no place for me there. Of course, this was not what I had expected, but I also could not take it against them, since I would not really feel comfortable in a house where a German commander was living.

On the way from Niš to Kragujevac, in the train I met a woman who was going back home from hospital, after her medical examination. She was married to the chief of the railway station in the village Badujevac and had two children. She mentioned that she had to find a person who would help her around the house. At that moment I was not interested in this idea, counting that my uncle's best man would take me in. However, now I remembered this, I did not even sleep over with Milivoje and Vida, so I took a train and went to this village, two stations away from Kragujevac. They welcomed me kindly, the woman was very happy to see me. There were many Chetniks in that village and in order not to raise anyone's suspicions they introduced me as a refugee from Bosnia, a relative of theirs. Everything started nicely, I worked hard and helped around the house, took care of the children, did the ironing and cooking. What I learned while staying with Cveta and Boca was so useful now, because while staying with my aunt and uncle I was so spoiled that I

could not even get the milk cooked. They took me with them when they were visiting friends, all their friends worked for the railroad, and lived at the station. A very nice young woman discretely suggested that I can always come to her place, she was pregnant and she could benefit from having a reliable and decent woman with her, not as a maid but as a companion. She was not telling me something, and I did not understand what she meant. Another older couple working for the railroad, he was a Russian and she was a Serb, were very kind to me and told me that I can always come to them when I have the time and if I need anything. I thought that they were being a bit strange, because what could I need when I was so nicely received in a good family.

My host, the chief of the railway station did not matter much to me. Who mattered was his wife, a good and considerate woman. I worked hard while I was with her, but that was my job, she was ill and we had to save money.

I slept in the kitchen, and one night I was woken up by my host who was making offers to me in vulgar language, insinuating an affair with him. I cannot say how I saw the end of that night, and early in the morning I was already dressed and did not say anything to the woman. I went to the Russians. They were not surprised when I told them what had happened, because it seemed that they had known about his incidents of this kind, as certainly I was not the first or the only one. The Russian took me to Batočina, a village near Kragujevac, to a rich widow, Mrs. Divna Kovanović. She was the owner of a big and rich estate in Batočina. She had many workers working the estate and taking care of the sugar production and the poultry and livestock. My task was to help her around the house. Her sons Žarko and Živa and daughter Raca were having school vacations at the time. The older daughter Bisa was married in the village to Vladimir Mladenović – and they had as a „guest“ a young Jewess, Klarisa.

Her son Žarko and daughter Raca had friends coming over, a company of young people who sang and played the guitar. One day, sitting with Divna in front of the house, I started crying listening to a song I knew. Divna asked me why I was crying, and I could not help myself and told her that I was not a refugee from Bosnia, but a Jew from an affluent home, a student of literature.

„I know, I suspected so“, said Divna, „but I did not want to tell you, there is no fault of yours in it. Damned be the Germans and those who are after you, but do not worry. Your aunt Divna will take good care of you. And do not tell anyone about this. I will be the only one to know.“

I calmed down; I was relieved to have confided in someone. I had thought that now I could live in peace. But, there was another bad turn.

Batočina, an affluent village in the vicinity of Kragujevac, had a very good and affordable green market to which people from Kragujevac came for shopping. To my great surprise, one afternoon, while I was sitting at a

table with aunt Divna, I saw through the yard people going by, as that was a shortcut to the green market. We paid no attention to them. Aunt Divna did not mind them passing by, since the yard was spacious and nobody cared. Then, suddenly – I froze with fear! Major Dragojević, commander of the military garrison in Negotin, was passing through the yard. He was from Kragujevac (I was not aware of this), so he was home on leave and was on his way to the green market. He saw me, he could not believe his eyes, and I was confused, could not take my eyes off him. He said nothing, just moved on. I turned all pale and right away I told aunt Divna that this man seeing me was a great risk.

She understood how serious the situation was, and in the evening she got the children together and they were deliberating what to do. Soon we were joined by Klarisa, the girl who was hiding with the family of aunt Divna's daughter. There was panic, because already the following day there was an order by the municipality that all those who had come to Batočina after 1941 were to report to the administration with their documents. Klarisa decided to go right away to Kragujevac, and I did not know where to go. There was nowhere to go. Aunt Divna's sister, who came to see us every day, and who was a widow of a man named Miler, was working for the Gestapo, but she was not a risk, she knew who I was and she made a very good and realistic suggestion:

„Why don't you go to Germany to work?“

We agreed that that was the only viable solution for us, since we were all aware how dangerous it would be for me to be discovered, and how equally dangerous it would be for the family which was hiding me. So – I was to go to Kragujevac and apply with the employment bureau to work in Germany. The medical examination, the interview with the employment clerk, it all went very well – and I was given a contract to go to work in Berlin. With this contract in hand I went to Belgrade, where aunt Divna's cousin had an apartment, although during the war he was living in Batočina. He let me stay there. Divna's oldest son Žarko took me there, stayed with me shortly, and went back. I was alone. I was living in Belgrade, but I dared not contact any of my relatives or friends; anyway the situation was not hopeless. I had to take care not to run into someone I knew. A month went by this way. I was not concerned that my identity document had expired, because I had the labor contract and this document will suffice for work in Germany. But, I was wrong – my life is full of surprises, there is no rest for me. I cannot remember why I went to the railway station, but I was there sitting in the waiting room. There were many people there. Nobody paid any attention to me, there was nobody I knew there, I could sit at ease. I bought some newspapers and was reading. I am safe here, I thought, in the restaurant one can get coffee or tea, and be among other people.

All of a sudden there was some commotion among people there. Some passengers sitting across from me were getting up in a hurry and storming outside. It was not clear to me what was happening – there was police there all of a sudden, a raid. Nedić police and Germans! They surrounded us, closed the door and started asking for our documents. Completely clam, showing no confusion, I showed them my contract. The fact that I spoke German helped me on this occasion. I explained that I had not yet left for Germany because I was waiting for friends who were to come from towns outside of Belgrade. That was why I was there at the station, waiting for them. I did not show any sign of confusion, what I was saying sounded reasonable, that was at least what I thought. The policeman seemed to be under the impact of my speaking German, but he was not quite convinced. He called an agent in civilian clothes to come over, he heard my explanation, returned my contract, and said very politely that I was not to go back to my apartment. He transferred me to the care of one of his colleague, also in civilian clothes, who escorted me to the Red Cross shelter, somewhere in the back of the railroad station. There, they let me wash my face, I settled down in a big room and was assigned a bed. They gave me lunch, I was to stay there until Friday, which was the scheduled day for the next transport to Germany. There were some other girls also waiting for the transport to Germany, as well as some refugees and some homeless people, some elderly women and men. So, I was to travel to Germany, no problem, I will go! I reported to the person in charge of the transport. He took my personal data and the contract to keep. So, there is no other choice – I am going to Germany. And it is not too bad, I thought.

### *The journey*

We were all given a small package of food, a piece of bread and some hard marmalade. I bought for myself a piece of baked pumpkin, that was what I could afford with the money I had. They got us into carriages that were subsequently to be assembled to the engine. Farewells at the platform. Every single passenger there had some kind of a sad history that forced them to leave. I was not seen off by anyone, I did not know what was ahead for me, but we would see, the important thing was to get going.

The train pulled out of the station. People soon got their food packages out; I also got mine out when it got dark. I could not eat everything that I had, and I packed what remained. We stopped in Ljubljana to get on board the others from the group of workers going to Germany. At the station we were again in the Red Cross shelter.



When the other groups for Berlin had arrived we started towards Austria. The train made a longer stop in Graz. The workers assigned to Graz were getting ready to get off so suddenly I decided to get off as well, despite the fact that my contract about going to Berlin was still with the group leader.

In Graz we were met by the officer of the Employment Bureau who took us to the office. He was calling the names of the group members, based on the contract that he received from the transport leader. One by one these people were going to the office where they provided their data and they were assigned places to work. I was the last one; there was no contract for me. I kept silent, I did not want to show that I could speak German; I pretend that I could not answer any questions. Those who travelled with me confirmed that I started with them in Belgrade and that I was with them the whole trip. Finally, I went into the office, and through an interpreter I tried to explain that I was a student and that I grew up in a pharmacy, where I worked on dispensing prescriptions and preparing syrups and powders. I was sent to RUEH, factory producing bicycles and engines, to work in the infirmary. We were taken to Lager Liebenau, where we were to live. I was put up in a room with two other women workers. We ate in the cafeteria and lived in the barracks. The atmosphere in the infirmary was very pleasant. There were no serious cases.

I communicated well with the doctors and other staff. They respected me. There was need to work hard, and we rested only during the breaks, but I did not mind the hard work. At least nobody asked me who I was, what I was, or where I came from.

I worked hard and did not register with any authority. I had thought that it was up to my boss, the doctor. No one told me that I should report somewhere. Wages were paid on Fridays, so everyone went to the office and got his pay, but there was nothing there for me! I was told to go to the office and ask, so I went there and asked the clerk, she was going through the list but could not find my name. „Have you registered?“, she asked. Confident, almost rude, I answered: „Of course I have.“ The boss came out of the office, he had heard that something was going on and he was asking what it was. „She says that she had registered, but I do not have her name on the list“, said the clerk. The boss was looking at me with sympathy and said: „So eine feine Dame lügt nicht, du sollst sie sofort auszahlen“ (Such a fine lady would not lie. Pay her off immediately). They found my note from the Bureau, the officer probably supplied it. He should have told me to register. However, the note was found, the clerk got my name on the list, and she paid my weekly salary. All was settled.

The weather was pleasant; on Saturdays and Sundays we would sit outside on the grass in front of the barracks, getting to know each other, talking



and having fun. It was a mixed company: Serbs, Croats, French, and other volunteers. Each, of course, had his or her reason to flee their countries, but we were all equal there and we understood each other.

During those days I got to know a pleasant young man, Ratko Cvetković, from Kragujevac, and I became friends with him. We often went out together. He told me that he had completed the technical military school. At the time of the mass execution in Kragujevac he ended up in prison, but his friends saved him and he was not executed. Right after that he came „voluntarily“ to Germany for work. He was working here as electrician.

He used to come every day, entertaining me and the others. At the nearby farming estate I used to get fruit and vegetables. For a while we forgot our problems, we forgot about our shattered and distant families. We were all young and aware that sooner or later the war would come to an end.



*RUŽA with daughter IRENA and grandson  
VOJISLAV SIMIĆ*

Loneliness and living without close friends easily leads one to being sentimental. I gradually started to have great trust in Ratko. I could not help myself and at a certain moment, without thinking about the risks implied in this, I told him about myself and the reasons of my hiding. „This you told me – and nobody else! Nobody!“ I was relieved that I found someone with whom I could share my secret, and he suddenly changed. He be-

came more serious and all of a sudden he felt the obligation to protect me and watch over me. He asked me not to go out without him and he started somehow treating me as if we were connected by something more than regular friendship. I gladly accepted this and suddenly all others started seeing us as a couple. He said that he would ask for a room for the two of us and he said that we would get married. Of course, there was no way that I would go to any consular or representative office in Graz or Vienna, and I told him so. He just listened and kept silent and soon he brought an official certified document which was not an actual marriage certificate but something of a contract of living together. I never understood how he managed to get it. He explained that he paid well for it and there in Austria there were people from

our countries who could get you anything. I did not think too much about it. For the first time after so long I felt safe and protected.



*RUŽA KRNDIĆ at  
present with  
husband Branimir*

However, it would be surprising if such a fine atmosphere were not to be disrupted by some unpleasant surprise. I was in a shop buying some stuff, and as I was getting ready to go out, I saw across the street a young couple from Batočina! They had just come back from vacation in Serbia. We had known each other from Batočina, we were in the same company a number of times. They saw me, I waited to meet Ratko there, and I told him about his encounter. I shall never forget the gesture that he made on hearing it. For the sake of my safety he even accepted to change his job. The company in Graz that he worked for had a branch in Bruck an der Mur. We went there, he was given a room to live in, some kitchen utensils, a cooking stove, and we got settled. I worked in a photograph shop, I learned how to develop photographs. The following year went by peacefully. Many of our girls and women were thinking of returning to Serbia. As I was pregnant, at Ratko's insisting, I decided to go back to Belgrade and stay with his sister.

### *Belgrade*

I returned to Belgrade. Ratko's sister Natalija had a fourteen year old daughter and lived very modestly, working for a minimum pay. The key at that time for her was to have food rationing coupons for herself and her daughter. I still did not have that privilege as I still could not register my residence. I was two months to delivery. Sister Natalija was worried, she was concerned about the costs, the arrival of the baby; it was not that I was not welcome, but she was also concerned that someone could recognize me. She made it openly clear that I should look for another place to stay, and I had

nowhere to go. At that time, during the months of July, August and September of 1944, Belgrade was bombed. Anytime I went to town, and there was always something that needed to be done, it was unpleasant because I had to be cautious and try to avoid friends or relatives and anyone I knew.

During my stay in Austria I knew nothing about my aunt, and she was arrested right after my leaving Negotin. I heard about her destiny only during an earlier illegal visit to Belgrade. At that time I went straight from the railway station to a friend of ours from Negotin who had moved to Belgrade, Mrs. Todorović. We were friends in Negotin. Her husband, dr Aca, and my uncle, the pharmacist, worked together and were good friends, and their son Mića went to school with me. So, I went to see this Mrs. Todorović, whom I called aunt Draginja. She was surprised to see me, she had heard that I was in Germany. I explained that I came only for a few days, that I was going to Šabac and Niš, and returning soon. And I also told her that I would be going to see aunt Milica in order to get together with my aunt. She knew that I was coming, I had written to her and scheduled for us to meet at a specific date and time. Hearing my words, Mrs. Todorović was silent, she was getting breakfast ready for me and she kept trying to keep me to stay longer! Any time I stood up, she would try to keep me some more. Finally, I got up and took my things as it was time for my scheduled meeting with my aunt. Then aunt Draginja started to cry and told me that I must not go there. Probably they would be waiting for me and arresting me, adding that my aunt was arrested more than a year ago and taken to the Banjica camp, and she knew what happened with her. Some friends of ours had tried to intervene as they thought that my aunt, having converted to Christianity and being married to a Serb should be released. However, this did not help.

So, this time, when I was definitely back to Belgrade, while walking in the town, doubtful about what to do since Ratko's sister would be glad to see me leave, I was in Slavija square and I ran into Mića Todorović, the son of aunt Draginja. He was standing among a group of Chetnik officers, himself wearing a uniform, he had a senior rank. He was very surprised to see me, he approached me, and asked what I was doing there. He immediately took me to his home. Aunt Draginja was happy to see me and I moved in with her right away. The end of the war was near. German troops were withdrawing from Greece. The Russian troops were getting nearer. We moved from Belgrade to a safer place in Rakovica, several families in one room, in a village house. Aunt Draginja registered me as her niece, took care of me and covered all expenses of our stay. Mića took me to the maternity hospital on 27 September (it was a Belgrade maternity hospital that had moved to Rakovica and was located in a school building). That was where my daughter Mira was born.

When Belgrade was liberated, on 20 October, there was celebration and happiness in town, the streets were filled with people full of enthusiasm. I did not know what I felt. Should I rejoice, because there was no longer anything to be afraid of! On the other hand, I was completely alone. My uncle was no longer there, he died at the very beginning of the war; my aunt was not there, she was executed on 5 October 1943 at the Banjica camp. My father and two brothers perished in Jasenovac in 1941. It was not known where my mother was; my eldest brother Joži – not known! The lives of Ratko and me soon took different turns.

It was only later that I found out that my mother had survived thanks to finding a job working for a family close to Bruck an der Leit, Austria, where she was taken from Jajce under a false name. She sewed, cooked, took care of their children. My eldest brother Josip-Joži was working on a German ship navigating on the Danube on the line Prahovo – Vienna under his true family name Lihtner. No one was suspicious of his origin because he applied as a German. I must give credit to some of his friends who knew him from the time when they were doing their military service, they served together in the navy, among them a young man from Jajce Derviš-Deda Kršak, a Muslim, who saw him every day and kept silent!

My father was not as fortunate. He was the supervisor in the chlorine factory in Jajce. He was very much liked among his colleagues and workers. He was very active in the town of Jajce, organizing sports competitions, bicycle rides, the amateur theatre, working for the youth athletic organization „Sokol“. When the Jews, Serbs, and the Roma were being rounded up nobody stood up for him. He was taken to Jasenovac along with my middle brother Vili and the youngest brother Drago. We never heard anything about them. All of this I learnt after the war from my mother.

I was consoling myself that I was still young, I was optimistic and full of zest for life and taking care of my daughter Mira. Aunt Draginja consoled and encouraged me, saying that all would be well. I went to the Jewish Community to register, but it is difficult to prove who I am, where I come from. I lived in Jajce and Negotin and was never registered with them. There, in the office of the President of the Jewish Community, was Mrs. Ela Berah, née Grof, born in Jajce. Our parents were friends in Jajce. I did not know her, she was older than me and she had left Jajce; anyway, she confirmed that I was saying the truth, and I was registered as member of the Jewish Community. There I felt being part of the community, no longer alone in the world!

The new life was beginning for me. I was ready to move forward. And once again, thank you to people from Negotin!



## VIII

# AT FORCED LABOR







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*Dr Đorđe BOŠAN*

FROM THE LINE FOR EXECUTION MY  
MOTHER PUSHED ME INTO LIFE



*Dr Đorđe Bošan (Boschan) was born on 8 June 1926 in Senta, of father dr Aleksandar Bošan and mother Paula, née Šrajcer (Schreier). He had an elder sister Magda (1922) and a younger brother Pavle (1931). Sister Magda and Đorđe were the only ones who survived.*

*He completed two grades of elementary school in Senta, and continued his education in Bačka and Kikinda, completing there the elementary school and five grades of grammar school. After the liberation he completed the senior three grades of grammar school in Novi Sad, and studied physics at the Faculty of Sciences and Mathematics in Belgrade. At the same faculty he did his doctoral studies and in 1976 received the title of physicist, Ph.D. He lectured physics at a number of higher education institutions and simultaneously he was engaged in experimental physics, publishing about 130 technical and scientific papers, the most distinguished ones published in the UK, Germany, Hungary and Yugoslavia.*

*Đorđe has been married since 1954 to Blažija, née, Kosić, a chemist. Their elder daughter Helena Pavlica is an electrical engineer and lives and works in Cairo, while the younger daughter, who specialized in pediatrics, a pulmonologist, is working in Niš.*

*He has four grandchildren and one great-grandchild, in Sarajevo.*

The language spoken in our family was Hungarian. Our parents were religious, but not Orthodox, so in the family we celebrated the high Jewish holidays. We regularly observed the Shabbat. We moved from one place to another where usually there were no synagogues, except in Novi Sad. Anti-Semitism did not affect us directly and personally, but we did feel certain coldness towards us. Until the war, while changing residence from year to year, I could not build permanent friendships. The reason we changed residence was father's dire financial situation because as attorney he had very low revenues and was in search of a place where he would have more work. Father was much more modest than was usual in his line of work. He never lost a litigation, since he took up only decent cases. He often talked to



*DORĐE'S parents: father ALEKSANDAR  
and mother PAULA, née ŠRAJER*

me about literature, being a highly educated intellectual, and his scope of interest was very broad – from Ancient Greek philosophy to Rabindranat Tagore, practically his contemporary. He had a huge library which I also used within the limits of my interests. Mother completed secondary education in Baja, at the beginning of the century, at the time when young girls usually did not attend secondary school. Her parents loved her very much, the atmosphere in their home was very pleasant. At home we had menorahs and all the Judaica objects needed for celebration of high holidays.

I was very young at the time, but ever since Hitler's coming to power in 1933 I was following up the escalation of Fascism, which was the only thing that disturbed the family.

We followed up on what was happening through radio and newspapers. We anticipated a tragedy, more by instinct than by actual knowledge.

I finished the fifth grade of grammar school in Stari Bečej, travelling every day by train from Čurug. I enrolled in the fifth grade in the autumn of 1940, and finished in 1941, just after the occupation, in the Hungarian language. Until that time Serbian was the language of instruction in the school. After that my education was interrupted; in the autumn of 1941

my sister was arrested under allegation of being engaged in political work. She was sentenced to many years of imprisonment. Initially, she served the sentence in the well-known prison Márianosztra in Hungary, and later in the great German concentration camps. Father was executed in Čurug on 5 January 1942, during a raid against Jews and Serbs, and his body was thrown under the ice of the Tisa river. Thus, it was my mother, brother and I who remained. Immediately after this event we moved to Stara Moravica in Bačka, with our grandfather dr Aleksandar Šrajer, who was the municipal veterinarian. He had retired before the war, but the Hungarians reactivated his service because of the demand for veterinary services. From May 1942 to May 1944, since I did not attend school, I did apprenticeship in an electrical shop in Stara Moravica. I think I learned the trade well, and it even helped me afterwards during my university studies.



*DORDE with his younger brother  
PAVLE in Stara Moravica in 1943*

In May 1944 we were rounded up in Stara Moravica and transferred to the Ghetto in Subotica. Just prior to this, on 19 March, Germany occupied Hungary. We stayed very briefly in the ghetto, where we fed on the ghetto soup kitchen, like an army.

My mother and I managed just once to visit my sister in the Márianosztra prison. In Pest we changed transportation and, passing through Buda, in an alley whose name translates to the blue globe street, we spotted my father's elder brother looking through the window. Our eyes met, but it lasted less than a second. He immediately withdrew inside and closed the shades. We understood that contact with us would be a tragedy for him since he was hiding there. Without a word and without any stopping we moved on. In Márianosztra we saw Magda. She asked when we would be coming again, and mother responded with a sentence that had special meaning for our family:

„When the cherry trees blossom“.\*

That was my only contact with Magda.

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\*Magda Simin published the book „Dok višnje procvetaju“ (Until Cherry Trees Blossom), published by „Bratstvo-jedinstvo“, Novi Sad, 1958. (editors note)

After a brief stay in the Subotica ghetto, an SS officer lined us up and asked all tradesmen to step forward from the line. I was standing to my mother's right, my younger brother to her left. As soon as the SS officer's question was uttered, my mother pushed me forward. By the time I recovered my senses after my mother pushed me, I was in the line formed by tradesmen. I think it was the following day that all the people from the ghetto were put on cargo carriages, including my mother, brother and grandmother. Grandfather Aleksandar had died in Stara Moravica before this. I could not come to peace with this and standing in front of the train I approached the SS officer asking him not to send my mother and brother to Germany. He answered calmly:

„Why not? My wife is also in Germany“.

That was it. The transport took them to Auschwitz, from where none of them were to return. Along with other tradesmen I was transferred to Baja, to a working camp of a German SS division. With this working camp we moved all across Hungary, and subsequently through Slovenia, to town Hoča, near Maribor, and then via Hungary and Czechoslovakia to southern Poland. In May 1945, fleeing in front of the Soviets, the division was withdrawing via Czechoslovakia, along with our working camp. A unit of Soviet tanks intercepted us. Fortunately, our trucks stopped at the entry to a huge neglected cemetery and we hid between the graves. When the situation calmed down we walked on foot to Brno, and from there, by clinging outside on the cargo train, we went to Budapest. There was a kitchen soup waiting for us there and we continued our journey by passenger train to Subotica.

There were about twenty people of different trades in the moving camp. By all standards, it was slavery. In order to enable us to work, they fed us relatively well. We performed auxiliary technical tasks and loading and unloading of wagons. I did not know anyone from the group before. The work was very hard, but we did not have any camp-like limitations like the others. We could talk among ourselves. Actually, we were needed as physical labor, like oxen! We obeyed, did the work, and they tolerated us. None of the group was killed. We were not subject to physical torture. All twenty of us were Jews. That was how it went on until the liberation.



*MAGDA BOŠAN SIMIN, DORĐE'S sister, next to him, the only one of the whole family to survive the Holocaust*

And just when we thought that we were free, we were surrounded by the military and taken to quarantine. Some days later I finally went back to Stara Moravica. It is difficult to describe the feeling that came over me on the way back, mixed with the joy of having survived and the sadness of having lost my dearest family. The only one who survived was my uncle Mirko Šrajer, my mother's brother, the sublieutenant of the Royal Army who, as commander of artillery unit heroically survived the bloody day long battle in which he destroyed three Wehrmacht tanks in a line withdrawing from Bulgaria. He was taken prisoner. He managed to jump out of the wagon in Erdely, and return home to Stara Moravica. However, he was right away sent to the Hungarian military working units. Once liberated from these units he moved to the Yugoslav Army and, as artillery scout he went with it to Austria. My other uncle, Stevan (Pišta) was with him in Ukraine and Russia, where he was killed in battle.

When I arrived to Stara Moravica, my uncle had not yet returned. I was met by my future aunt, who was keeping the house during the war.

Subsequently I moved to Novi Sad. I lived with my sister and worked for about half a year in the power plant, until the autumn, when I enrolled in the sixth grade of grammar school.

My meeting with the only person from our direct family who survived, my sister Magda, after the war, is equal to scenes from Greek tragedies.

Mirko's wife Vera Šefer and their ten year old son Đurika perished in Auschwitz. My younger uncle, Jakob Bošan, mathematician and a famous chess player, who was living in Kikinda, was transferred with his wife and daughter to the Belgrade Fair Grounds, not to return.

Since 1953 I worked uninterruptedly for twenty-five years for the Electronic Industry. In parallel to this, I lectured physics at the Faculty



*Monument by SOLDATOVIĆ to victims of the Raid of 5 January 1942 in Čurug, during which father of ĐORĐE BOŠAN was executed*

of Electrical Engineering, the Medical Faculty and other faculties, for thirty-one years, starting in the autumn of 1960, ever since the higher education institutions were established in Niš. I never had any problems in Niš as a Jew, nor did I feel any kind of animosity. In the Electronic Industry I worked as researcher and director, and in doing so I travelled to many countries for professional education.

Finally, I wish to mention that at the beginning of my university studies in Belgrade I lived with my sister Magda, and subsequently at the Jewish students' dormitory in Kosmajaska street.





# IX

## KASTNER'S GROUP





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*Marta FLATO LADANJ*

SAVED FROM THE RAID  
AS SIX-MONTHS OLD BABY



*M*arta Flato Ladanj was born on 11 July 1941 in Novi Sad, of father Bela Zemanek and mother Piroška, née Kasovic.

Both her parents were executed in the Novi Sad raid on 23 January 1942. Those who survived the raid were her brother Robi, cousin Eva (their parent two brothers were married to two sisters), and cousins Olika Šorš and Marta.

After her parents' execution, Martu Flato was legally adopted by the family Ladanj, therefore she was given this family name as well.

Brother Robi and Olika perished in Auschwitz in 1944, along with grandmother Ida and grandfather Maks Kasovic\*.

After return from Switzerland, where they ended with the so-called Kastner's transport, Marta lived from 1945 to 1948 in Belgrade, in the city district Senjak, where she finished the first grade of elementary school.

With the first Aliyah, on board of the ship „Kefalos“, in 1948 she arrived to Israel. In Israel she completed the elementary and grammar school, did her military service, and in Jerusalem graduated from the Pharmaceutical Faculty.

Marta has three children and five grandchildren.

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\*By mistake, the names of Maks and Ida Kasovic are inscribed on the Danube Quay in Novi Sad as victims of the Raid. They perished in Auschwitz (note of editor).

Regretfully, I cannot say anything much about my parents. Nor can I say much about how I stayed alive. I recently read the letter by my grandfather Maks Kasovic from Novi Sad (where he had a private bank), written to his daughter Klara Montani in Zagreb, saying that he had sent me to Budapest to be with his other daughter Sofia Žoka Ladanj, since my parents had already perished. Žoka also wrote to her sister Klara Montani, in February 1942: „Dearest family, Pirika and Margo are no longer with us ...“



*PIRI and BELA ZEMANEK, mother and father of MARTA FLATO, were executed during the Novi Sad raid in January 1942*

The persecution of Jews, Serbs and others during the Novi Sad raid was recalled in a moving manner by Dušan Mihalek in the Novi Sad daily „Dnevnik“ in January 2005, on the occasion of 63 years of this horrific mass massacre. „The double lines of death at the Strand included among others Marta Flato, which she discovered only in recent days from a video recording of testimony by Žuža Henig, who at the time of the Raid was ten years old. Marta, as a six months old baby was held in the hands of her mother, Piri Zemanek. Pirika was in the line in front of her father Maks Kasovic. Once she realized that there was no escape and that very soon it would be her turn in the execution, in her desperation she handed the baby to those standing behind her, and they to those behind them ... Thus, Piri ended up in the waves of the Danube, and then the black limousine arrived with en-

voys from Budapest, ordering the Raid to stop. Marta stayed with the family Kasovic, as did her five year old brother Robi...”

The brother was given to Ila Kasovic Lampel, mother’s oldest sister, a pianist and music professor at the Music Academy in Novi Sad; however, the last letter written by the grandfather on 31 March 1944, which was a coded letter, makes it obvious that Ila returned Robika to grandfather. The cousin Eva Zemanek, Grandfather and grandmother gave the little cousin Eva Zemanek to the family of Marica and Janoš Tirkli in Budapest, while Olika stayed with them. We know that the grandfather ended up in Auschwitz, this was confirmed by cousin Truda Kasovic who saw his suitcase in Auschwitz. They arrived by the last transports which were sent directly to the gas chambers.

We lived in Budapest until 1944. My second father Ladanj was a Zionist and wanted to immigrate to Palestine, but we ended up in Bergen Belsen where, luckily, we stayed only for half a year. They told me later that in the camp I was sick with scarlet fever.

We stayed in Bergen Belsen from July to end of December 1944. My new parents, family Ladanj, already had two children, my sister Žuži, born in 1933, and brother Pavle, born in 1936 in Belgrade. We were all together in the Bergen Belsen camp. According to the agreement made between the Zionist official from Budapest dr Rudolf Kastner and Eichmann, we were transferred



*DENEŠ LADANJ, the second father of  
MARTA FLATO, 1944*

from the camp to Switzerland, where we stayed until the end of the war. Namely, now we know that 1,800 Jews were to travel at that time to Palestine. Yet, the plan had changed. A group was made of 1,684 Jews, mostly Zionists, of which many were without any money, while the more affluent Jews, like my adoptive parents, paid for the salvation. The truth is that even while in Bergen Belsen we had different treatment than other inmates. We

were placed in barrack 10, we did not have to wear the yellow armbands and the families were not separated, and labor was not obligatory for parents.\*\*

In Switzerland we were put up in the „Camp de refugees“, and later transferred to Basel, where my father worked, without salary, with the chemist Tadeusz Teodor Reichstein, who later in 1950 received the Nobel Prize for medicine. The Reichsteins came to Switzerland from Poland. Father was a chemist by profession and was later very proud of his work with him.

The Ladanj family had lived in Belgrade, in the district of Senjak, Pet-

ra Mrkonjića street number 4. On the day of bombing of Belgrade, 6 April 1941, a bomb directly hit their home. Father had a chemical factory „Oksid“ in the then Brijanova street (presently Drago-slava Jovanovića street), where he produced liquid glass, and he had a patent office and a bank account in Switzerland. That was the reason they allowed us to stay in Switzerland.



*ROBI, the minor brother of MARTA, perished in Auschwitz in 1944 with some other family members*

From Switzerland we all went back to Belgrade. At the end of 1945 my parents renovated the house. Right after our return, my parents filed an application for my formal adoption, in Novi Sad. Already in Bergen Belsen I was registered in the records under the family name Ladanj. I learned about this later, because our group, as I said earlier, had certain privileges.

The prisoners themselves compiled the list and my father, who spoke foreign languages, in compiling the list put me in with his family name. Father was

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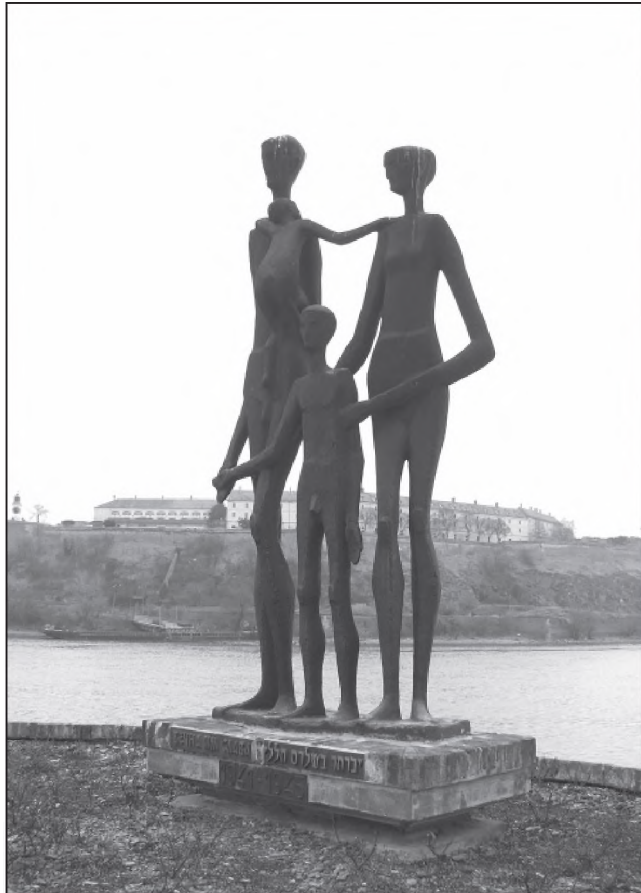
\*The work by historian Eberhard Kolb „Bergen Belsen 1943–1945“ which states: „The so-called Ungarnlager – the Hungarian camp – received on 8 July 1944 the first group of residents of the 1684 predominantly prominent Hungarian Jews of the legendary Berber-Kastner action, who started from Budapest by special train on 30 June 1944. While in Bergen Belsen, they enjoyed better treatment than other inmates. The first group of about 318 persons was given a permit already on 8 August by Himmler to leave for Switzerland, and the remaining about 1360 after long negotiations left Bergen Belsen for Switzerland on 6 December 1944.“



a very good man, he assisted inmates who were sick. Until I became of age, I lived convinced that the Ladanj couple were my true parents.

First, my father's factory was returned and we started life anew. But, after the factory was subsequently nationalized, things took a turn for the worse.

*The monument by JOVAN SOLDATOVIĆ in Novi Sad, commemorating the atrocities during the Novi Sad Raid in January 1942 by the Hungarian Fascists executing more than 1300 innocent women, children and men, Jews and Serbs, throwing them under the ice of the frozen river Danube*



That was when we heard that we could go to Israel, to our country. Father said that if we were to start anew for the third time we would do it in Israel.

After immigration to Israel, we initially lived in Lod, the place where the Tel Aviv Airport is presently situated. Father first opened up a drugstore, and subsequently a pharmacy. At the age of 52 he went to Jerusalem to study pharmacy, as he felt that being a chemical engineer was not sufficient for the business that he was running. He successfully graduated, had his pharmacy „Sanitas“, where mother also worked. Regretfully, father died young, in De-

ember 1963, and mother continued to work until 1978. She died in 1987, aged almost 85. Her name is written in the *Keren Kayemeth* Golden Book.



*MARTA FLATO'S  
family at present*

My true father had a company in Novi Sad „Ergas“ and he provided the financial support for the medical studies of his brother dr Dezider Zemanek, married to Margo Kasovic. They were the parents of my sister Eva.



X

BORN IN THE CAMP





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*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



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?“





XI

APPENDICES





TABLE OVERVIEW OF CAMPS IN YUGOSLAVIA IN WHICH  
JEWS WERE INTERNED\*

Place and date of establishment	Type of camp and who established it	Catchment area	Fate of inmates
BANAT			
Petrovgrad, August 14/15, 1941	assembly-Germans	Petrovgrad, Srpska Crnja and Jaša Tomić	at the beginning of September 1941, men were interned in Topovske šupe and killed by end of October; women and children interned on December 12, 1941 in the Sajmište camp and killed by May 1942
Novi Bečej, August 14/15, 1941	assembly-Germans	N. Bečej, N. Kneževac and V. Kikinda	at the beginning of September 1941, men were interned in Topovske šupe and killed by end of October; women and children interned on December 12, 1941 in the Sajmište camp and killed by May 1942
Pančevo, August 14/15, 1941	assembly-Germans	Pančevo	at the beginning of September 1941, men were interned in Topovske šupe and killed by end of October; women and children interned on December 12, 1941 in the Sajmište camp and killed by May 1942
SERBIA			
Kragujevac, May 1941	assembly-Germans	Kragujevac	executed by firing squad on October 19, 1941 in Kragujevac
Belgrade, Topovske šupe early September 1941.	concentration for men – Germans	men from Banat	shot from the second half of September to end of October, 1941 near the village of Jabuka
Belgrade, Banjica, July 10, 1941	concentration for men – Germans	Belgrade and surrounding places in Serbia	shot from end of October to December 1941 in Jajinci and other places
Belgrade, Sajmište, December 12, 1941	concentration – Germans	women and children from Banat, Belgrade, Niš, Kosmet; men and women from Sandžak, Zvornik, Montenegro, Šabac and Split	large number perished from February to May 1942, a certain number transferred to Auschwitz
Šabac, July 1941	concentration – Germans	Šabac and Jewish refugees from Austria, Germany, Poland and other	men shot on October 12 and 13, 1941 in Zasavica; women and children taken on January 26, 1942 to Sajmište where they perished
Niš, Crveni krst, October 15, 1941	concentration Germans	Niš and surrounding area	Men shot on February 12, 1942 at Bujanj; women and children taken, in March 1942, to Sajmište where they perished

\*According to the book by dr Jaša Romano „Jews of Yugoslavia 1941–1945 victims of genocide and fighters of the National Liberation War“, published by the Federation of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia, Belgrade 1980.

Place and date of establishment	Type of camp and who established it	Catchment area	Fate of inmates
Bor mine	Labour-Germans	men from Bačka	a certain number perished in the Bor mine and on the way to Crvenka in October 1944. remainder perished in Nazi camps with a very small number of survivors
MACEDONIA			
Skopje, March 11, 1943	assembly-Germans	Macedonia	between March 22 and 29, 1943, transferred to the camp in Treblinka where almost all perished
CROATIA – SLOVENIA – SREM			
Koprivnica, Danica, April 20, 1941	assembly – Independent State of Croatia	ivarious places in Croatia and Bosnia	transferred to the camp in Gospić, then some to the Jadovno camp, some to Slano and Metajno, and some to Jasenovac
Daruvar, May 1941	assembly – Independent State of Croatia	Jewish refugees from Western Europe	transferred to the camp in Gospić, then to Jasenovac – ali perished
Zagreb, Zagrebački zbor, July 1941	assembly – Independent State of Croatia	various places in Croatia, Slavonija and Bosnia	transferred to the Gospić camp, and then to other camps – ali perished
Gospić, June 1941	assembly – Independent State of Croatia	various places in Croatia, Slavonija and Bosnia	transferred to Jadovno, Metajno, Slano, Jasenovac
Sremska Mitrovica, June 1941	assembly – Independent State of Croatia	Jews from Ruma and Jewish refugees from Europe living in Ruma	Jews from Ruma were released home after a few days, while refugees were sent to the Stara Gradiška and Jasenovac camps
Vukovar, August 1941	assembly – Independent State of Croatia	Jews from Vukovar	transferred on November 8, 1941 to Jasenovac – ali perished
Osijek, Tenje	assembly – Independent State of Croatia	Osijek and surrounding area	transferred to Jasenovac in August 1942, one group to Auschwitz
Vinkovci, July 1942	assembly – Independent State of Croatia	Vinkovci, Ruma, Šid, Ilok	transferred in July 1942, some to Jasenovac, some to Auschwitz
Loborgrad, September 1941	assembly – Independent State of Croatia	various places in Croatia, Slavonija and Bosnia	August – October 1942 transferred to Auschwitz
Đakovo, December 1941	assembly for women – Independent State of Croatia	women and children from Bosnia, Croatia and Slavonija	from June 15 to July 15, 1941, transferred to Jasenovac – ali perished
Kerestinec, May 1941	assembly – Independent State of Croatia	members of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and sympathisers from Croatia and Bosnia	one group shot on July 8, 1941, and the remainder on July 17, 1941

Place and date of establishment	Type of camp and who established it	Catchment area	Fate of inmates
Jadovno (Gospić), June 1941	concentration – Independent State of Croatia	transferred from the camp in Gospić and from the Danica camp	large number killed, the others transferred to Jasenovac in August 1941
Jasenovac „Logor 1“ Krapje avgusta 1941	concentration for men – Independent State of Croatia	transferred from the camp in Metajna	large number killed, the others transferred to Camp III, Jasenovac in November 1941
Jasenovac, Camp II, Bročice, September 1941	concentration for men – Independent State of Croatia	from Croatia and Bosnia	large number killed, others transferred to Camp III Jasenovac in November 1941
Jasenovac, Camp III, (Brickyard)	concentration – Independent State of Croatia (men's)	Croatia and Bosnia and, surviving inmates from Camp I and Camp II	almost all killed from 1942 to 1945 – a small number managed to escape
Jasenovac, Camp IV, (Kožara) January 1942	concentration – Independent State of Croatia (men's)	Croatia, Srem and Bosnia	almost everyone killed – a small number transferred to Jasenovac and Lepoglava
„Camp V. Stara Gradiška, second half of 1942	concentration for men – Independent State of Croatia	Croatia, Srem and Bosnia	almost everyone killed – a small number transferred to Jasenovac and Lepoglava
Lepoglava, July 1943	concentration for men – Independent State of Croatia	Croatia and survivors from the Stara Gradiška camp	transferred to Jasenovac at the beginning of 1945 and killed
BOSNIA – HERCEGOVINA			
Kruščica, end of August 1941	assembly – Independent State of Croatia	Surviving inmates from the camp in Metajno and prisoners from Sarajevo	on October 5, 1941, men were transferred to Jasenovac, and on October 6, 1941, women and children transferred to Loborgrad, and then to Auschwitz
Bosanski Petrovac, July 1941	assembly – Independent State of Croatia	Bihać	in September 1941 transferred to Prijedor from where a small number escaped, while others were transferred to Stara Gradiška and Jasenovac
ZONE I			
Rab, end of May 1943	assembly – Italians	transferred from camps in Dubrovnik, Kraljevica, Brač and Hvar	on September 9, 1943 the inmates used force to gain their release
ZONE II			
Slano (Pag), June 1941	concentration for men – Independent State of Croatia	transferred from the camp in Gospić (from Bosnia and Hercegovina)	a large number killed, others transferred to Jasenovac in August 1941

Place and date of establishment	Type of camp and who established it	Catchment area	Fate of inmates
Place and date of establishment	Type of camp and who established it	Catchment area	Fate of inmates
Metajna (Pag), June 1941	concentration for women	transferred from the camp in Gospić (from Bosnia and Herzegovina)	a large number killed, survivors transferred to Kruščica in August 1941
Lopud, Gruž Kupari (Dubrovnik camp), November 1942	assembly – Italians	Dubrovnik, Bosnia and Herzegovina	transferred to the camp on Rab at end of May 1943
Kraljevica, November 1942	assembly – Italians	Croatia, Slavonija, Bosnia	transferred to the camp on Rab at end of May 1943
Brač, November 1942	assembly – Italians	Croatia, Slavonija, Bosnia	transferred to the camp on Rab at end of May 1943
Hvar, November 1942	assembly – Italians	Croatia, Slavonija, Bosnia	transferred to the camp on Rab at end of May 1943
<b>BAČKA</b>			
Bačka Topola, end of April 1941	assembly – Hungarians and the Gestapo	Sombor, Novi Sad and other places in Bačka	transferred to Auschwitz on April 29, 1944. The camp existed until the end of September 1944
Subotica, beginning of June 1944	ghetto – Hungarians and Gestapo	Subotica	transferred to assembly camp in Bačalmaš on June 16, 1944
Stari Bečej, May 20, 1941	assembly – Hungarians	Bačka Topola	in June 1941 a number released, the others transferred to the camp in Bačka Topola
Begeč, May 1941	assembly – Hungarians	Novi Sad	released in July 1941
<b>KOSOVO AND METOHIJA</b>			
Kosovska Mitrovica, August 1941	assembly – Gestapo	Kosovska Mitrovica	in March 1942 transferred to the Sajmište camp and then to Bergen Belsen where they perished
Priština, beginning of 1942	assembly for men – Italians	Priština	transferred in 1942 to the camp in Berat (Albania)
Priština, 1944	assembly – Gestapo	Priština and surrounding area	transferred to the Sajmište camp in Belgrade
<b>MONTENEGRO</b>			
Cetinje Bogdanov kraj Prison, February 1944	assembly – Gestapo	Jewish refugees from Serbia and Bosnia	in June 1944 transferred to the Sajmište camp and then to Bergen–Belsen
Podgorica (prison) February 1944	assembly – Gestapo	Jewish refugees from Serbia and Bosnia	in June 1944 transferred to the Sajmište camp and then to Bergen–Belsen



**JEWISH COMMUNITIES IN YUGOSLAVIA**  
I — 1940

*a) in the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities*

place	number of members	n a m e	
		of president	of rabbi or eldest priest
Apatin*	61	Bela Šefer	Samuel Švalb
Bačka Palanka*	229	Solomon Štajf	Eugen Gros
Bačka Topola	254	Josef Vig	Julius Goldštajn
Bajmok*	123	Ljudevit Šefer	Mavro Jakobović
Banja Luka ašk.	139	Moric Hercog	Sigmund Kon
Banja Luka sef.	244	Josef Nahmijas	Mihael Atijas
Bela Crkva*	51	Josef Gros	Evgen Kraus
Bell Manastir*	—	(being established)	
Beograd ašk.	1688	dr Fridrih Pops	Ignjat Šiang
Beograd sef.	8500	dr David Albala	dr Isak Alkalaj
Bezdan*	90	dr Nandor Poper	H. Grinberger
Bihać*	156	dr Levi	Avram Atijas
Bijeljina*	245	Zadik Baruh	Salamon Levi
Bitolj*	3146	(Committee)	Avram Romano
Bjelovar	337	Dragutin Grinhut	dr D. Ginsberg
Brčko*	145	Hajim D. Salom	Leon Katan
Čakovec	404	dr Ljudevit Švarc	dr J. Grinvald
Čantavir*	66	dr Simon Lipot	Adolf Kraus
Čonoplja*	31	dr Aleks Hajdu	Makso Dajč
Čurug*	55	Šandor Lampel	V. Birnbaum
Daruvar	169	Leon Gros	
Debeljača*	148	Andor Gutman	Ignjat Rot
Derventa*	118	Moric Kabiljo	Jakov Papo
Doboј	53	Josef L. Pesah	
Dolnja Lendava	134	Moric Švarc	
Donji Miholjac*	173	Urlik Libling	
Dubrovnik	87	Josip Mandl	Salamon Baruh
Đakovo*	197	Josip Frank	Aleksandar Rot
Horgoš*	24	Marko Deneš	Ižak Abraham
Karlovac*	297	Josip Rendell	David Majzel
Koprivnica*	358	Milan Rajh	dr Izrael Kon
Koa, Mitrovica*	116	Benvenisti Koen	
Kragujevac*	85	dr Moša Eli	
Križevci*	119	Ljudevit Štraus	Lav Buksbaum
Kula*	124	dr D. Holender	S. Šlomović
Kutina*	132	Albert Singer	Mojsije Trilnik
Leskovac*	59	Bokor Mandl	
Ludbreg*	82	dr L. Šlezinger	J. L. Dajč
Ljubljana		(being established)	
Mali Idoš*	30	Šandor Kertes	Lipot Frankl

p l a c e	number of members	n a m e	
		of president	of rabbi or eldest priest
Mostar	142	Bernhard Širc	David Perera
Murska Sobota*	711	Armin Hiršl	dr Lazar Rot
Našice*	229	Muško Vajs	Jakov Šmelcer
Niš	337	Bora H. Hazan	Albert Daniti
Nova Gradiška*	198	Jakov Kon st.	Andrija Trilnik
Novi Bečej*	204	G. Šlezinger	Emanuel Polak
Novi Kneževac*	69	Josif Šiler	Izrael Gelbman
Novi Pazar	297	Leon Bahar	Cadik Konforti
Novi Sad	4104	dr Ferdinand Lustig	dr Hinko Kiš
Novi Vrbas*	233	Aurel Rajh	Josip Klajn
Osijek gor. grad	2400	dr L. Margulies	dr H. Štekel
Osijek donji grad	184	Bela Herman	
Pakrac*	99	Josip Mautner	Izak Frajdes
Pančevo	403	Oskar Fišgrund	Majnhart Klajn
Parabuć*	73	Šamu Kelemen	Ernest Špicer
Petrovgrad	1267	Leopold Frajšberger	dr David Finci
Plot*	96	Moša Levi	
Podrav. Slatina*	136	Artur Bauer	
Priština	385	Hajim B. David	Zaharlje Levi
Rogatica*	44	mr. ph. S. Papo	Salomon Pardo
Ruma*	249	Dezider Šlezinger	Vilim Goldštajn
Sanski Most*	94	Isak Atijas	Isak Papo
Sarajevo ašk.	1060	v. d. Iso Herman	dr Hinko Urbah
Sarajevo sef.	7054	dr Samuel Pinto	dr Moric Levi
Senta	595	Armin Graf	dr A. Erenfeld
Sisak*	258	dr Emil Fleš	dr Beno Hajs
Skoplje	2816	dr Avram Nisim	Moše Behar
Slav. Požega*	123	Leo Štajner st.	Mordehaj Rikov
Slav. Brod	423	dr Milan Polak	dr L. Vajsberg
Smederevo*	70	L. Tajtacak	
Sombor	945	dr Henrik Oblat	Jakov Špaser
Split	284	Inž. M. Morpurgo	Isak A. Finci
Srem. Mitrovica*	100	dr Fridrih David	Ger. Belogorski
Stanišić*	31	Bene Liht	Bela Vajs
Stara Kanjiža*	174	A. Griner	Herman Vajs
Stara Moravica*	38	Aleksandar Špajer	J. H. Frenkel
Stari Bečej	253	Rudolf Špicer	
Stari Sivač*	47	Vilim Lederer	Leo Lifsic
Subotica	4900	dr Elemir Kalmar	dr L. Geršon
Sušak	143	Velimir Švarc	Oto Dajč
Šabac*	83	dr Hajim Ruso	Nisim Adžes
Štip*	588	Menahem Levi	Meir M. Kasoria
Temerin*	63	S. Šosberger	Gerson Slovak
Titel*	80	dr Eugen Fišer	Vladimir Herškovič
Travnik	261	dr Jakob Konforti	Samuel Abinun

p l a c e	number of members	n a m e	
		of president	of rabbi or eldest priest
Tuzla	241	dr Ignjat Rozner	A. Fingerhut
Valpovo*	140	Inž. L. Hupert	
Varaždin*	515	v. d. Mato Štraus	dr Rudolf Gilk
Velika Kikinda	512	Maks Gutman	dr Vllim Štajner
Vinkovci*	630	dr Ignjat Lang	dr M. Frankfurter
Virovitica*	204	Edo Kajzer	Adolf Springer
Visoko*	126	Elias Kabiljo	Majer J. Kasorla
Višegrad*	93	Gavrlel Papo	Josef Levi
Vlasenica*	61	Albert Altarac	Aron Altarac
Vršac	290	Hajim Sid	Mavro Salcman
Vukovar*	213	Hinko Štajner	dr Izrael Šer
Zagreb ašk.	8712	dr Marko Horn	dr Gavro Švarc
Zagreb sef.	625	Cezar Gaon	Isak Baruh
Zavidovići	117	J. Zonenfeld	Isak Kabiljo
Zemun ašk.	354	dr L. Brandajs	Geršon Kačka
Zemun sef.	115	Moreno Anaf	Isak Musafija
Zenica	195	H. Libling	Juda Finci
Zvornik*	78	Nahman Hajon	Nisim Montliljo
Žabalj*	100	Jakov Fišer	
Žepče*	58	Mošo J. Musafija	Isak Mevorah

*b) in the Association of Orthodox Jewish Religious Commuties*

Ada*	350	David Hubert	David Hofman
Bačka Palanka*	50	Karl Levi	Jonaz Glauber
Bački Petrovac*	100	J. Glid	Samuel Silber
Bačko Petrovo Selo*	310	J. Sanet	
Ilok ašk. ort.*	160	Herman Štern	
Ilok ort.*	150	Lazar Štern	Hilel Štajner
Mol*	100	M. Šlezinger	
Senta sef. ort.*	850	Mozes Krajnik	Mozes Lebović
Sombor*	70	Šandor Gros	Henrik Vajs
Stara Kanjiža*	35	Bernat Menzer	Salomon Berkovič
Subotica*	560	J. Grosberger	Mozes Dajč
Zagreb*	130	Leon Hesel	

\* -- Jewish communities no longer exist

place and number of members		place and number of members	
1. Ada	59	21. Rijeka	99
2. Apatin	25	Rijeka surroundings	75
3. Bač	2	22. Sarajevo	1557
4. Bačko Petrovo Selo	26	23. Senta	110
5. Banja Luka	46	24. Senta-ortodox	118
Banja Luka surroundings	85	25. Skoplje	328
6. Beograd	2271	26. Sombor	145
7. Bitolj	57	Sombor surroundings	56
8. Bugojno	8	27. Split	163
9. Dubrovnik	31	Split surroundings	19
Dubrovnik surroundings	3	28. Sremska Mitrovica	20
10. Kikinda	37	Sr. Mitrovica surroundings	13
11. Kosovska Mitrovica	33	29. Subotica orthodox	88
12. Mol	11	Subotica surroundings	186
13. Mostar	65	30. Subotica	981
14. Niš	31	31. Šid	16
15. Novi Pazar	36	32. Tuzla	78
Prizren	4	Tuzla surroundings	9
16. Novi Sad	1001	33. Vršac	31
Novi Sad surroundings	220	Vršac surroundings	2
17. Osijek	361	34. Zagreb	2080
Osijek surroundings	249	Zagreb surroundings	434
18. Pančevo	88	35. Zavidovići	25
Pančevo surroundings	13	36. Zemun	132
19. Plot	12	37. Zenica	34
20. Priština	224	Zenica surroundings	9
		38. Zrenjanin	92
		Other places	36

place	number of members	name of president
Bačka Topola	29	Olga Vajs
Banja Luka	47	Ašer Volah
Beograd	1602	Bencion Levi
Bjelovar	12	dr Oto Kraus
Bečej	5	Zoltan Vajnberger
Čakovec	21	Elizabeta Bartoš
Daruvar	36	Marko Flajšhaker
Doboj	27	Mihajlo Atijas
Dubrovnik	62	Emilio Tolentino
Jajce	20	Flora Klem
Kikinda	4	Jelena Kovač
Ljubljana	84	dr Aleksandar Švarc
Mostar	74	Filip Kon
Niš	36	Peša Gedalja
Novi Pazar	10	Aron Mentović
Novi Sad	281	Pavle Šosberger
Osljek	220	dr Mavro Vizner
Pančevo	78	dr Ladislav Erš
Priština	11	Hajim Adlžes
Rijeka	160	Josip Engel
Sarajevo	1090	dr Isak Levi
Senta	58	Arnold Fridman
Skoplje	54	dr Nikola Šajber
Slavonski Brod	32	Armin Berger
Sombor	61	dr Mirko Gutman
Split	115	Slavko Zvezdić
Subotica	403	Mirko Vajcenfeld
Travnik	17	Jakov Fincl
Tuzla	60	Joško Vizler
Virovitica	34	Marko Vajs
Vršac	7	Pavle Vaserman
Zagreb	1341	dr Leo Singer
Zavidovići	12	Monika Musafija
Zemun	136	Josip Frank
Zenica	30	Geza Kacur
Zrenjanin	28	Ruža Tajtl
	208	

*APPENDIX 2* – all appendices in this chapter are taken from the “Memorial 1919–1969 of the Alliance of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia”, published to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Alliance.

## JEWISH COMMUNITIES RE-ESTABLISHED IN 1947

Place and number of members	Place and number of membres
1. Ada ..... 59	21. Rijeka ..... 99
2. Apatin ..... 25	Rijeka surroundings ..... 75
3. Bač ..... 2	22. Sarajevo ..... 1557
4. Bačko Petrovo Selo ..... 26	23. Senta ..... 110
5. Banja Luka ..... 46	24. Senta - ortodox ..... 118
surroundings ..... 85	25. Skoplje ..... 328
6. Beograd ..... 2271	26. Sombor ..... 145
7. Bitolj ..... 57	Sombor surroundings ..... 56
8. Bugojno ..... 8	27. Split ..... 163
9. Dubrovnik..... 31	28. Sremska Mitrovica ..... 20
surroundings ..... 3	Sr. Mitrovice surroundings.. 13
10. Kikinda ..... 37	29. Subotica - ortodox ..... 88
11. Kosovska Mitrovica ..... 33	Subotica surroundings ..... 186
12. Mol ..... 11	30. Subotica ..... 981
13. Mostar ..... 65	31. Šid ..... 16
14. Niš ..... 31	32. Tuzla ..... 78
15. Novi Pazar ..... 36	Tuzla surroundings ..... 9
Prizren ..... 4	33. Vršac ..... 31
16. Novi Sad ..... 1001	Vršac surroundings ..... 2
Novi Sad surroundings ..... 220	34. Zagreb ..... 2080
17. Osijek ..... 361	Zagreb surroundings ..... 434
Osijek surroundings ..... 249	35. Zavidovići ..... 25
18. Pančevo ..... 88	36. Zemun..... 36
Pančevo surroundings ..... 13	37. Zenica ..... 34
19. Pirot ..... 12	Zenica surroundings ..... 9
20. Priština ..... 224	38. Zrenjanin ..... 92
	Other places ..... 36

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 Total: Number of places 38

 Number of members 11,924
 

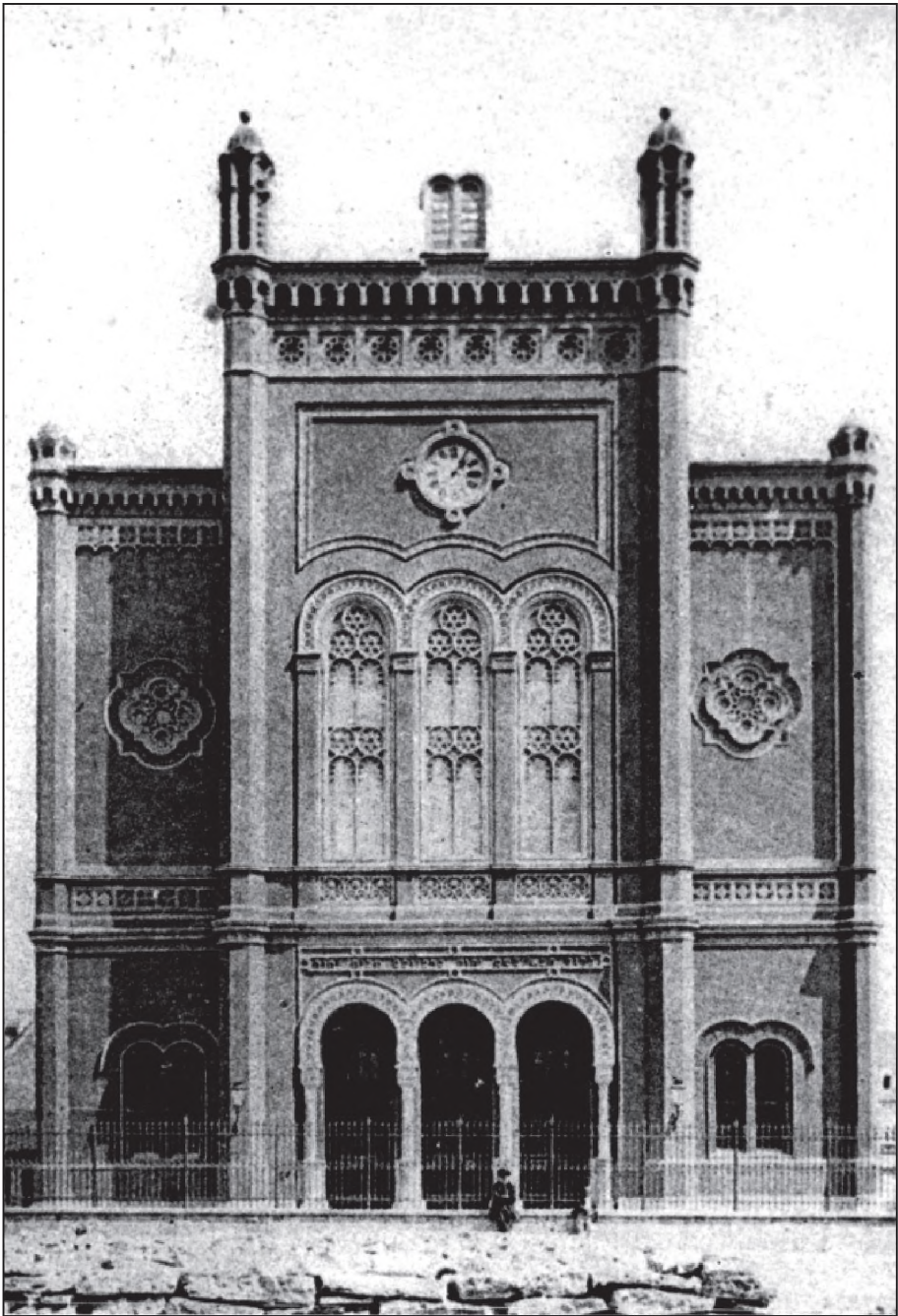
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SYNAGOGUES DESTROYED IN WORLD WAR TWO

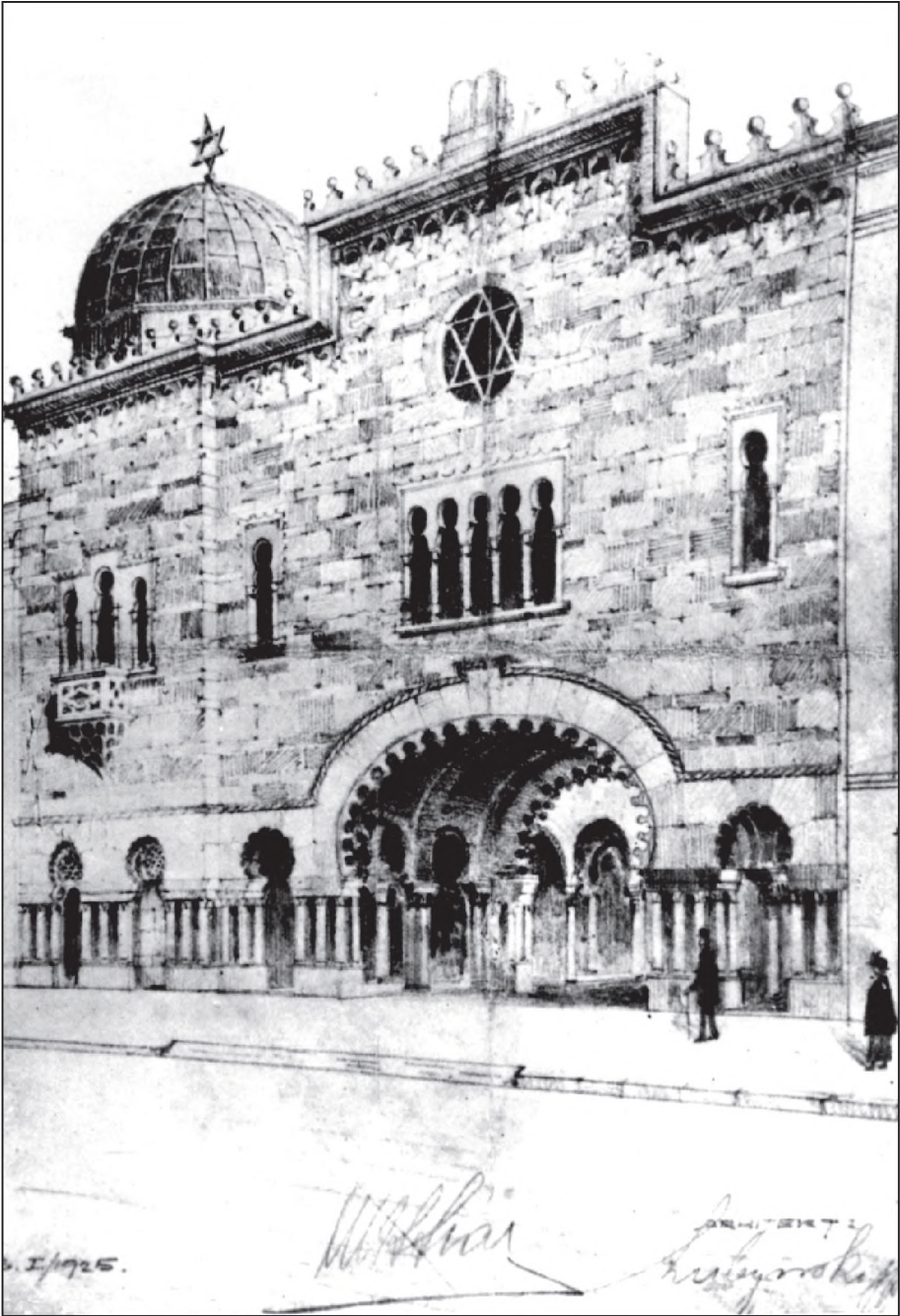


*Synagogue in Belgrade, built in 1908 and burnt down  
in the bombing of Belgrade in 1944*



*Synagogue in Praška Street Zagreb, built in 1867;  
destroyed in 1941*





*The Great Sephardic Synagogue in Sarajevo, built in 1927,  
destroyed in World War Two*



*Synagogue in Osijek (1869), destroyed in World War Two*





*Synagogue in Slavonski Brod, destroyed in the bombing in 1944*



*Synagogue in Zrenjanin, destroyed in World War Two*



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## GLOSSARY

*AFZ* – the Anti-Fascist Women's Front

*Akiba ben Joseph* – celebrated teacher from the times of Bar Kohba's uprising against the Romans; or abbreviation for the Akiba Agudat Hanoar Haivri (Akiba Association of Jewish Youth), a youth scouting movement of general Zionists (Akiba teaches the youth in the national spirit to take part in the building of Erez Yisrael.

*Aliyah* – (Hebrew) rise, ascent. Moving into Palestine, that is, later Israel, because, according to tradition, for Jews, going to Palestine meant exaltation. Aliyah means more than immigration: it is the main ideal of Zionism and the primary goal of its realisation. It means personal participation in the rebuilding of the Jewish homeland and the individual's rise to a higher level of self-fulfilment as a member of a reborn nation." (EJ, 1971: 633).

*Anti-Semitism* – racial, national and religious hatred of Jews. This phenomenon can be observed from ancient times until the present day. The result of anti-Semitic propaganda was the concept of the "final solution to the Jewish question" in World War Two and the destruction of six million Jews. The term was introduced sometime around 1880..

*Appello* – (Italian) assembly, roll call

*Appellplatz* – (German) assembly place for roll call

*Arbeitskomando* – (German) labour command

*Aron Hakodesh* – The Torah Ark, the sacred cabinet which contains the Torah scrolls in a synagogue.

*Ashkenazi* – an adjective which derives from the geographical term Ashkenaz which is what Germany has been called in Hebrew literature since the middle ages. The Ashkenazi are a branch of the Jewish people who speak either Yiddish or German, or some central European or eastern European languages. Ashkenazi, the inhabitants of the German-speaking region, who spread in migrations to eastern and later also to southern Europe, are, in some ways, different from the Sephardim, in the liturgical and lingual sense, because they differently pronounce both some of the vowels and some of the consonants of the Hebrew orthography.

*Aufseherin* – (German) woman SS-overseer, attendant

*B'nai Brith*, – an organisation which engages in humanitarian and cultural-educational work. Because of its elitist organisation and lodges, it is often identified with Masonic organisations

*Bar Mitzvah* – (literally son of law); religious coming-of-age ceremony for a Jewish man who has turned 13. It is performed in the synagogue when the boy is called out to stand before the Torah. With this act the man becomes a full member of the community, responsible for his actions before God. It is very festively celebrated in all homes.

- Bat Mitzvah* – religious coming-of-age ceremony for girls at twelve years of age. Festively celebrated in the home.
- Bersaglieri* – (Italian) high-mobility infantry unit of the Italian Army
- Blockälteste(r)* – (German) barracks chief (male or female)
- Blocksperr* – (German) ban on leaving the barracks
- Cantor* – (Latin) (Hebrew *hazan*) in Jewish religious services the singer of prayers
- Confino libero* – (Italian) free confinement: free movement within a restricted territory
- Coprifuoco* – (Italian) covering up the fire, figuratively: curfew
- Daskalica* – (Bulgarian) teacher
- Diaspora* – dispersion, emigration of people, scattering; in Hebrew: *galut* (persecution)
- Endlösung (Die)* – The Final Solution; Fascist term for the systemic destruction of the Jewish people.
- Erez* – (Hebrew) country; often used as a synonym for Israel
- Gabbai* – A person who assists in the running of a synagogue and ensures that the needs are met, or an assistant to a rabbi. The gabbai's obligations might also include maintaining a Jewish cemetery.
- Ghetto* – Italian) a part of town in which Jews lived under the orders of the authorities. Ghettos were locked up at night and because they were overpopulated life in them was unhealthy. The term was first introduced in Italy.
- Häftling* – (German) prisoner
- Hagana* – (Hebrew) defence, or Haganah – self-defence, Jewish defence in Palestine organised after the first Arab riots in Jaffa in 1921. After the state of Israel was formed in 1948 it became the regular army and its name was incorporated in the name of the official army of the new state, Zeva Haganah le Izrael.
- Halutz, (plural halutzim)* – (Hebrew) a pioneer who is preparing for the return to Erez Yisrael.
- Hamisha Asar Bishvat* – (Hebrew) Holiday also known as Tu-Bishvat, Hamishoshi, Frutas or the New Year of the Trees. Celebrated on the fifteenth day of Shevat (January-February).
- Hanukkah* – (Hebrew) feast of light, it is celebrated for eight days beginning the 25th day of the month of Kislev (December-January) in memory of the struggle for liberation from the Hellenic occupying forces in the third century BC.
- Hasharah* – (hebr.) preparation for emigration to Palestine; young people prepared for work learning agricultural and trade skills. Trade courses were held in the city, while courses in agriculture were held in villages, on larger farms. There were several hasharachs in Yugoslavia
- Hashomer Hatzair* – (Hebrew) Young guard, a Zionist youth organisation of socialist orientation. Its aim was to educate young people for the building of the Jewish homeland on biblical soil.
- Haver* – (Hebrew) friend; comrade; haverah (fem.), haverim (m.pl), haverot (f.pl)
- Hazan* – see Cantor
- Heder* – (Hebrew) room. Heder is a school for the first level of traditional Jewish education. Sephards call this school “meldar”. “These educational institutions were founded in 63 BC in Judea, and the initiator was Rabbi Joshua ben Gamla. He introduced the obligation to select teachers for children of seven years of age and older in every province and in every city. Later, up until World War One, even children younger than seven came to the heder. The classes were held all day, from early morning until eight or nine in the evening. In three months the boys would learn the Hebrew script. On the fourth month they would start to read the Humash (Thora), and then the Mishna and Talmud.” (Danon, 1996: 216).

- Hehalutz* – (Hebrew) international organisation of halutzim; all halutzim preparing for the aliyah would become members.
- Holocaust* – (Greek holos, entire; kaustos, burnt) the destruction of Jews in World War II by killing in gas chambers and burning their bodies in crematoriums
- Honved* – (Hungarian) literally homeland defender; a specifically Hungarian army within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, distinct from the Austrian *Landwehr*. The term Honvéd continued to be the name of the Hungarian military after the end of World War I and the dissolution of the empire.
- Hora* (*hava*) – (Hebrew) traditional Jewish dance
- Hupa* – (Hebrew) canopy, a part of the wedding ceremony when the bride and the groom stand under a canopy
- I. G. *Farbenindustrie* – Interessengemeinschaft der Farbenindustrie, (German) An interest association of the German industry of paints manufacturers; an industrial concern which used Jewish prisoners as free labour
- Jugendaliyah* – (German) Aliyat hanoar, youth aliyah
- Kaddish* – world (in Aramaic, the then spoken language of the Jews); a prayer for the dead. “Kaddish is an ancient prayer, which was created in Palestine, from where it spread to all countries of the galut. (Diaspora). Except for the last verse, which is in Hebrew, the original language of the Kaddish is Aramaic, so it would be understandable to ordinary people who didn’t know Hebrew (...)” The essence of the Kaddish is an expression of loyalty to God and the acceptance of his judgement, in line with the principle that a person has the obligation to express his gratitude even for the misfortune that has come upon him as he expresses his gratitude for the good.” (Danon, 1996: 179, 180–181). The prayer is said by the son or by the closest relative.
- Kal* – see synagogue
- Kapo* – (Italian.) head, chief; an inmate - supervisor
- Ken* – (Hebrew) nest, a Zionist youth group
- Ketuba* – (Hebrew) a written marital contract
- Kibbutz* – (Hebrew) a farm with collective ownership of land, resources and products. The organisation of work is based on an agreement, volunteering and equality of kibbutz members. The first kibbutz, Degania, was founded in 1909. Kibbutzim also play a defence role.
- Kibbutznik* – member of a kibbutz
- Kiddush* – Name of prayer used to sanctify the Sabbath and holidays, based on the biblical commandment “Remember to keep holy the Sabbath,” Moses II, 20:7
- Kipa* – (Hebrew) a small cap that Jews wear in the synagogue and during prayer, while religious Jews wear the kipa all the time.
- Kolkhoz* – collective farm in the Soviet Union
- Kosher* – (Hebrew) confirming to religious regulations in selecting and preparing food (kasher: clean, permitted).
- Kvuca* (*mishomar*) – (Hebrew) company, an organisational unit of the ken, group, small community
- Ladino* – Jewish-Spanish language, or Judeo-espagnol, or judezmo. Medieval Spanish language that the Sephardim spoke and preserved. Enriched by Hebrew, Turkish and Slavic words.
- Laissez-passer* (*French*); *Lasciapassare* (*Italian*) – pass
- Luftwaffe* – (German) German Air Force
- Maccabi* – (Hebrew) a frequently used name for Jewish sports associations which were named after Judas Maccabaeus, a Jewish hero from the 2nd century BC.
- Madrih* – (Hebrew) educator
- Magen David* – (Hebrew) David’s shield. The six-pointed Star of David, a hexagram; one of the symbols of Judaism;

- today also on the Israeli flag. (a term also used is Solomon's Seal)
- Matzah* – (Hebrew) unleavened bread which is made for Pesah when no food containing any leavening or any other product fermentation is allowed for a period of eight days.
- Megillah* – (Hebrew) scroll, a short name for the biblical Book of Ester which is read for Purim
- Menahel* – (Hebrew) youth leader
- Menorah* – (Hebrew) seven branched candlestick; a symbol of Judaism. The menorah was adopted as the official emblem of today's Israel.
- Mezuzah* – (Hebrew) a scroll with an excerpt from the Bible which is placed on the right side of the doorpost
- Minyan* – (Hebrew) number, the quorum of ten men over the age of 13 required to hold a service in the synagogue
- Mitzva* – (Hebrew) religious command, a good deed
- Moshava* – (Hebrew) settlement; in Jewish colonisation this is a non-collective farm where every person has his own land; in youth organisations it refers to a camp
- Musulman (camp slang)* – meaning a person who is at the end of his life from exhaustion. The word probably comes from the German words Muschl (shell) and Mann (man). Meaning: a shell keeps its form even after it loses its contents.
- Numerus Clausus* – (Latin) regulation legally limiting the number of Jews who can enrol in universities and schools to a certain percentage
- Nyilas* – (Hungarian) Hungarian ultra-rightists, Fascists of the Arrow Cross
- Ole, ola (female) olim (plural)* – new immigrants in Israel.
- Omama* – (Hungarian) grandmother
- OZNA* – *Odsek zaštite narode (Department for protection of the people)* – Yugoslav security organisation formed during the war for counter-intelligence duties. Formed in September 1943 by the Supreme Commander it assumed the duties of the Anti-Fifth-Column Commission of April 1943. Later became the central security organisation covering all of Yugoslavia.
- Pagnocca* – (Italian) round bread roll used in the army
- Pesah* – (Hebrew) Passover, a holiday celebrated in memory of the exodus from Egypt. It begins on the 15th day of the month of Nisan (March-April) and lasts eight days. It is also called Hag aaviv (the holiday of the spring) and Hag amatzot (the holiday of unleavened bread), because Jews must eat matzah. The holiday is celebrated according to a strictly defined ritual.
- Prefettura* – (Italian) the office of a prefect
- Purim* – a holiday which is celebrated in memory of the Jews' stay in Persia and events described in the biblical Book of Esther. It is celebrated on the 14th day of the month Adar (February-March).
- Quaestor* – (Italian, *questore*) Senior rank in Italian police
- Questura* – Police administrative section in each Italian province
- Rabbi* – (rav; teacher). "A common foreign word used for Jewish clerics, which was created in Western Europe from the word rabbi: my teacher, my master. In essence a Rabbi is not a clerical person, nor a priest, but one of the titles that is awarded after completing yeshivah. In Jewish communities the rabbis performed their duties, interpreted laws, even passed judgements on a non-professional basis, as authorised experts, experts in Jewish humanities. The rabbi profession, as a paid community employee in some societies and states is of more recent date." (Verber, 1988: 339).
- Revir* – (German) region, area; in the camp the name for hospital.
- Righteous* – One of the nine tasks of Yad Vashem, according to the Law on

- remembrance of martyrs and heroes passed on August 19, 1953 in Knesset, is to eternalise the memory “of the righteous of all nations who put their lives at stake to save Jews.” The Righteous is a rough translation of the expression “Hasidei umot haolam,” while a literal translation would be “the Righteous of the world”.
- Rosh* – (Hebrew) head, chief, leader (of ken, moshava, kibbutz)
- Rosh Hashanah* – (Hebrew) holiday, the Jewish New Year. It is celebrated on the first and second day of the month of Tishri (September-October).
- Sabbath, Shabbat* – (Hebrew) Saturday, seventh day of the week, the day of full rest, when no work is allowed
- Seder* – (Hebrew) seder; order; festive dinner, an introductory ceremony to the celebration of Pesah
- Sephardim* – (Hebrew) descendants of Jews who were expelled from the Iberian Peninsula in the fifteenth century
- Shalom (Shalom Alehem)* – (Hebrew) Peace, peace to you, traditional greeting
- Shamas* – Synagogue official who provides various services, often one who manages day-to-day affairs
- Shoah* – (Hebrew) Hebrew word for the Holocaust
- Shofar* – A ram’s horn used in ancient times as a signaling trumpet, and still blown in synagogues on Rosh Hashana and at the end of Yom Kippur
- Shomer* – (Hebrew) guard
- Shtetl* – (Yiddish) a small town or in Poland and Russia with a majority Jewish population
- SKOJ* – Communist Youth League of Yugoslavia
- Sokol* – Youth movement and physical fitness organisation, originating in Czechoslovakia in 1862 and eventually spreading through Poland, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Ukraine, Bulgaria Macedonia and Russia.
- Sonderkommando* – (German) special command, prisoners working in the gas chamber or crematorium during exterminations.
- Sukkot* – (Hebrew) the festival of tabernacles or booths (sukkah; booth, hut, tent). Once they freed themselves from Egyptian slavery the Jews wandered around the desert for 40 years and dwelt in tents. In memory of this kind of accommodation, on Sukkot, Jews spend seven days in huts. The festival lasts nine days. It is celebrated in autumn.
- Synagogue* – (Greek) Jewish place of worship. The word synagogue appears for the first time in Septuaginta, the translation of the Old Testament into Greek in the third century BC. and stands for community, group of people, municipality. Somewhat later the word synagogue refers only to a community of religious character, that is, a place in which religious services are performed. The Hebrew term *bek hakeneset* also has a long history (Aramaic: *bet hakenishta*) the house of assembly, which could often be heard in Bosnia. Among the Bosnia-Herzegovina Jews it was customary to call the synagogue “hram” or temple and *kal* (this last was used only by the Sephardim.” (Gotovac, 1987: 11).
- Tallit* – (Hebrew) a prayer cloak worn by men during prayer
- Talmud* – (Hebrew) learning. This is the Jewish “post-biblical encyclopaedia of specific quality, created between the second and fourth centuries. It is, first of all, a collection of comments based on various interpretations of the Bible, but it also contains comprehensive material on religious and secular Jewish customs. It contains elements of theology, ethics, agronomy, medicine, hygiene, law, history, mathematics, astronomy, and so on. The Talmud regulated the Jews’ way of life in post-biblical times all the way up to the emancipation in the 19th century. The Talmud played

- a crucial role in preserving Jewish national unity in the Diaspora. Because of its strictness and moral pedantry, because of its emphasised Judaeocentric stance and strong opposition to the pro-zealot striving of Christianity, for centuries Talmud was attacked, slandered and forged within and outside Judaism.“ (Baleti, 1982. 34).
- Temple* – (Hebrew) temple, Jewish place of worship
- Torah* – (Hebrew) the five Books of Moses which, according to Jewish tradition, are the foundation of the Jewish religion.
- Trumpeldor* – Zionist right-wing politician
- Ustasha* – Croatian far-right organisation put in charge of the Independent State of Croatia by the Axis Powers in 1941. They pursued Nazi and Fascist policies. The Ustasha were subsequently expelled by the Communist Yugoslav Partisans in 1945. At the time they were founded in 1929, the Ustashes were nationalist political organisations which committed terrorist acts. When they came to power they also had military formations which numbered some 76,000 at their peak in 1944.
- VVN (Vereinigung der Nazi Verfolgten)* – Association of the Victims of Nazi Persecution
- Wehrmacht* – German armed forces
- WIZO* – acronym for: Women’s International Zionist Organisation
- Yad Vashem* – (Hebrew) “Hand and name” (yad, hand; shem, name), a monument and archive in Jerusalem on the killing of Jews in World War II which was established under the decision of Knesset in 1953 by passing a special Law on the Commemoration of martyrs and heroes – Yad Vashem. “The point of the legislation adopted is to erect an eternal monument in the minds of Jews in memory of the millions of innocent victims, fighters, of the inexpressible riches of the Jewish cultural values that were created for centuries and which were destroyed by criminal Nazism“ (Alkalaj, 1971).
- Yashar koach* – (Hebrew) literally first time. In the temple it is used during the reading of the Tora, that is when congratulating on a task well done, something like ‘Good work’ or ‘Well done’
- Yeshiva* – (Hebrew) a high religious school attended after completion of the first religious school (heder – Ashkenazi, melder – Sephardim). „The expression ‘yeshiva’ was used in Talmud for the oldest Jewish institution which primarily focuses on studying the Thora, Talmud, Jewish regulations and the development of Jewish thought.“ (Danon, 1996: 217).
- Yiddish* – the language spoken by the Ashkenazi Jews from Germany, Central and Eastern Europe. “It was created based on some dialects of Middle-High German from the tenth century which had been fixed at that level of development. Later the lexis was expanded with Hebrew and Aramaic words and, later again, following the arrival in Slavic countries, also with Slavic (Polish, Ukrainian and other) words. It is written in Hebrew script, which is specially adapted to the phonetics of the language.” (Verber, Glossary in the catalogue Jews on Yugoslav Soil, pg. 337).
- Yom Kippur* – a holy day, Day of Atonement, celebrated on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Tishri; a 24-hour long fast
- Zählappell* – (German) the counting of lined-up prisoners at a certain place
- Zionism* – named after the hill of Zion, where the Jerusalem temple was built; in a figurative sense it stands for Jerusalem as a religious and cultural centre of the Jews. A national-political movement which aspires to national revival and the gathering of Jews in a restored national state like that they inhabited in biblical times.



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