

סאנסקי מוסט

SANSKI MOST

DERVENTA דרוונטה

TRAVNIK טראוויניק

BIJELJINA ביילינה

BRČKO זאווידוביצי' ברוצ'יקו

DOBOJ דובוי

ZAVIDOVIC

ואגרב

TUZLA טוזלה

ZAGRE

VLASENICA ולאסניצה

ZENICA זניצה

VISOKO ויסוקו

ŽEPČE ז'פצ'ה

SARAJEVO

VIŠEGRAD

בלגראד

וישגראד

BEOGRAD

WE MOSTAR מוסטאר

SURVIVED...4

YUGOSLAV JEWS ON THE HOLOCAUST

סקופייה

SKOPLJE

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!