

סאנסקי מוסט

SANSKI MOST

DERVENTA דרוונטה

TRAVNIK טראוויניק

BIJELJINA ביילינה

BRČKO זאווידוביצי' ברוציקו

DOBOJ דובוי

ZAVIDOVIC

ואגרב

TUZLA טוזלה

ZAGRE

VLASENICA ולאסניצה

ZENICA זניצה

VISOKO ויסוקו

ŽEPČE ז'פצ'ה

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YUGOSLAV JEWS ON THE HOLOCAUST

סקופייה

SKOPLJE

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 ...