



ALEKSANDRA LIČANIN

TWO LOVES AND
ONE WAR OF
EVA PANIĆ NAHIR

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Publisher



maticahrvatska

Čakovec Branch of Matica hrvatska

Co-publisher

Jewish Community Čakovec

Čakovec, 2015

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*I clearly remember the morning when they
took my mother.*

*I begged Mioma not to eat it all because we
have to leave something for Mum
to have for lunch when she returns.*

Of course, she didn't return.

TIJANA WAGES

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*I have never been to see Auschwitz.
I am not interested in it at all.
Do you know why?
Because I did not think that people needed
to go to the camps humiliated and silent,
I was convinced they had to fight.*

EVA PANIĆ NAHIR

Preface

This is the story of Eva Panić Nahir nee Kelemen.

Eva has gone through the situations which most of would consider totally hopeless, but it only has strengthened her even more and enriched her life experience.

Life was even more than cruel to Eva, and the sentence that we hear from her today: "I'm fine." tells us that she has found peace and serenity.

Her current life motto "There are no good and bad nations, only good and bad people." proves that her life is filled with love and tolerance.

I would like to thank Aleksandra who found inspiration in Eva and put their conversations into words, a book which remains as a pledge for the future.

I would also like to thank professor Pranjić for his professional help and suggestions. Thanks to Matica hrvatska for another successful cooperation.

Thanks to the Town of Čakovec and the Međimurje County that helped with publishing this book.

Andrej Pal, M.D.

President of the Jewish Community Čakovec

Introduction

At the urging of the President the Jewish Community Čakovec Dr. Andrej Pal and my high school teacher Ivan Pranjić, I have become part of the life story of Eva Panić Nahir, nee Kelemen. Our long talks during 2012 and 2014 resulted in this biography, which is now here before your critical eye, and if I may say something in favour of it, it is its three-dimensionality. Namely, it was written from the perspective of three women; Eva, Tijana (Eve's daughter) and me.

I learned a lot with Eva. First of all, I have become fond of the place where I grew up even more. Čakovec is a town rich in history, the scene of many human tragedies, but love as well. Eva has testified about it in a unique way. Between the two world wars in her memory it is the town with European atmosphere. It was delightful to listen to this unobtrusive, sincere and extremely lucid lady in whose company time flies. When talking about her first husband Radoslav Panić, she sounds like she is writing a novel. It is liberating to know that such love existed in the real world, that it flamed up here, at the places that we also love. It took her away from her hometown Čakovec, saved her life, gave meaning to it. The wind-storm of World War II took her to the world of espionage, later to prison and women's camp on the island of Sveti Grgur.

This remarkable person was not worth meeting only because of her incredible life story, but also because of her character, lifestyle, humanity, because of the superior ease when saying: "Life in modesty can also be a good life". She was born into a rich family. Her martyrdom was followed by extreme poverty, then again she lived a normal civil life and, finally, a serene, peaceful life in the social equality of the kibbutz. This book is not written with the intention to present mere facts. I wanted to introduce readers to Eva as a person. Her daughter Tijana Wages, whom I thank most heartily, helped me with that. The first to read the text was my mother and one more person. I'm sorry my father could not do it. He loved the written word, especially history, and would have something to say. I chose these two because although each of them like me in their own way, they may be very critical towards me. Once you know where it comes from, criticism is always beneficial.

For the purpose of this preface I will quote the following comment: "I like the part where Sveti Grgur is described very realistically and the reasons why Eva was stuck there. It was a Yugoslav reality, the twilight of communism. Both then and now,

people build careers at other people's expense. It is amazing that a Jew whose parents finished their lives in Auschwitz, a part of the family ended up in Jasenovac, and she herself on Sveti Grgur, even now still believes that the idea of communism is good".

Eva always has her nails painted red, she never leaves the house without the basic makeup, watches what and how much she eats. That's why last spring in Čakovec she went down the staircase lightly like a squirrel, leaving me, who offered her to hold on to a handrail, speechless. With her the surprises never end. I thank her for all the long hours we spent in conversation, her kindness and numerous e-mails (yes, yes, Skype and email are constantly on), for her private photographs and documents, the disclosure of the world which is not known to many of us.

Writing of these pages has opened many new insights, brought into my life people whom I probably never would have met and added another dimension to the people I already know. Before the audience is my first written work that is called a book. Every time I take it in my hand there is something I would change, but more important than my intervention is the atmosphere that Eve's story has left. Tijana wrote to me in one of her emails, most of which were in the Croatian, except only a few of them in English: "No need to change anything - your text is perfect. Each time and place has its pluses and minuses. No place is perfect".

I would like to thank Andrej Pal on every assistance and the freedom I was given as the author. Also, I feel grateful to Mr Ivan Pranjic for every kind word of encouragement and Kristian Novak who, without thinking twice, expressed his readiness to write a review. Thanks to Marija Mišćančuk, who left nothing to chance when translating the text into the English language and asked for clarification of any possible ambiguity, and there is also my colleague Dane Ilić from RTS Belgrade.

Thanks to all of them and to my two critics.

... and everyone who takes this book in their hands.

December 2014
Aleksandra Ličanin

Those who fear poverty are not worth living in abundance.
(François Marie Arouet known as Voltaire)



I. Eva KELEMEN

Ema

Ema Kohn worked as a chief accountant in one of the most beautiful retail stores in Nagykanizsa. Selected fabrics and silk, shoes and clothes the Hungarian ladies and gentlemen longed for, were arriving from the European fashion meccas. It was the end of 1904, when the predictable everyday routine of the restrained but kind Ema, was irreversibly changed by her employer.

He offered her to independently run a shop in a town where such an offer had not existed before. Well, not quite independently.

- *Miss Emma (one hundred and ten years later, her daughter Eva tells the story), if you want to marry our new official Bela Kelemen, I'll provide you with the goods to open a store in another town, in Čakovec. That is what the employer told my mother and made her rethink her future. She was 27 years old, lived with parents who had no dowry to give to her because her father sent her three brothers to Budapest to study. Without any means a Jewish woman could not be married. She hesitated, but in the end, though, decided to marry my father. Arranged marriages in those days were nothing unusual. You know, it was not the best life. Dad was terribly strict, and my mom was always trembling for us kids – says Eva Panić Nahir nee Kelemen, about the interweaving circumstances which in 1905 brought the married couple Emma and Bela Kelemen to Čakovec.*



Kelemen family house in the center of Čakovec during the first years of 20th century. There was a store on the ground floor. Today it is 5 Kralja Tomislava Street.

Eva Kelemen was born on August 3, 1918 in Čakovec, in a family house in Kralja Petra Street. Today it is 5 Kralja Tomislava Street, in the very heart of the town. Today, the citizens recognize the building as a branch of Zagrebačka banka on the ground level and living space on the first floor. Over a century ago it was the same – business premises down-stairs and living space above.

Glazed windows lured consumers with their dimensions and compelling contents – from Austrian shoes and silk treated in France, to Italian fabrics and German suits. Bela, who was born in Kaposvar, run his trade very skillfully, firmly, always making sure all the paperwork was meticulously done. Ema enriched the contacts with customers with her warmth, and they loved and respected her.

- The store was very classy. You could buy top quality clothing, footwear and textiles. Nothing was domestic production, all arrived from abroad. I can say that we were well off. We lived in a beautiful flat with a lot of servants, a cook, a maid, a butler. The house had six fireplaces to keep it warm in winter. We lived a very nice life in the material sense, but our childhood was marked by father's strictness. We took a lot of beating. I was not worried much about the beating, but my sisters and I were very afraid of our father.



Eva Panić Nahir, born Kelemen, in front of her birthplace house and former family store in spring 2012. Today, there are offices of Zagrebačka banka on the ground floor and a private apartment on the first floor.

At home we spoke Hungarian and German, our parents did not know any other languages. Actually, Čakovec was under Hungarian rule until 1918, so this was nothing unusual for our family - Eva recalls her childhood.

She had two sisters, Žuža, who was born in 1908 and Klara who opened her eyes for the first time in 1910. The year 1914 was a sad year for the Kelemen family when a stillborn Katinka was born. The umbilical cord wrapped around her neck. When she gave birth to Eva, Ema Kelemen was 40 years old.



From the Jewish parish register - Jewish Community Čakovec

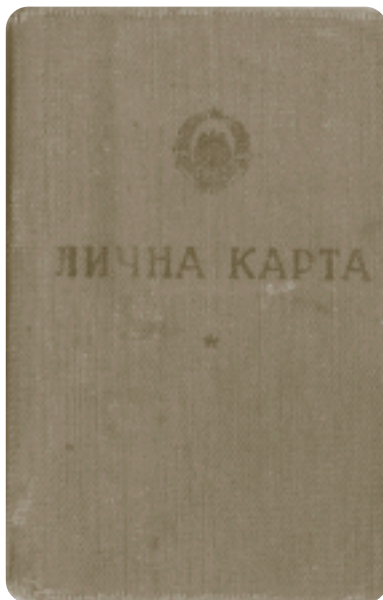
Fair-haired guardian angel

Short and tiny, with thick dark hair, having just turned six, Eva Kelemen started school in 1924. In her classroom she was the youngest and the smallest, just as in her family. She began to learn Croatian.

- My teacher Evica Potočnjak was a friend of my parents and when she started with a new generation of first graders, she told my parents to enrol me. The school was in the street leading to the barracks. On one side of the street there was a primary school, on the other a Trade school. The Open University stands there today. I was the smallest in the class, and one tall, fair - haired girl promised to take care of me. She had been my best friend until the end of her life. Her name was Jagoda Rotanić. Her father was a director of the First Croatian Savings Bank. They lived in Kralja Petra Street, like me, near the church¹. The Rotanić family had a vineyard and a weekend house in Štrigova, so I used to spend a part of summer there with Jagoda. They would drive us there by a hackney carriage. You know, she was the daughter of a bank director, it was "hoch".

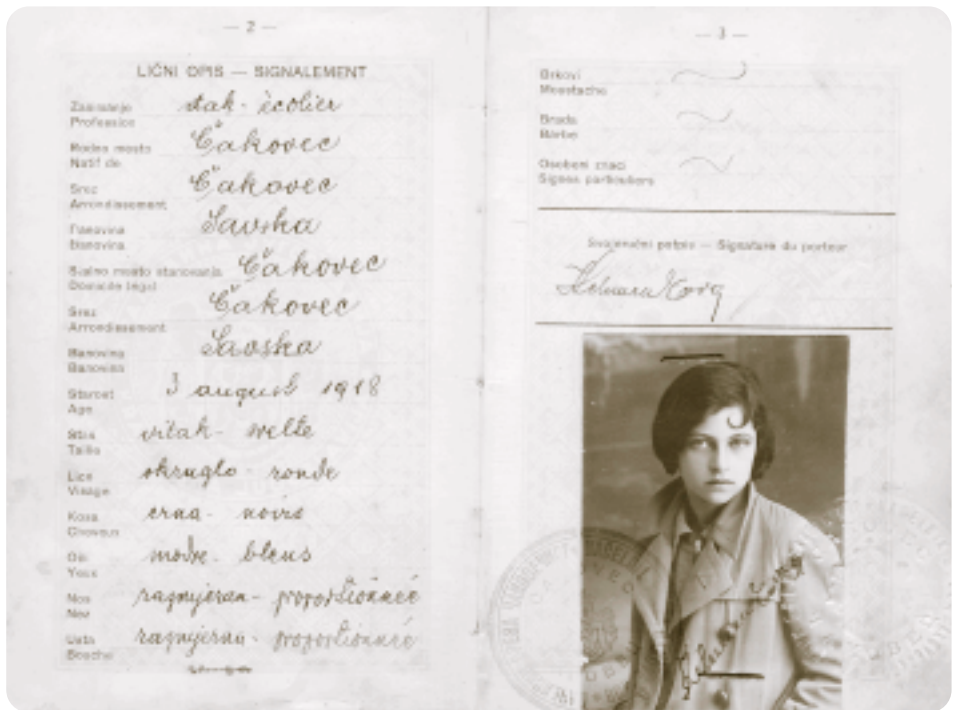
Eva remembers that every day, "she would pick up Jagoda on her way to school" and after school they would see their friends off to the train station, which was located next to the barracks. *Lendavec*, on its way to Vratišinec, Mursko Središće and Lendava stopped there. Today, it does not stop there anymore. Eva Kelemen finished Trade School and as a young girl joined the local Zionist² organisation. Later, together with many friends and acquaintances she left it.

- When the Germans entered Austria, Čakovec was full of refugees, mainly Jews. We all abandoned the blue-and-white Zionist colours to avoid being asked whether we were Jews or Gypsies?



¹ In the building of the present Čakovec City Hall, 15 Kralja Tomislava Street.

² Zionism is an expression coined by Nathan Birnbaum in 1885, and implies political and national aspirations of Jews to create the state of Israel. Today it is a political movement.



Cover and content of Eva Kelemen's ID card

My best friend was Mirko Weiss, he had two brothers and their mother was a widow. I remember well that he courted Boža Glogovec, and I was very close to her and her sister Vjera. In February 1940 when Mirko visited me in Belgrade he told me he was going skiing to Macedonia. Actually, the real reason why he was going there was to get the instructions on what to do if invaders enter the country. He was killed in Bosnia - stepped on a mine. His brother Miki died as a partisan in 1941 in Zagorje. He was only sixteen years old. The Glogovec sisters moved to Zagreb. Many people went away, and we who stayed, we became leftists. My friend Jagoda and her parents moved to Varaždin. We used to see each other on Sundays. I also saw her after the war whenever I came to see my sister Klara in Lendava. Until her last day Jagoda and I stayed in touch, and when I'm in Čakovec I visit her son Zlatan Milić, who lives in Varaždin. It makes me really happy.

Bela Kelemen did not know that his daughter left the Zionist ideology and became a left-winger. Her mother Ema knew, as she knew about all her daughter's ideals, and supported her. Eva introduced her boyfriend to the association as well, so both she and Radoslav Panić gained deep socialist convictions.

Rade

The day before finishing Trade School, at the dance after a school celebration, was and has undoubtedly remained fatal for Eva Kelemen. She met lieutenant colonel Radoslav Panić, who served in the 8th cavalry regiment in Čakovec. Five years later, he would become her husband. However, don't be deceived by the simplicity of the statement. Eva and Radoslav confronted a lot of challenges to which they had to find right solutions.

From a number of meetings with Eva Nahir in 2012 and 2014 I have learned that Radoslav Panić is her favourite topic. Memories of him are still strong, and deep in her heart the experience is impressively emotional.

- We met at a dance, it was a Saturday, March 7, 1936, Rade was a military officer in Čakovec, born in Kruševica in Serbia. When I came home that evening, I told my mother: "Tonight, I met the boy whom I will marry. He will be my life partner." Of course, mother was surprised. She asked me what I was dreaming about, but I explained to her that he was the man for me. Half of his monthly salary he sent to his parents to build a house because they lived in "čakmara", a hut made of mud and straw with a dirt floor, where they slept lying next to each other. I liked the way he lived, how he was devoted to his family and the fact that he was the first one from his village who went to school. Rade was the only educated member of his family, and his way to school was a six-kilometre walk through the forest.

For the next five years Radoslav Panić stayed a secret for Eva's father. While Bela Kelemen played preferans every night at the Café Royal³, Radoslav, Eva and her mother Ema would go for a walk. Although the young couple was supposed to be alone for the first date, Ema Kelemen herself got in their way.

- Rade asked me what I was doing the next day? I told him that every Sunday I went to visit my friend Jagoda Rotanić in Varaždin, and that I would come back by train at seven in the evening. He waited for me at the station, a little further from the entrance, under a chestnut tree, but my mom waited for me as well. I asked her why she had come because she had never done that before, and she said that it was inappropriate for me to walk alone with a guy. How come? Then I remembered telling her on Saturday that

³Today's Town Café.

Panić asked what I was doing the next day?

The evening card games of Bela Kelemen at the Royal meant a few hours free for everyone in the family. Eva did not want to leave her mother alone at home, and she told her boyfriend that.

- Rade said all three of us could go for a walk. So every evening we walked by the Graner brothers' knitwear factory⁴, and down the promenade with benches all the way to the railway station. This was called "pedestrian's path". Is it still called the same today? You must know that my mother did not speak Croatian at all and I had to translate each sentence they said because both of them were constantly asking me - what did he say? what did she say? For five years we were seeing each other in such a way, me translating conversations during our walks, waiting for my boyfriend to turn 26 to get a permission to marry. When that time came, in 1940, a law according to which the officers were not allowed to marry Jewish women came into force.

Čakovec, June 2012

Eva Panić Nahir: *When I met my husband at a dance, he told me he was from a very poor family, that he was sending half of his salary home, and whenever he got two cubic meters of timber he sent it home, too. With that money they were building a house, because they lived in a house made of mud and straw, on the dirt floor. I told my mum that he would be mine forever. She asked me: "Why is he so special? What does he have?" I replied, "He is so proud of his poverty. He's the right one for me." He was very modest, my Panić. He used to say that by the time he got the consent to get married, his family would have already finished building a house. So, later, fleeing from the war, I found myself in his family's house.*

Bela

Bela Kelemen's radiating authority was difficult to ignore. He was fear and terror for his daughters, but his reaction to the discovery that his youngest daughter had been seeing a Yugoslav officer for almost five years – was amazingly moderate.

⁴ Today Medimurska trikotaža Čakovec, in Matice Hrvatske Street, with the entrance from Vladimira Nazora Street



Eva Kelemen's passport from the Kingdom of Yugoslavia

Eva Nahir's opinion is that the credit for that could have been partially given to Rabbi Ilija Grünwald. It was him who pointed out to Kelemen to see a broader picture of the events in which Eve's affair could be life-saving for her.

- It was 1940 and Čakovec was full of Jewish refugees from Austria. Father found out about our relationship at the Café Royal, which was run by family Legenstein. One evening the owner directly asked him: "How long will your wife and daughter walk with that young lieutenant?". My father came home and asked my mother if it was true, and she told him to ask me because I was an adult. When I confirmed my relationship with Panić he remained stupefied. He said: "If you marry a Serb, I'll jump out the window of embarrassment," to which I replied "If this embarrassment is the reason for jumping, I'll open the window." Then he went to Rabbi Grünwald⁵ and said to him that I wanted

⁵ Eva Nahir knew a lot younger Eva Schwarz, daughter of a rabbi and the last president of the Jewish community in Čakovec before holocaust, whose biography, written by Branimir Bunjac, was published by Matica Hrvatska Čakovec and the Jewish Community Čakovec. Eva Schwarz, already a pensioner, found affordable accommodation in Budapest to Eva Nahir and her granddaughter Emily, while they were investigating their family tree. They investigated their roots in Čakovec first, then in Zagreb, Serbia and Montenegro, Pecs and Budapest.

to embarrass him. However, Rabbi Grünwald was wiser and told him: “Mr. Kelemen, the Germans entered Austria. Every night we see your wife and daughter with this young man, they also visit cantor Leopold Katz. Perhaps she will be the only one to stay alive if she goes away with him. Invite this guy to your home, talk to him, because we are all in danger.”

Bela Kelemen acted wisely. He invited lieutenant colonel Radoslav Panić to his home. It was Sunday when he told Eva to take her bike, go to the barracks and invite him to their home. The consent to his daughter’s engagement, which was uttered that day, resulted in moving the young man to the barracks in Skopje and away from Eva.

- Rade came to us, knelt down, took my father’s hand and kissed it. He would do the same to his father, too, but my father felt uncomfortable. He was standing next to a large fireplace and said exactly these words: “An officer in a uniform kneeling before an old Jew. Eva, tell him I’ll give him everything he wants, just make him stand up again.” A law that officers must not marry Jewish women was in effect at that time, and in schools there was a rule that limited the number of Jews allowed to be in one classroom. When the rumour that the old Kelemen agreed to the engagement was spread, Rade was transferred to the farthest garrison. To Skopje. Just to keep us apart.

II. Eva PANIĆ

A goose will never turn into a pig

Young Panić decided to defend his choice, love and honesty. As a member of the cavalry, later becoming a champion of equestrian sport in the first Yugoslavia, he decided to go to Belgrade to the cavalry commander. The promise he had made to his love five years ago was one which he wanted to keep at any cost, which, and the upcoming months would show, really existed.

- My Panić asked the commander whether they wanted to have an honest man or an unfair officer? He told him that he had promised to marry me, and now when he was turning twenty-six, he intended to do so. The commander replied to him to go to Skopje and if he managed to marry - he would turn a blind eye. That summer, it was July, mother and I went to Skopje because Rade wrote that a military orthodox priest would baptise me and issue a birth certificate for five thousand dinars. Panić had a monthly salary of one thousand two hundred dinars, and the priest's was a thousand. Dad told us to go and gave us the money, and when we arrived there the priest said: "I'll write you a birth certificate. Anyway, a goose will never turn into a pig, a pig will not turn into a goose. I'll write whatever it takes, as long as it can help you get married". We needed a best man and he suggested taking a carriage and to bring any drunken officer. Simo Mirković was the most drunken one Rade knew there, so we took him and I got my birth certificate.

Kruševica

Eva then went to live with the Panić family in Mala Kruševica, a small village on the hills of the Varvarin district, about eighty kilometres southeast of Belgrade. When she arrived there with her mother for the first time, it was undoubtedly a big cultural shock for both of them. Her fiancé's family lived in a house made of mud, and the house for which Radoslav used to send half of his salary each month was near completion.

- Extreme poverty and primitivism. They did not even have a toilet. My mother was horrified by the conditions they lived in, especially the fact that I would stay there to live. Neither she, nor I had ever seen anything like that. They were all illiterate, except my husband. As for me it was all the same in what conditions we would live. The only thing that was important to me was to be with Rade. There was no stove in the house, and meals were very modest, it was mainly corn flour. Mother and I settled in the new house. We stayed there for two days and then returned to Čakovec. When I met my mother-in-law Tijana, I said that if I ever had a daughter I would call her Tijana, after her.



In May 2014 Eva Panić Nahir visited part of her family in Kruševica (Serbia) and went to the house where she lived when she married Radoslav Panić

Dallas, November 2014

Tijana Wages⁶: In fact, the name Tijana has a long history. During their first date, Eva and Rade discussed various topics, among others, they talked about their siblings, parents. When Rade said that his mother was called Tijana, my mother replied that it was the first time she had heard that name, and if she ever had a daughter, she would name her Tijana.

Most valuable signature

The birth certificate that Eva had obtained four months ago in the Temple of Glory, just outside Skopje, was an introduction to the next step the young couple had to make in their intention to get married. There was another signature they required. The minister's.

Eva and Radoslav wanted to play it safe. They thought it would be best to deliver the request for the wedding in a pile of documents that were submitted to the minister for signing. To do this, they needed a partner. And they found him in the minister's adjutant. The cost of his cooperation was 50,000 dinars.

- Panic's wedding request had to be somehow planted to the minister to be signed. The adjutant told us to leave the envelope with fifty thousand dinars with his relatives in one pharmacy, and that the money would be given back to us if he failed to get the Minister's signature. My father gave me the money. It was the value of a house. The adjutant contacted us by phone and said that the request was signed, but it would be best to get married, without anyone witnessing it. Literally we ran off to the ministry and paid five thousand dinars in order to be married the next day. Of course, the officers had to get married in church and we went to the Church of the Ascension in Zemun. We got married on 29 November 1940, it was early morning. I did not have anything special to wear. Rade bought me a chaplet for 12 dinars, we invited two men to be our witnesses and everything was over very quickly. There was no one at the morning mass in the church, we were alone, but very happy that we finally managed to do it.

Radoslav had already asked for a transfer and he got it. In Zemun he began work-

⁶ Tijana's surname is Wages, after her ex-husband.

ing as a teacher at the Cavalry School. Eva's parents arrived in Belgrade to congratulate the young couple, and as the son-in-law refused to accept the dowry, they equipped their apartment, bought food, paid the rent.

- Our apartment was furnished like heaven. My father bought us everything necessary so Rade's salary was left untouched and with that we were able to start our life together. It was several months before the war.

They were among the first tenants of a residential building near the railway station in Zemun, at 34 Radića Petrovića Street. The walls were freshly painted, still wet when they moved in.

The Royal Army officers began to move from Čakovec to Serbia, which Eva's father used to transport the furniture from Eva's maiden room to Kruševica, to the Panić family.

- Father paid for a wagon and sent all my stuff. They are still there in Kruševica. It is a beautiful white room with a wardrobe, a sofa, armchairs, a desk with a mirror, so I could do myself up a little.



Radoslav and Eva Panić in 1941

What if there is a war?

Eva Panić managed to come to Čakovec once more before the outbreak of the war in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. She visited her parents in February 1941.

- I managed to come to Čakovec. My sisters were already married. I had a good rela-

tionship with Žuža, but not with Klara. Žuža married Šomlo in Budapest, and Klara lived with her first husband in Lendava. He was a great Zionist and resented me for having a boyfriend who was not a Jew. My sisters had their own lives and I didn't meet them then, but I stayed with my parents for a few days. I asked my father what we were going to do if there was a war? He replied: "Eva, I have made a great sacrifice by allowing you to marry a non-Jew. Pay it back. You are communists, free people. Do not stay at home, go and fight. Here's my gun, the last bullet is for you. Kill yourself Eva, but don't ever get enslaved." He gave me a small Browning gun, which I would keep for years. Then, in February 1941, it was the last time I saw my mother and father.

Eva Panić Nahir learned about the fate of her parents from a woman (whose name she does not remember) whose son was supported by her father Bela Kelemen in Čakovec. She informed her that the Hungarian gendarmes took literally all Jews from Čakovec and Međimurje to Nagykanizsa, and then to Auschwitz. It was the night of 28th to 29th April 1944.

Since 1941 Međimurje was, together with Prekmurje, Baranja and Vojvodina, part of Hungary, under the regime of Regent Miklos Horthy, who made alliance with the Third Reich back in 1938. Thanks to his own skills in communication with Adolf Hitler he managed to maintain a "well-dozed" autonomy in his rule over the territory which was literally given to him for free in 1941. It was this autonomy that made it different from other Hitler's satellites, and until 1944 he refused to send the Jews to the Nazi camps. Deportation of the Jews from Međimurje in April 1944 was ordered by the German SS.⁷

- They suffocated my parents in the gas chamber because they reached the age of 50. That was the end. Ivica, my sister's son was there together with my Mom. I really resent my mother for this decision. They were supposed to send the child to me as I asked them to do, and Mom said that we did not even have a toilet and she would not send him to me. She would rather go to Auschwitz than to Kruševica because there was no toilet hole.

⁷ "While since the summer of 1941 Holocaust already ravaged the European countries under Hitler's domination, about 750,000 Jews in Hungary and the countries annexed to it were living under the illusion that despite all the troubles they would still survive the war. Only when Hitler completely lost confidence in his unreliable ally Horthy, German troops occupied Hungary on 18 March 1944. The Nazi SS took over the strict control of state institutions, Adolf Eichmann and his men came to Budapest and began deportation to Auschwitz. The first in line were the areas annexed to Hungary, which included Čakovec as well"; from the feuilleton "Eva's story: My 96 years - love, happiness and suffering" by Slavko Goldstein in Jutarnji list, June 2014.

Dallas, November 2014

Tijana Wages: *Mum's sister Klara, married Stern, lived in Zagreb. Her husband was killed in Jasenovac. She married a second time after World War II in 1948 in Lendava to Lajos Blau. My other sister, Žuža, emigrated to Australia in 1960. She went to her son, to where he had fled in 1956 during the Hungarian revolution.*

Čakovec, May 2014

Eva Panić Nahir: *I have never been to see Auschwitz. I am not interested in it at all. Do you know why? Because I did not think that people needed to go to the camps humiliated and silent, I was convinced they had to fight. I despised that Jewish weakness. They were supposed to fight. People are not cattle to be treated as one! You have to resist and fight.*

1941

When on the night of April 6, 1941 air strikes on Belgrade began, Eva Panić was staying alone in the apartment. Radoslav, according to his wartime posting had already been in the area of Virovitica, in Špišić Bukovica.

- *I was in my apartment when Belgrade was being bombed, but I had to leave. I went to the refugee camp, together with Vera Lapčević, a woman from my building. I stayed in touch with her until her death in 2013. That night, when we fled, was high snow, we were moving on foot, it was very difficult. I went to my husband's parents in Kruševica. When I arrived, my mother-in-law Tijana was at home with her daughter-in-law. Rade's brother Radosav and my father-in-law were mobilized. They had only fifty kilos of corn flour to prepare some food. Very poor. Incredibly poor.*

A month later, in late May 1941, the lists of killed and captured soldiers were published. Eva's husband's name was not on any of them. It was enough for her to set off to look for him, and she shared the idea with her father-in-law, Milosav. He tried to stop her.

- *You're a Jew. Where are you going without papers?*
- *If I get the papers, will you come with me?*
- *Of course I will.*

Together they set off on foot to Varvarin on the Morava River, 27 kilometres away from Kruševica. They found a German officer who was surprised with Eva's knowledge of the German language. It proved to be the key that opened all doors.

- I went to a German commander, told him that I was Hungarian, and I needed an ausweis because I wanted to return to my family in Hungary. He said: "Ma'am, we are in the middle of nowhere, no one knows a word of German. I will give you whatever you need, just sit down for half an hour and talk to me." So I stayed with him and we talked. I told him that my father-in-law did not allow me to travel to Hungary alone and that I needed documents for him as well. He issued the documents to me without a word. I was very happy. We could continue to Belgrade.

Dallas, November 2014

Tijana Wages: My parents enjoyed their time together for only six months until the moment war broke out on April 6th 1941. Then, when Belgrade was bombed, my father had already been mobilized, and the neighbour who was a Folksdojčer⁸ came to my mother's door with a gun in his hand and forced her out onto the street. So my mother started walking towards Kruševica, having no idea what had happen to my father.

My Mika, you've come?!

Both Eva and her father-in-law in peasant clothes and shoes, and Eva with her father's gun tucked into her vest, walked for the next two days. They stayed overnight on a farm, in a barn. When they arrived to Belgrade, they had to stop in front of the demolished bridge to Zemun. On the river bank there was a Hungarian jeep surrounded by a few soldiers. Eva shouted out in Hungarian that she and her father-in-law needed to be taken across the Sava river. The Hungarians took them to Zemun.

- The neighbourhood where we lived was new, settled with young families. I already saw from a distance that it was full of German soldiers and prostitutes. My father-in-law

⁸Folksdojčeri (pl.) (Volksdeutsche) were the German people who after World War I lived in other European countries, because of the redrawing of borders and creation of new states. They are, therefore, a German national minority in the successor states of Austria-Hungary, and in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia as one of them.

asked himself out loud what we could possibly do? When the Hungarians dropped us off, we sat down in the open, and I started thinking – What to do? When it got dark, I went under my neighbour Vera’s window and called out: “Veručka, Veručka”. Do you know who spoke up? My husband. He was lying at the foot of the window and said: “My Mika. You’ve come.” My husband called me Mika, because that was the name of his favourite horse. The horse and I were both called Mika.

In May, Panić’s platoon was arrested and taken to Bjelovar, and he managed to escape. On that occasion he fell and his stomach ruptured, but he didn’t give up his plan.

- Ustahas arrested his platoon and all of them were confined to the second floor of the Bjelovar High School. One night, my husband jumped out of the window into the yard and ran away. In the town, he stumbled upon a shop with a sign on it - Tivar suits - Grinhud. He knocked on the window, and Mr Grinhud opened. He said: “Mr Grinhud, my wife is Jewish. Could you give me a suit, please.” He asked him who my wife was, he told him my maiden name, and Grinhud confirmed that he knew my sister Klara Kelemen, because he served his military service in Čakovec. He dressed him in a new suit, put a hat on his head and my husband was ready to go to Belgrade.

For the next ten days, he walked at night, hiding in the forests of Slavonia during the day. He arrived to his village in the last few days of May.

- Can you imagine, we arrived to Zemun on the same evening at the same place. I took my husband’s arm and helped him to move. He held on to his stomach. I approached my father-in-law who was waiting behind a building and said: “I’ve found your son.” I decided to go to our apartment and if someone was there - I would kill them.

Dallas, November 2014

Tijana Wages: *After the capitulation, my father returned wounded and the way my mother and him reunited was incredible. Immediately afterwards, they went to the village and stayed there the next year. Briefly put, the Chetniks sentenced my mother to death. Then begins their work in the intelligence service, then begins their time in Belgrade.*

Gold and diamonds from jam

The apartment was empty. The two men walked in slowly, and Eva immediately headed for the pantry. During the night of her escape from Belgrade, she left jars of jam on the shelves and her mother's jewelry in one of them - she hoped it was still there.

- Everything was still there, untouched. This is the jewelry my mother left me, I knew that one day it would come in handy.

She packed all that could fit in six suitcases. Some clothes, feather duvets that she still has in Israel, silver cutlery, some food, ... The next morning, at dawn, when the peasants from Sriem started coming to

work on the nearby field, the three Panićs headed toward the bridge.

- I showed the cutlery with twelve silver spoons, forks and knives to one Hungarian soldier and said: "I have a wounded soldier and suitcases. Give me a ride to Zeleni vijenac in Belgrade." He nodded and said, "Load them up, madam". When we arrived there I entered the first tavern and asked who would give me a horse and a čeza⁹ in exchange for a diamond ring. They offered me two horses, but I insisted on what I asked for. After a few minutes the barter was completed, we loaded the suitcases, climbed and headed towards the village. As we were approaching the village, we decided to wait for night and



A 20-year old Eva Panić was photographed in a coat with a red fox fur collar, which her husband Radoslav Panić killed during the hunt

⁹ A two-wheeled carriage.

then enter the village so that people would not know that my husband was wounded because there was a risk he could be taken into captivity. Nobody except the immediate family was allowed to know he was at home.

Passing through Kruševica in the pitch dark, the Panićs travelled home in complete silence. Radoslav immediately went to bed and during the following months his mother Tijana would treat his ruptured stomach with herbs and ointments. Not once did they call the doctor because even the slightest risk of increasing the number of people who knew that Radoslav Panić was at home - was unacceptable. - All who had rebelled against the Germans began to move or pass through the village. Partisans and their supporters. I began to communicate with them and they found out that my husband was at home. At that time, the government of General Milan Nedić ruled Serbia and his supporters came to our house and offered Rade to report on where the fights between partisans and Nazis in the mountain near Kruševac took place. They offered to hire him in the Serbian State Guard. So, we were in such a way connected with the Partisans, and Rade was a member of the regular gendarmerie, the police.

**Čakovec - Dallas - Sha'ar
HaAmakim, November 2014**

In my correspondence with Tijana Wages, many impressions I got from the talks I had with Eva Panić Nahir further crystallized. However, there is one story, I encountered for the first time. Tijana suggested asking her mother, I quote: "... for the details of the story that will likely be of interest to people in Čakovec, about a commander from Zemun, from the time of NDH (Independent State of Croatia), whose Jewish wife lived with the Kelemen grandparents". I received Eva's reply by e-mail.



Eva Panić Nahir with the president of the Jewish Community Čakovec Andrej Pal, MD, in front of her birthplace house, where she was born on August 3rd 1918

Eva Panić Nahir: *Before World War II started here in Čakovec, in the 8th Cavalry Regiment, together with my Rade, served lieutenant colonel Schaller. He lived with his wife, who was Jewish, originally from Virovitica. My family knew them very well. When the war broke out, he joined the Ustashas in Zemun and became the commander. He allegedly divorced from his wife and left her to stay in the apartment with my parents. For a whole year, each month he would come to Čakovec to visit his wife and then he would deliver my letter to my parents. Upon his return from Čakovec to Zemun, my father-in-law and I would go from Kruševica to Belgrade to meet him. Schaller would cross the Sava river in a boat wearing civilian clothes, and our meeting place was always in front of the Bristol hotel in Karadorđeva Street. There he would hand me the letter and the money my parents sent me. I think his wife ended up with my parents in the camp, and as for Schaller, he was killed after the war.*



During years, the family house of the Kelemens changed owners and purposes. From 1980 on the ground floor there was a store named "Izvor" established by Trgoćentar, Čakovec.

Counterintelligence

- During 1942, the Chetniks became more active in our area. They told my husband that he had to divorce me because I was Jewish, and all Jews were on the side of Moše Pijade. Rade told them that he would divorce me and send me to my parents in Hungary, but he sent me to Užice, which was liberated, and he went to Belgrade. His connection was our best man Vljako Purić who was, as lieutenant colonel, the deputy commander of Belgrade. Rade told him that he wanted to cooperate with him and offered to infiltrate the Chetniks of Draža Mihajlović, who were all German informants. They elaborated a plan on how I would report about what they were doing and which people were in danger. Then, Purić soon realized that I could also be trusted. He provided us with the necessary documents and in a short period of time I came from Užice to Belgrade. There, no one knew I was Jewish, so I was able to move freely.

So the married couple Panić returned to Belgrade. The authorities accommodated them in a house of an elderly man who lived alone and was a supporter of Draža Mihailović. They told him that Eva and Radoslav Panić were refugees from Croatia. Every evening, ten minutes before ten, certain liaison people met with the Panićs who then conveyed to them important information and names of the people who could be found on the Chetnik lists for arrest. The next day, they would try to transport those people to the partisans, but until its realisation the fugitives secretly slept at the Panićs.

- We gave the intelligence agent the names of Draža's associates and the names of people who were marked as partisan friends by the Chetniks. That way, we informed more than 1500 people who were to be arrested, but had been previously sent to the partisans. Most of them stayed with us before the escape, while we tried to live a seemingly normal everyday life. I cooked for my husband and the landlord, worked in his garden, days were passing by. I was my husband's right hand in the intelligence business. Rade officially worked in Nedić's army and was a spy at Draža Mihajlović supporters called Dražinovci, but also worked for a confectioner. He found this job through one of our Čakovec connections, and as I sold the candies quite skillfully, we somewhat managed to survive. We worked all the time, carrying the messages and shipments to Purić and vice versa. Rade found out many Chetnik and Nedić's secrets and often had the information about where the raids would take place and who would get arrested. Sometimes it was really

very difficult. Actually, despite living in constant danger, we weren't very afraid. We were so stupid.

It wasn't the first time that Radoslav Panić found himself in the role of mediator during the war. A similar task was assigned to him by Mirko Weiss in Čakovec, Eva describes this episode:

- Mirko said to my Rade that the Čakovec batallion was a penal batallion for the Serbs who were considered communists. Marko asked Rade to do only one thing - give the letters written by Mirko's communists to the soldiers in the barracks. It was his obligation within the movement and he fulfilled it.

During the war period, they trusted the young Panić and hired him in the Ministry of Interior when the war ended.

- The most fierce fights for the liberation of Belgrade were led from the 13th to the 20th October 1944. Yugoslav National Liberation Army (NOVJ) and the Russian Red Army fought with the Germans, and we were ordered to transfer our entire Draža Mihailović archives to a specific place in Belgrade, to Ćubura. I moved everything under the whistling bullets. After the liberation, Rade began working in the Ministry of the Interior. He got the rank of police captain, and he was still a man of trust. Together with freedom came our wish to have a child. In June 1945, I gave birth to our daughter. We named her Tijana, after my mother-in-law. She now lives in America and has two children, Emily and Jason.

Dallas, November 2014.

Tijana Wages: *Their counterintelligence work began back in Kruševica, when Rade came back. They were in connection with the partisans who helped mom to first escape to free Užice, and later to Belgrade. Looking for Eva, the Chetniks came, beat grandfather Milosav and left him half dead. Grandpa tied his son Dosa high up on a tree, because he was afraid that he would talk. When the Chetniks had left, my grandmother wrapped grandfather in the skin of a just slaughtered sheep, and started healing him. Namely, Grandmother, though illiterate, was a known village healer and midwife.*

A short time of happiness

After the end of the Second World War, a three-member family Panić comfortably lived in a beautifully decorated apartment. Tijana was growing up, and her parents were very happy together. Radoslav was employed and worked in the Police Cavalry School in Zemun, as commander of a Sports group in the National Police, and Eva was a housewife. Their next-door neighbours and best friends in the centre of Belgrade, in 34 Kosmajaska Street, were Mira and Vlado Carin, a doctor and a journalist, and their two daughters.

Always full of energy Eva prepared meals for both families and took care of three children. She followed her husband to equestrian competitions and hurdles races at home and abroad. Two years in a row he won the national gold medal in show jumping. There were races in which he was injured, and the last accident happened to him in September 1951 when he broke his collarbone. He wore a cast, and that was why he had to stay on sick leave at the beginning of October.

It was during these days that Panić's best man was arrested.

- Then we did not believe that he was arrested by the Cominform, even though we knew that he had been to Russia during the war. It was clear that he was a Russophile. Four days later his wife and the people he was close with were arrested, too.

On Friday, 12 October 1951 Radoslav Panić received an invitation by General Drulović to come to the Ministry for a meeting.

- Rade came back from the meeting and said that the General asked him to organize a horse race. I asked him how he could do it, still in plaster? He didn't want to change his mind and said he would go to buy some firewood for the winter. Again, he acted strange. I asked him if he was crazy and why would he need to buy the wood now? He did not answer, but complained that the cast hurt him and asked me to give him something to relieve it. I gave him a cotton wool pad, but he said: "Well, you'd better put a bandage on it". Why am I mentioning this fact? It was the bandage he used for hanging himself in prison!

My husband is sacred to me

After breakfast the next day, on Saturday, Radoslav was about to go out and told Eva that he would call her to say whether he'd be home in time for lunch, because

he was going to the Ministry for another interview with the general. This was be the last time that Eva saw her husband.

She waited for him with lunch, and when she realized that it was too long without any sign of him, she started calling the places where she thought he could be. In vain. She went to the headquarters in Zemun and found out that Radoslav had never reached the general. She returned home and waited.

- Saturday passed, Sunday too, and on Monday I got ready and went searching for my husband to Banjica, the military complex and the prison. Tijana was six years old, just started school. I told her to go to Mira Carin`s place after school. I could not know when I`d be back because Banjica was far away. I asked Rade`s superior where my husband was, and he replied that some people had come and asked for him. I found out that he was taken away by two UDBA agents with no explanation, and his superior promised me that he would do everything to set him free. I went back home.

The next morning, Eva and Tijana were at the Carins, when the doorbell rang. There was a man in a black leather coat standing on the doorstep of the Panić`s neighbours.

- He asked me if I was comrad Panić, and I said that he must have come to help me find my husband. However, he expressed his condolences to me.

At that moment, still calm, Eva replied that it was not necessary, because Radoslav was neither the first nor the last to be arrested, and that he would certainly be released.

- He tried to commit suicide, said the UDBA man.

- Is he alive or dead?

- We`ll see when we get to the Military Hospital.

- I`ll fall under the trolleybus!

- Come on comrade Panić, I have a car outside the house. I`ll take you.

Tijana remained at Mira Carin`s home, and Eva went with the man in black. It was about two in the afternoon.

- When I got into the car man said stiffly: "Lie down bitch, lie down so that no one sees you." I was dismayed. I lay on the back seat and they drove me. When we arrived in front of the Military Hospital only the man in the coat entered, and I was left to wait in the car together with the driver. He came back and told him to drive me to the head-

quarters. I protested and said that they should take me home because my daughter was waiting for me. They took me to the Serbian UDBA¹⁰ headquarters in Obilićev vijenac. It was near our apartment. They put me in a small cell. Every now and then a policeman would look through the hole and ask me about Panić? They threw cigarettes into my cell, and I was standing there, making two steps to the left, and back to the right. I did not know what was going on. Was I arrested? Why? I did not know if my husband was alive or dead?! I freaked out. Night came.

Eva spent the night in a one square meter cell, mainly standing or sitting, and in the evening she lay diagonally on the floor, because otherwise it wasn't possible to stretch her body. In the morning she went to the Military Hospital with a police officer.

- A policeman told me to get ready, and then they took me. When I entered one room in the Military Hospital, I was confronted by two officers and a military doctor. One of them came to me: "Comrade Panić, your husband hanged himself on the frame of a bed. He tied a bandage around his neck, tugging at it until he cut his own throat. Blood came out on his mouth and eyes. When the guard arrived, he had already been dead. You have the right to see him if you want. He's in the morgue." I said: "God forbid, no! I want to keep him in my memory as he was." He hanged himself on 16 October 1951. It was the saddest day of my life.

They offered her then to sign a statement according to which she "renounces her husband Radoslav Panić as a traitor and public enemy".



Eva Panić Nahir: "When I realized that I lost my husband, my whole world crashed!"

¹⁰ State Security Service was established in 1946. The infamous secret police with a broad network of informants and provocateurs

- *Comrade Panić, your husband was arrested as a public enemy, as a supporter of Stalin. Make a statement in which you renounce him, and it will be published tomorrow in the Borba*¹¹.
- *I will not sign. Rade is neither a traitor nor a public enemy. To give up my husband?! My husband is sacred to me!*
- *Then you will remain in jail.*
- *Then I'll stay in jail.*
- *You will lie there for three years.*
- *I will stay there for three years.*
- *Your daughter Tijana will be left on the street.*
- *Tijana won't be left on the street. She has got a family and friends.*

Dallas, November 2014

Tijana Wages: *I clearly remember the morning when they took my mother. I begged Mioma, as we called Mira Carin, not to eat it all because we have to leave something for Mum to have for lunch when she returns. You'll laugh, but I remember that we had stew with one piece of chicken for each of us, and I was afraid that "Mum's piece" would not be left for her. Of course, she didn't return.*

Čakovec, June 2012

Eva Panić Nahir: *When I found out I lost my husband, it was my greatest misfortune. We had a very good marriage, full of love and tolerance. I did not want to give it up. I would never agree to it, under any circumstances. I loved him more than anything. Now, before returning to Israel, I went to Kruševica to say goodbye to him. When I returned from Goli Otok, from Sveti Grgur, I demanded his exhumation. He was buried at the military cemetery under a number, no name. My mother- and father-in-law brought a crate, fabric and a rug because it was required in order for them to give me the body for recognition. Can you imagine? After two and a half years - just bones. I recognized his teeth and jaw. I recognized him immediately. That's the same jaw our daughter Tijana has.*

¹¹ A paper that was a political magazine in the service of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia

Čakovec, May 2014

Eva Panić Nahir: *It's hard to answer the question of why Rade killed himself in custody. I wondered about it. Rade was such a person, from the outside strong and tough, from the inside sensitive. He could not bear being so humiliated by those he sacrificed his life for. It's my interpretation.*

I have never been a spy!

Then she was returned to a solitary confinement and for three days nobody asked her anything. On the fourth day she was taken for questioning.

- I asked the investigators why Rade killed himself, but they completely ignored me. They asked me to speak about my husband's co-workers, about what he was doing, who he hanged out with? I did not understand what they wanted from me. I kept telling them that I did not understand what they wanted from me. After a few days of interrogation, they said they had plenty time, and I would surely change my mind and cooperate. Ten days later they called me to sign a statement according to which I was arrested on the grounds of espionage for the Soviet Union. I refused to sign and said: "I will not sign it even if you kill me. I have never been a spy."

During the next few days she kept refusing to sign that compromising statement. Investigators were changing, each of them using their own method of pressure, one of them even told her to sign it and complain afterwards. She refused.

*- Your husband hanged himself, you can do the same, bitch. You know, but you won't talk.
- You will pay this dearly.*

Eva Panić was still wearing the boots in which she was brought into custody. She tried to use the leather laces from her boots to end her life.

- In the solitary I hanged myself with shoelaces on the door hinge. From the outside they heard my panting, entered, released my neck and poured water on me. My neck was cut and I was never left alone any more, they placed me in a room with other women who nurtured and fed me. I weighed 38 kilograms.

They changed her investigator. Eva claimed that he knew how to talk to her.

- He would tell me, for example, that he saw my daughter walking along Kalemegdan with two other girls or something else about her. He always insisted that I could talk to him freely about the people who used to visit us and that I could have faith and believe nothing would happen to them. I told him that friends visited us and nothing really was happening. Then, suddenly, every investigation stopped. It had already been six months since I was imprisoned at Obilićev vijenac. From the window of my cell I watched them emptying our apartment, taking out things. Friends and neighbours put away some of my clothes. Later they themselves told me about it.

How? On the roof of the building where the Panićs lived Eva's neighbours Agica Sas and Milica Uzelac occasionally met. They would come at night and stand on the spot best for "eavesdropping" from the cell across.

- The cell was facing the road so my sister in law Rosa and her husband Todor Todorovski went for a walk every day. We would shortly communicate with gestures or whispering. Then, I also signalled them that Rade hanged himself. At first they did not understand, but I tried waving my arms and in the end they understood. The next day they sent me a black scarf to prison. I found out from my neighbours that they saved some things and that my daughter Tijana went to Lendava, to my sister Klara. Neighbours Agica, Milica and Fanika, the housekeeper would climb to the roof of our building and talk loudly. One early evening Milica said: "Alas, she'd rather stop crying. Tajika is at Klara's in Lendava". So I found out that my daughter was safe, I was not worried for myself. I believed that I would go home soon.

III.

Sveti Grgur - GOLI OTOK

April 14, 1952

Božo Drobac, a prison governor at UDBA addressed Eva Panić during her detention with fake appreciation. She could not imagine what the reason might be for that, but eventually she realized. After half a year in custody, the day came when Eva had to be transferred to a place which would eventually deeply mark her personality.

- Božo Drobac was a very nice man. Whenever I got a parcel, he would say: "Eat something Panić, you're only 38 kilos." I did not know why he treated me so nicely, but I found out later. After almost six months of my detention, I was invited to the assembly room. They told me to take only my private things and leave everything else, because I was going home. Some women were already in the large room. I asked where we were going, and they replied that we were going to serve our sentence. Sentence? Well I had not even been tried, got a verdict, nothing. It was April 14, 1952 when they put a few of us in the car and took us away. Belgrade was prosperous, people on the streets joyful, there was something good in the air, and the seventeen of us were being taken ... we did not know where, nor why. It really was a horrible feeling.

Eva Panić says that at that time she knew about an island in the Adriatic, a prison camp. She had never explicitly heard its name, not until she got acquainted to it directly.

- I knew there was an island which people who were sent there called Hawaii, but when we left Belgrade I did not know we were going precisely there. They drove us to Topčider train station. A train with carriages with frosted glass windows was awaiting there. Two people were assigned to one seat where they were tied up. I was tied up with a girl called Bosa, a student of philosophy, a partisan since she had been fourteen. Then she was only 22, and I was 33. Once, back in custody, Bosa took my hand and said: "I am Bosa Đurović, a Montenegrin. Let's never get separated." And we did not. She was terribly beaten because she was a true Stalinist, since most Montenegrins were great Russophiles. Whilst there, I always had some cloths ready to put on her open wounds after she was beaten.

It was a long train journey, and its female passengers, accused without indictment and convicted without a verdict, were left without food for the entire time. They quietly speculated about the route of the train. They were not allowed to talk, so they would only say a few words to each other under their breath. When night fell, the train stopped and then the regime began.

When leaving the wagons, women caught a glimpse of the sea glistening in the moonlight. The concrete shore and the ship were joined by a plank which the women used to start entering the belly of the vessel, one after another. On the ship's bow the word *Punat* was written in big letters.

- The yelling and pushing started. Police officers were shouting: "Get in, get in, you bastards, get up, bastards!" We all got mad. Then for the first time in my life I heard the term bastards. I did not know what that meant. We were in the belly of a ship, it started swaying, the hysteria began. We were afraid that we were being taken away to be thrown into the sea, some women threw up, some urinated and even defecated in shock. In this turmoil and confusion all kinds of silly things could be heard - they would cut off their beautiful hair or they would break their glasses.

The boat journey lasted until sunset. The noise from outside could be heard inside the ship. Eighteen overtired, terrified women listened to singing, yelling and insults.

- We were approaching the place from where an incredible noise could be heard. We heard singing, but also annoying cries. "Boo bastards" were the cries that could be clearly heard. When we came closer, we could hear women's voices singing "we will destroy the bastards, none of them will be left." We panicked. You had the impression that you had come among beasts.

When *Punat* was anchored, the prisoners got off the ship quickly and under constant threats. Any loitering would result in getting beaten. Infuriated women in uniforms, placed in two rows awaited them on the barren land. Eva was dragged from the boat by her hair and thrown onto the ground. That's how she arrived at the women's camp on the uninhabited islet of Sveti Grgur, situated between the islands of Rab, Krk, Prvić and Goli otok for *correctional community service*, although, as a civilian, she had never got a verdict, nor any other document for it.

- Women who were there waiting for us were howling and beating us as we were passing by. You went past, and each of them hit you with her hand or foot, or spat at you. Some of us got broken ribs, vertebrae, were dragged across the floor, stamped on. I received a lot of blows to the head. When I later saw myself in the reflection of water in a barrel, full of lumps on the head and face, I thought that my own mother would not recognize me. But it was nothing compared to the other women who had ended up with broken arms, legs, eyes knocked out. The first scene after this "welcome" we saw a building in front of us with a sign on it: Tito's way - our way.

Women

All women from Eva's group were settled in the barracks called the House of Culture. Ironically, the floor was covered with straw and they all had to lie down next to each other. After they had spent some time lying down, they were taken for a haircut.

- Bosa lay next to me, we stuck together when they took us to get a haircut. Comrade activists gave us haircuts. Those were the women, former prisoners who had been reformed and now got on well with the authorities. We were literally sheared like sheep, using sheep shears. A tuft of hair left here and there, the shears scratching your skin a little. Although I was small I was given shoes size 42 and a skirt coming down to the floor, and Ružica Božičković, who was 180 centimetres tall, was given a short skirt covering only half of her buttocks. There were no buttons on the clothing, so when we wore it, it opened revealing parts of the body. We all looked disfigured.

Female prisoners, three thousand of them, were mostly young women. Eva points out that she was among the older ones, but there were women who were even older. Regardless of age, they were all humiliated and abused, mentally and physically in the same manner. They spent their first evening standing in front of the barracks -

like scarecrows, Eva would say. Each barrack had its elder, and she had a deputy. Those women were also convicts. Reformed. There were no men on the island. The convicts were told that early in the morning the next day they would go to the construction site, and then the “collective” stood in front of them and started to spit.

- They shouted at us, howling, spitting. Unbelievable. The elder counted us and gave a report to the policewoman.

In the evening they received the first portion of food since they left the Belgrade Prison. It was corn flour with a little sugar. Later on, they would eat pretty much the same, a crumb of bread, never meat.

Nights interrupted with cries

- They started interrogating us individually already on the first night of our arrival. They called your name and took you from the barrack. It never happened to me at night, but I often waited for my fellow sufferers with a cloth to cover their open wounds. All that could be heard in the barracks was screaming, every time. They tied women on a bench and hit them with truncheons asking them with whom they socialized, about their relationships and connections. The next morning we went to work.

It is generally known that on Goli Otok, including the island of Sveti Grgur, where there were female convicts, stones were carried from one side to another, up the hill and back down the hill. It was a Sisyphean task leading to complete physical, mental and emotional exhaustion. The bigger the stone, the greater possibility that a woman would fall under its weight. For elders, it was an excuse for further beating.

- You carried a stone up the hill, left it, took another and carried it down the hill. The stones were carried on a piece of wood with two rods, called “tralje”. Once crushed stone fell out of my hand, and they took me to a pear tree and punished me by hitting my legs with barbed wire. Comrade activists were shouting: “You bastard, now you pretend that you cannot carry, and you knew how to conspire against Tito!” Two weeks later, confession time¹² came. The amphitheatre was full of camp community employees and convicts. Each convict was individually shouted at: “Confess your wrongdoing, you bastard! How

¹² In the original Croatian text the term “raskritikovanje” is used. “Confession of your wrongdoing” is the translation used in the English version.

did you spy and conspire, expose your links and connections, what did you do...". Unbelievable. Women gave all kinds of answers, but not one name was uttered. The answers were, for instance: "I plotted with a friend at college," and similar. I never said anything. That's why they shouted: "Boycott! Boo, you bastard, boycott!"

Boycott

What was the boycott? The torture that the inmates went through for their silence during interrogation and *"confession of their wrongdoing"*.

- Boycott is something that you cannot even imagine. It was torture to death, losing common sense. First of all, I was not allowed to sleep at night. When we went to bed at 22:00, I'd lie down, and after five minutes I would be awakened by the elder. I would stand, and she would interrogate me, forcing me to speak about something that did not have anything to do with reality, let alone with my life or my husband's life. For example: "One day you'll talk. Reveal your husband's connections, you gonna talk sooner or later". And so on and on.

Eva Panić often stood together with Desanka Diklić, a lawyer. None of them had anything to say, so they continued to remain silent. After carrying stones during the day, lack of sleep and standing up at night, after a few days Eva could no longer bear standing. Her legs were swollen, she went to the doctor's.

- I told the doctor that I couldn't walk, and she told me: "Unburden yourself and we will unburden you". This meant "confess and we will make it easier for you." She told me to say something that was not true, something I had nothing to do with?! When I was in the boycott, I had no right to talk to anyone during the 12-hours at work. The only right I had was to ask the person who was watching me to let me go to the toilet. As a boycotted one, everyone could spit at me and beat me, and in the barracks I was not allowed to sleep on a bed but below the urinal bucket, so the women pissed on my mouth.

The only thing that kept her alive was the thought of her daughter. Her only motive for every stone she moved, every step she made on Sveti Grgur - was Tijana's life. She repeated like a mantra that she had to take every stone up the hill because there was a doctor who would help her sick child.

- I repeated it constantly to myself, if I did not take the stone, Tijana would die. On the way down the hill I thought my legs would collapse, and then I would lie to myself: "Down

there is the pharmacy. If you do not bring down the whole stone, you won't be able to get in", Tijana was the only salvation for me. In my mind I only saw her and I told myself: "Do not ever think about suicide because Tijana's waiting for you." From lack of sleep my eyes watered extensively for five months. Later, I could not close my eyes all the way, and even today I cannot fully bend my right elbow. I was injured and my right arm got black and blue. They tied it to my back so I carried the stones with my left hand.

Tijana

Eva knew nothing about Tijana in her prison camp days, except that she was in Lendava at her sister Klara. One day she had to respond to the call of Hilda Sedej, a warden of the Women Camp, not even imagining that the topic of the talk could be her daughter.

- When three months of my "boycott" had already past, Hilda, a warden, invited me to her office. She said that my daughter wrote to Aleksandar Ranković, who was in charge of police and security services, asking where her mother was. Hilda told me that Ranković ordered me to write a letter to give a sign that I was alive. I did.

Ružica, the saviour

It turned out that Ruža Božičković played the same role for Eva Panić as Jagoda Rotanić did in her childhood, and a lot more. She was her friend and guardian - almost as important as life itself. After Sveti Grgur they would remain friends forever.

- Ružica heard that I had a daughter and that my husband committed suicide, so she wanted to help. Since the stones I carried were always falling out of my hand, simply because I was physically too weak, they constantly beat me with barbed wire. Ružica was a big, young, Dalmatian woman. She always stood behind me, and the thing is that you have to carry the burden together with the one behind you. When she first stepped behind my back, I thought she wanted to show me how much stronger she was. I felt bad, worried, and I couldn't ask her why she would stand behind me. However, Ružica loaded the stones in a way so that all the weight of the stones were left to her. I could not ask why she was doing it, but when we received a permission to speak, she said that she saw them beat me and thought: "I will save that woman." Every day she came up to me

and helped me. She remained my friend forever, just like Bosa. Ruža's son Mladen still writes to me, we are in contact. Bosa's son Vladimir, too.

Many women were losing their strength. It was nothing unusual because they worked hard, and ate very little. Food for the convicts was prepared mainly based on corn flour and tea. They had never got meat for a meal, and there was so little bread that it was not even perceived as food. They slept in barracks that were once grain silos. A small space with triple bunk beds.

- We could talk only in the barrack. Ružica told me that she had never heard of Cominform¹³, did not even know what it was. I asked one 19-year-old Russian woman why she was on the island, and she said she was swimming and there was a man from the Russian embassy somewhere nearby. Two men approached and arrested her. They took her into custody in a bathing suit.

Women served their time on Sveti Grgur, men on Goli Otok. The wardens were mainly women, the only men on Grgur - were guards in high positions. They guarded the approach to the island. No ships were allowed to pass.

Eva became friends with Adela Bohunická, a doctor, declared Russophile. She shared the despair with her peer, later also a friend, Dea Guberina, whose husband sent the divorce papers to her on the island and married another woman at home. She says that on Sveti Grgur, or during the investigation, she never experienced any gesture of anti-Semitism. She had a good relationship with a lot of women no matter where they came from. She was bed to bed with Duša Jovanović, so every night she stroked her hair before falling asleep.

On Sveti Grgur in a separate group there were young participants of the Journalist and Diplomatic College from Belgrade.

- Duša would later say that she could not wait for me to lie down and pat her a little. See how little we needed. Deja introduced me to her friend Vera, from the group of journalism students. Vera came to the island a year after me and occasionally we used to hang out together, to make the burden of our grief easier to carry. She is the late wife of Slavko Goldstein. You know, the hell on Sveti Grgur aroused more good among good people, and the bad ones became even worse. Our colleagues, fellow convicts also beat us, because in that way they proved how they hated the enemy and how reformed they were. Horror. Something like that is hard to imagine.

¹³ Information Bureau of Communist and Workers' Parties

Eva Panić had never seen a female corpse on Sveti Grgur. She says she had never testified to a death of a convict. If someone died, it was undoubtedly a secret that has never been found out.

- Police women counted us regularly, and the elders – reformed convicts - stayed with us, beat us, monitored, hated and called us hopeless bastards. You are reformed as much as you hate the bastards who have not been reformed. I was desperate, but I never thought that I would end up there. I knew it must come to an end. In my life I have never been a Stalinist, nor a Cominformist. I have never loved either.

I will spit at Gordana tonight

Even now in her old age Eva is unable to get rid of some pictures from Sveti Grgur. Some scenes and feelings unimaginable to anyone who has not experienced the extreme brutality of man over man still haunt her. She will remember Gordana Aćimović and Jovanka Rebrača as long as she lives.

- Sometimes during the night I cannot get rid of some pictures. It was an extremely hot summer. Jovanka Rebrača was punished by being exposed. They put her in a box in which she stood, tied, and we watched her when passing by. The sun was unbearable, and she had chronic diarrhea. She was constantly leaking, fainting, and they'd pour water on her. When I think of Jovanka, I get goosebumps.

She also remembers Gordana Aćimović, who was totally physically and mentally numb during the last months of our stay on Sveti Grgur. She would sit, constantly looking into the distance, completely isolated from the environment. Nothing mattered to her, she was dirty, drawling from her mouth.

At the same time, Margita Adler was concerned about Eva's passivity which was drawing her deeper and deeper into further prolongation of the boycott. One day walking to the site, she suggested that she should swallow that little bit of remaining humanity and pride for just one moment, and do something for herself. It would only take a second.

- Eva, you're going to stay here forever. You know that passivity is the first step to hostility and that your sentence will be constantly extended. I know that you cannot do any harm to anyone here, but you can see Gordana Aćimović sitting here, you see that she is not quite normal. When going back from work, pass by her and spit at her. She won't feel it.

Show how much you hate the enemy and have your sentence annulled.

- I'll see.

When being reformed, you must show that you've got things straight with the enemy.

What was more important for Eva Panić was – get things straight with herself.

- Every day I carried those stones and thought: "Tonight I will spit at Gordana Aćimović. Tonight I will spit at Gordana Aćimović" and then the evening came, and I could not do it. I met Gordana later in Belgrade. She told me: "I knew what you talked about, but I could not respond. Thank you so much." These two experiences with Jovanka and Gordana will stay with me forever. Women brutalized each other. They went through such terrible torment that they often turned into animals. From the beginning until the dissolution of the camp on Sveti Grgur there was a woman called Marković. A month after arriving home, I heard later, she went to her mother's grave and killed herself. She was one of the few older women there, she was 72 years old. Rada Popović, a sister of the national hero Žarko Zrenjanin was also there with us.

Record

The International Women's Day was also celebrated on Sveti Grgur. Eva remembers what it was like.

- Posters would be placed on the barracks, and we had to sing. I still remember it clearly today, the song that went: "And every day I'm gonna be better, a step closer to freedom I'm walking the way, the way led by Tito". Or for example: "And soon we will be in the association of women. We will build, build, build our country,"

They went to the site singing. In the afternoon they had to sing, and the *bastards* stood to the side. Bastards were those not accepted by the community, those who hadn't "revised their political attitude".

Each of them wrote her own record. It was expected that each of them wrote about her entire life on the white paper, mentioning as many names as possible, sins, who was who, who did favours for whom, who betrayed whom. For Eva Panić, many times punished by boycotting, it was an ideal opportunity to sit and rest a bit.

- You got a pen and paper and had to write from morning till night on a small stool and a box. You were required to write all your hostile work, all your thoughts, what you know and

do not know, what you were and weren't dreaming about. I had to write it all: from when I was breast fed as a baby to this day, and then they would check what I had written and whether I had withheld something or lied. They would then decide whether to cancel my boycott or whether to give me a more terrifying punishment because I lied to the management.

The beating and torture of convicts stopped when the warden Hilda Sedej was replaced by Tanja Vilotić. Although for Eva Hilda was the horror of all horrors, many other female convicts claimed that the former warden Marija Zelić had been even more brutal. She was one of those who, in front of her superiors, would boast about her bloodthirstiness.

Shortly after Tanja Vilotić was appointed as the new warden, Slobodan Penezić Krcun, the Minister of Interior came to take a tour of the Women's camp. When he entered the room where the convicts were writing their records, he recognized Eva Panić and was totally stunned.

- Panić, what are you doing here?

- Comrade Minister, surely you are more familiar with the reason, because I still do not know why I'm here.

- Sit down, and go on with writing.

Dissolution of the site. Freedom.

Krcun Penezić was embarrassed to see Eva visibly shaken by their meeting and talk. She remembers that her record was sent further and a month later she was summoned to the investigator Duško Lazarević. He was, she says, very pleasant to her.

- Panić, we have received the verification of your record from Belgrade and you are taking the first available transportation home.

- Comrade investigator, I have not been reformed, nor informed. I do not know why I came here, I do not know why I'm going home. I have no idea.

- Listen, I've said my piece. If you do not make any mistake - trust me, you'll go home with the first possible transportation.

Tanja Vilotić's husband was also an investigator whom Eva met two days before leaving Sveti Grgur. He instructed her on what to do when she got out.

- I do not remember what his name was, but he told me: "Panić, your case is very sad.

What can you do? Raise your daughter Tijana well, and if someone asks you anything, come to us. You do not have to cooperate with anybody and answer to anyone.” I did not get any paper from him.

The next day, 28 November 1953, the women were invited to the meeting and informed that they would be released. They called them one by one and handed to each of them a thousand dinars.

- At the meeting we were told not to talk about anything when we got out. We were told that this way we would show that we deserved UDBA’s trust and would be classified as normal citizens, accepted by society. The dissolution of the Women’s camp was actually Khrushchev¹⁴’s condition to come to terms with Tito. In addition to the money they gave us, each of us got a piece of paper, as well. It said that I was at community work and that was also my ticket to ride. How much is a thousand dinars, I thought? I had no idea. It had been two years since I had been free.

That very evening, the women, three thousand of them, were free. All night they sang relentlessly, and in the morning they boarded a ship in their new convict suits. After half a year of being in custody and having served twenty months of hard labour on Sveti Grgur, Eva Panić was free. When the former prisoners from a deserted Adriatic island sailed into Rijeka, they boarded the trains. To different directions. Eva Panić headed to Lendava. She wanted to see her daughter.

- In the last days of November 1953, I set off to Lendava to my sister’s. My arrival was a very big shock and surprise for them. Of course, no one expected me. Tijana was the first to see me and she said: “Alas, Eva is here”. I was in a convict suit, which was a terrible shock for her. She had to go to school, and I stayed there sitting with my sister. I planned to stay in Lendava.

Dallas, November 2014

Tijana Wages: *When my mother returned from prison, I asked her: “Did you two love something else more than me, to leave me just like that?”.*

¹⁴ Nikita Sergejevich Khrushchev was a Russian politician and president of the USSR from September 1958 to October 1964. In the history he was remembered as the General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party from 1953 to 1964, but also as a person who declared Josif Visarionovič Stalin responsible for mass killings and deportations, the German invasion in World War II and the Soviet break with the former Yugoslavia.

“Welcome” of the nearest and dearest

Klara quickly rejected her sister, saying that she did not want her near her family. She did not want to consider the possibility of them living together, but advised Eva to try her luck in Zagreb. Undoubtedly they felt discomfort because of Eva's appearance in the uniform from Sveti Grgur and the fact that Klara's family was often visited by investigators to question little Tijana Panić about her family. They wanted to know who her parents socialized with, whether they listened to foreign radio stations in their home, who came to their house.

For Tijana those days were traumatic. But those in Belgrade, before she arrived in Lendava, had been even worse.

Eva Panić did not know anyone in Zagreb, so she decided to go to Belgrade alone. She left her daughter with her sister in Lendava. When she would be in a situation to provide a real home and security for her daughter, she would bring her to live with her. When she arrived in Belgrade, from the railway station she phoned the mother of her dead husband in Kruševica.

- *My dear, we cannot take you, you cannot come to us.*
- *I have a thousand dinars in my pocket. The only place I can go to is the Danube.*
- *Unfortunately, we cannot take you. The situation is very complicated.*

Immediately afterwards she called her friend and neighbour Mira Carin.

- *Mira, it's Eva.*
- *Where are you?*
- *Here I am, at the station.*
- *Why do you not come to me?*
- *I dare not.*
- *Just come. You're my friend. Come, I'm waiting for you.*

The accommodation at the Carin family was modest. She had no clothes, nor a real bed, because the apartment was not large enough to fit another bed. The next two years Eva would sleep on the floor, at the only friends who dared give her accommodation. In addition to the Carins, the Metal Servis company was kind to former convicts from Goli Otok. They employed ex-cons, and Eva's knowledge of the German and Hungarian languages proved to be a good recommendation for the job.



Eva Panić's employment book in 1953

- In the Ministry of Interior they asked me what I knew, so I said I spoke languages well. They sent me to a three-year evening school for ino correspondents. During the day I worked in Metal Servis, and then from 16:00 – 22:00 I went to school. So I finished the high professional training and replaced the work at the Metal Servis with a new job in TEKIG Invest. It was a company that was involved in the import and export of leather, rubber and textiles. It was a very good job, I had a better pay, I also got bonuses, and I needed the money to raise my daughter.

In addition to finding a job and attending the evening school, another of Eva's imperatives was the exhumation of the remains of her husband Radoslav Panić.

Čakovec, May 2014

Eva Panić Nahir: *Tijana has the same hands as my husband, the same skin, the same jaw, her father's handwriting and she is not very friendly. Rade was like that. In the five years he had spent in the barracks in Čakovec he had not made a single friend. He was very shy, and so is Tijana. She inherited everything from him. Interesting.*

Tijana's return to her mother

On one occasion, in Belgrade, Eva met Tanja Vilotić, the last warden of the Women's camp on Sveti Grgur. They talked from the perspective of their new lives.

- She told me that she was sent to dissolve the site and make everything possible so that women could normally leave the island. I remember her saying several times: "Do not eat this fat, moisturise your face. What are you going to look like when you go home?" She let us make paper hair curlers and fix ourselves up a little. She told us that we were preparing ourselves for freedom, we had to look like women, not as fools. UDBA sent her because they knew she was a gentle person. Otherwise, it wouldn't be possible.

After two years at large, Eva was given an apartment. She could thank the Jewish community which she turned to following the instructions of Sonja Baruch, a secretary of the League of Communists.

- Sonja told me to go to Moša Pijade and ask for help. I did so. I went to the Jewish Community, to Moša Pijade's office, where in the waiting room were all Jewish women whose husbands were involved in various quisling operations. I told Moša what Rade and I did during the Second World War, he wrote down everything and told me to come next Wednesday. He was informed by Krcun Penezić about me, and he confirmed that everything I said was true and asked him to help me.

Moša Pijade mentioned to Eva Panić that there was a possibility of getting an apartment in a building that was currently under reconstruction. It soon happened. She moved into an apartment in Kosmajaska Street, furnished it with bare necessities and replaced the two years of sleeping on the floor at Mirjana Carin's with her own bed. Finally she could bring her daughter from Lendava to Belgrade. She worked in TEKIG Invest, helped Tijana with her school obligations, spent time with only a narrow circle of friends and tirelessly investigated who had accused her husband of being a Stalinist?

So, with a mother struggling to provide for them the best she could, there was a dark shadow of the past haunting Tijana's childhood.

Dallas, November 2014

Tijana Wages: *When I returned to Belgrade to live with my mother, I went to Classical High School. There were some unpleasant experiences. I remember Sergei who once wrote on the board "Tijana Panić is a child of the public enemy".*

I loved him more than life

Today, Eva confirms this with her words:

- Rade Panić was my greatest happiness. I did not want to give him up. Yes, I loved him more than life. Now that I am close to 96, probably for the last time in Čakovec, I'm going to Mala Kruševica to his grave, to say goodbye. When fifteen years ago I visited Goli Otok with Tijana and my granddaughter Emily, they understood everything. It is immensely important to me.

The truth about who denounced Radoslav Panić and a hundred others, Eva found out shortly after returning from prison. It was Milenko Nikitović, a colonel of the Counterintelligence Service (KOS) who also worked for the Russians. Being a man of trust of KOS, he plotted against the lives of a hundred people. He reported everyone who refused to cooperate for the Russians, including Radoslav Panić.

- Nikitović was sentenced to eighteen years in prison. Then I asked the minister Vojkan Lukić to confirm in writing that my husband was innocent and give me permission for the exhumation of his remains. I got it all. I asked to dig up Rade's remains from the military cemetery where he was buried under a number, no name. The condition to allow me to move him to the tomb in Mala Kruševica was to be able to recognize him. Can you imagine that? After two and a half years - just bones. I recognized his teeth and his jaw. I recognized him immediately. It is the same jaw our daughter has. My in-laws brought a crate, fabric and a rug. We drove him to Kruševica.



Eva Panić Nahir with her daughter Tiana Wages in 2000 on the island Goli otok, when the documentary about Eva was filmed

Dallas, November 2014

Tijana Wages: *When in 2000 a documentary about my mother entitled “Eva” was being made, I asked her for the first time about the decision she made at the time of her detention. So, as an adult, I asked her why she didn’t sign the document against her husband. If she had done that she could have stayed with me. This can also be seen in the film, I was directly puzzled by the fact that I had never asked her that before.*

Čakovec, June 2012

Eva Panić Nahir: *I think communists are despised today. In fact, they have been despised for decades. They are marked. But, for me, the idea of communism itself is a good solution. After all, I live in the socialist kibbutz founded by the Yugoslav emigrants in 1935. I haven’t changed.*

Tijana is leaving her mother

That was the year when Tijana Panić made the decision to move to Israel. She felt all the consequences of her family tragedy and unwillingness to continue living in the same place where she had lost her father, while living with the mother who, even free, had to prove that she was worth that freedom.

- *My daughter said, "Mom, you were communists. Dad had to die, and you ended up on Sveti Grgur. I cannot stay in this country." I told my child that the only option was going to Israel, to the kibbutz founded by former Yugoslavia. There, I had many acquaintances who emigrated from the country, and she spent the summer after she had finished high school there. In 1964 she moved to Kibbutz Sha'ar HaAmakim. Two years later I emigrated there, too.*

Dallas, November 2014.

Tijana Wages: *I think that my departure from Yugoslavia wasn't dramatic. After graduation, at eighteen, I went to my mom's friends in Israel for summer holidays. There they were receiving volunteers and I responded with great interest. It was very nice and when I came back to Belgrade in September, I told my mother that I intended to move to Israel. It is true that I wanted to leave my difficult past behind... due to all the above reasons.*

Confirmation: Radoslav Panić died innocent

At the time of Eva's fight for the truth about her husband, another woman from Čakovec lived and worked in Belgrade, Veda Zagorac Pećar. Someone benevolent tipped off Eva that turning to Veda could be useful for her. It was worth a try.

- *She was writing the memoirs of Josip Broz Tito and was close to the high society circles and I asked her for help. She was clever. She decided to send a telegram to the Congress of War Veterans in my name. She wrote: "I, Eva Panić wonder why my husband had to kill himself, when we have never been Cominformists"? I have heard that they stopped reading my telegram halfway, and I was called by Vojkan Lukić, who was pretty angry, to come to the Central Committee.*



Eva Panić Nahir

Eva was glad that secretary Lukić called her. More than anything she wanted to face anyone who would begin to unravel that knotty tangle of life and death.

- *What is it Panić?*

- *Veda agreed to send a telegraph so that I would be able to tell you that my husband and I have never been Rusophiles. We were not Cominformists. My Rade killed himself in custody immediately upon his arrest. An innocent man. What did you want from us? We sent 1,500 people to the Partisans, saved their lives. I am going to stand in the middle of Terazije and shout this to the world!*

- *You are not going to shout anything anywhere because you are going to Israel.*

- *I cannot go. You've taken everything from me, I'm naked.*

- *We'll buy you all that we have taken and you'll go. In six weeks, you're out.*

At that moment it seemed less important whether Eva Panić convinced Vojkan Lukić. All the circumstances already indicated that the Panić couple, like many others, were collateral victims of complicated ideological, intelligence set-ups and intrigues. Without any criteria, without proper evidence of any involvement in the games of the big ones - they were cornered.

- *Vojkan Lukić wrote a certificate which stated that my husband Radoslav Panić died an innocent man. I went to see Moša Pijade who told me: "You've saved so many people, and you ended up in jail, your Rade killed himself. If they did not believe him, who do they believe?" I was the only person in Yugoslavia, to my knowledge, who was compensated as an innocent convict from Sveti Grgur. They bought me everything: TV, blankets, furniture. They sent me to Israel, and I was happy to go.*

Čakovec, June 2012

Eva Panić Nahir: *I participated in World War II because I did not want to sit and wait. I'm not angry because of Sveti Grgur, they say that a prison like Goli Otok has never existed anywhere else, but I am very glad that I did not get scared and fall into a useless heap of a person, I was a fighter.*

IV. Eva PANIĆ NAHIR

Israel

In the first half of 1966, Eva Panić quit her job at the Belgrade company TEKIG Invest and moved to Israel. She knew what was waiting for her there in Sha'ar HaAmakim – a kibbutz situated between Haifa and Nazareth, because her daughter had already been living there for the last two years.

- The first time I went to visit my daughter, to meet her future husband, it was clear to me that the life in the kibbutz was the life I liked. Simple, honest and sympathetic. I didn't like Tijana's future husband, who was Israeli. He was guided only by interest, I told Tijana not to marry. But you know how it is with young people ... She married and soon divorced. Her second husband was American, I liked him. She emigrated to the United States with him and the children. Today she lives in Dallas, Texas, and before that she lived in Spain.

Dallas, November 2014

Tijana Wages: *During my first visit to Israel, in the same kibbutz, I met Gideon Vaisman. After a three-month "romance" I returned to Belgrade and the romance continued with letters until June 1964. That year I moved to Israel forever. Since at that time, according to Yugoslav terms, it was inconceivable for people to live*

together unmarried, I told my mother that I was going to get married. She came to the kibbutz to meet my future husband, but they didn't find a common language. The next three years I studied in Jerusalem, and I spent weekends with my "legal boyfriend". Gideon studied at the Technion, Haifa. At 24, I was already divorced. My second husband Brian Wages was American. We met in Jerusalem when I was 28 years old. He graduated from the Air Force Academy, was a military pilot and Eva liked him very much because he reminded her of Rade. Brian was not a Jew. We met in April 1973, soon got married, and in September the same year we were in Washington, DC. The next four years Brian worked for the Pentagon, Middle East Desk. Our son Jason was born in 1974, and daughter Emily 16 months later. When my husband was assigned the rank of colonel (Colonel USA Air Force), he was transferred to Spain so we lived in Madrid from 1977 to 1981. During this period we also got divorced and I moved to Dallas, Texas.

That same year 1966, Eva said goodbye to all the nice people in Belgrade, Varaždin, Zagreb and generally all over the former Yugoslavia, to friends that she would permanently stay in touch with and whom she would outlive. She left behind the sacrifice she had given in World War II and the one left on Sveti Grgur, the island of stone and blood. Widow Eva Panić was leaving behind the exposed and confirmed truth about her husband, and in Kruševica she said good-bye to the love of her life at his grave. She made sure to bury him with dignity as soon as she had returned from prison. It was time for a new beginning.

- *The Jews who survived the war and the camps returned to Čakovec, but only shortly. No one stayed there, they all went to Israel. When I emigrated, I met all those people there again. We Jews from Čakovec have always stuck together. I remember the Schlesinger family who had a forwarding firm in Preloška Street in Čakovec. Their daughters with their husbands also immigrated to Israel. One of them married Zolti Hirzson, whose daughter I am still in contact with today. I invited her to come with me to Čakovec for the 70th anniversary of taking the Međimurje Jews to concentration camps¹⁵, but she did not have the courage to go.*

¹⁵The anniversary was marked under the name *70 years of memory - not to forget the crimes* in May 2014. It was organised by the Jewish Community Čakovec. The Mayor of Čakovec Stjepan Kovač at the ceremony held at the Cultural Centre awarded to Eva Nahir Panić the status of a honorary citizen of Čakovec, in accordance with the decision of the Town Council of the Town of Čakovec.

Proof that life may be unpredictable, and the fact that Jewish communities from these regions linked, would be confirmed by Eve's encounter with a woman whom she was close to in Belgrade. They met in Israel.

- Almost every day I was seeing Mrs. Berger. She and her daughter Edith survived Auschwitz. They lived close to us in Kosmajaska Street, in the Jewish home. My Tijana constantly hung out with Edith and the girl often stayed with us for lunch. Mother and daughter Berger moved to Israel before us and Edith married a doctor from Skopje. Mrs. Berger was a cousin of the late wife of Moshe Nahir, who later became my husband.

During Eva's last visit to her daughter Tijana before moving to Israel, Mrs. Berger turned to her and suggested she should meet Moshe Nahir, because she could help him in raising his son. Namely, Mr. Nahir was a widower and several people tried to organize his acquaintance with Eva. The day before her return to Belgrade, Moshe personally knocked on the door of Tijana's house. He came to invite Eva to visit him and officially meet. Generally she accepted the invitation, but a little upset, she immediately turned to Mrs. Berger.

- What should I do? I've never been alone with a man in the house.

- Just go. Moshe is pleasant and smooth. Everything will be fine.

Moshe and Amos

- I came to meet Moshe, he prepared fresh coffee. As soon as we started talking, he had to go. He said that he needed to be present at a meeting. He was a kibbutz accountant and could not avoid his obligations, and I had to go back to Belgrade the next day. I explained that there would be no more opportunities for us to meet again, to which he calmly replied that I should write my biography and deliver it to him - Eva retells her first encounter alone with the man who would later become her husband.

After returning to Belgrade, she sat at a typewriter and wrote her biography. Soon she received a letter from Moshe, written in German. "I have received your biography. I am in a very difficult situation because my son doesn't have a mother. Your daughter is not in a good situation, either. Come as soon as possible to help our children," these words were stated in the introduction of his letter.



First Eva's visit to Moshe Nahir in his apartment in Israeli kibbutz Sha'ar HaAmakim

Moshe Nahir graduated in agronomy in the Netherlands, and as one of the founders of the kibbutz Sha'ar HaAmakim became close with a group of Yugoslav and Romanian young Jews who had settled there. On several occasions he was elected director of the kibbutz, and in the late 1960s the Israeli government hired him as an agricultural adviser and inspector in the area from Haifa to Nazareth.

- It was April 1966, before the Jewish holiday of Pesach. I had moved to Israel forever. At first I lived in Haifa, in the Language School, which I attended for half a year. The first time Moshe told me he would come see me- we met in a café. Our conversation was quite relaxed. In those moments it was important to me to establish contact with his son Amos as soon as possible. I told him I wanted to talk to the boy.

On the first occasion she went to the kibbutz, to visit father and son Nahir. She wanted to meet the boy and approach him with an open heart.

- I told Amos: "Your father wants me to take care of you. I'll come only if you need me. I promise I'll do the best I can, but I'll need your help, too." He was then 13 and a half years old. Today, both of us gladly remember our first meeting. He told me then: "Come and I'll help you."

Moshe Nahir also had an older son, Asaf, who was already married at that time, and also lived in the kibbutz with his family. Eva told her future husband that she did not want to move into his family house, believing that Moshe and she should have a brand new start. She asked from the kibbutz management to give her an apartment.

- I wanted to turn a new and positive page in the book of life, to start a new life with Moshe and Amos in the environment that we could share together. I got an apartment and I've been in it for the past 48 years. I also established good relationship with Asaf, who unfortunately suffers from Parkinson's disease. It is a very good relationship. He still lives with his family in the kibbutz, and Amos moved to Ramat Ishai immediately after his father's death and works at the kibbutz Degania Bet known for its dairy industry, agriculture, silicone factory, tourism.

Tijana was very happy when her mother arrived in the kibbutz. She also reacted with joy to the news that she would live with Moshe.

- I am very pleased that I chose the kibbutz to continue my life. My daughter was also very pleased for me. She was glad that we would both live in Israel and that I'd have to take care of someone. After graduating chemistry, Tijana worked at the hospital in Hadassahi, and when she married she moved with her husband to the United States, so soon we were separated again.

Čakovec, May 2014

Eva Panić Nahir: *Tijana's husband had been sent to Israel to finish his studies. When he returned to America, married, he worked as an Air Force lieutenant colonel in Washington. Because he was transferred to Spain, they moved there, got diplomatic passports and soon got divorced. He said that he was ordered to get divorced because my Panić and I were communists. I do not know if it's true, but anyway it's doesn't matter. Tijana brought up her two children Emily and Jason herself; In Spain, she learned to make gold jewelry and it has been her job until today. She creates artistic filigrees 22-carat gold jewelry. She lives in Dallas, the capital of the state of Texas. It seems to be a very uncultured city, but people are rich and buy her jewelry a lot. She is successful, but I think she's lonely.*

Dallas, November 2014

Tijana Wages: *"Dallas is a very uncultured city?" I have to laugh. Then, the whole of America, except New York and a few other exceptions, is "uncultured". Everything is relative. It depends on our point of view, doesn't it? Loneliness? It is also relative. Interestingly, my mother sees me as a reserved and shy person. Maybe it's just that I do not like to be in the spotlight.*

Humanity licking its wounds

Amos Nahir became withdrawn after his mother's death and treated his environment with antagonism. This was particularly evident in school where he often fought with his peers.

- *Moshe and I really got on well. He was grateful that I had established a good relationship with Amos. I've always been very kind to him. For instance, before him I never expressed great closeness to Moshe because I did not want to arouse unwanted emotions in the child. I did not want him to be jealous. He soon gained more confidence, and stopped fighting at school. His teacher told me that I had performed a miracle, but it seems that it only took a little warmth and a good friend- he obviously had one in me.*



Eva and Moshe Nahir

The life of Eva and Moshe, who was six years older, and their relationship as a whole were not only defined by a desire to give the best of themselves to Amos and help Tijana and Asaf in the best possible way, but also by the fact that the past still intensely lived in both of them.

Eva chooses the words when talking about life with Moshe with care. The attention with which her husband treated her felt good. Eva's admiration for the fact that her past in a new home and new environment was extremely appreciated cannot be hidden. Moshe soon expressed his desire to visit the native village and the grave of her late husband with Eva.

- Moshe was a great man. With his knowledge he helped the economic development of the nearby Bosnat Tivon. Although he had quite a high salary, he would give it all to the kibbutz where we still stayed to live by the rules that were valid for all. I never got over my husband Rade. I told Moshe that I would be a good and loyal friend, but I loved only one man. He deeply respected that. He would later go with me to Croatia and Serbia. When we first came together to the Panićs in Kruševica, my mother-in-law told him: "Let me hug you instead of my son, since you are so good to my grandchildren and this martyr".

Eva Panić Nahir

Moshe Nahir and Eva Panić were never formally married. The reasons for this are not a secret. On the contrary.

- Moshe and I never got married. When Moshe went to a rabbi in Tivon, he asked him where I got my surname Panić from? I told Moshe: "Moshe, I'm not going to a rabbi to ask me about my name. Nobody needs to ask me about my name. Go to Haifa and change it." My documents say Eva Panić Nahir.

This event did not disturb Eva's satisfaction with life in the kibbutz at all. As time went on, she was more and more satisfied with her decision.

- The way of life in a kibbutz suits my habit, my life determinants. I was pleased that I came to live with my second husband and helped him raise his son. His wife had been sick for years, they had also been through the heavy burden of personal tragedy. Losing a loved one is a great tragedy. Moshe and I got along very well, we had the same political thought. We were members of leftist party MAPAM, which advocated the idea of egalitarianism in the kibbutzim.

Moshe had heart disease. He died in 1997 at the age of 84.



One of the last photos where Eva and her second husband Moshe Nahir are together. Moshe died in 1997.

Čakovec, May 2014

Eva Panić Nahir: After leaving Čakovec and going back to Israel, I am going to Belgrade and Kruševica. I'll visit the family, the children of some of my friends, Tijana's friends from school, and then I'll go to visit my Panić. I'm going to his grave, to say goodbye to him for the last time. Soon, I will turn 96, I do not think I will ever come back to this area again.



By the tomb of the Panić family in Kruševica (Serbia) in May 2014. Eva considered this coming as her last, also as goodbye forever to Radoslav.

Kibbutz

Life in the kibbutz before four, five decades and today, is not the same. In the late 60s of the last century, when Eva moved to Sha'ar HaAmakim, the organisation there was somewhat different. But the most important thing has remained unchanged - the conditions of life for all residents are exactly the same.

- It was a real kibbutz at the time when I moved here. Today it is different though, but life is still very simple. Trade was made not by means of money. We had almost no salary, only a small allowance. We lived modestly and we were civil, as true social democrats. We are not devout, we do not fast for Yom Kippur, have no connections with the rabbis. Things are different today, we have to pay for many things. I receive my husband's pension, and he was vice president of the kibbutz at some point. The president is elected every three years, by a free vote, and he lives like any other member of the community. The kibbutz is also managed by a secretary, maskir. All six members have the same rights and the same material opportunities.

Residents of the kibbutz eat mainly in the soup kitchen, but in the local shop you can buy food for your private kitchen. However, food can be bought both for yourself and for the kibbutz kitchen. Eat little and do not burden the stomach is the most important Eva's motto when talking about food. As the years go by, she is an even more convinced advocate of this thesis.

- With age, the bones loose calcium so your legs can no longer carry a large belly and behind. You should endure for a few months and eat less. The stomach gets smaller over time, and you cannot eat large quantity of food any more. At first it may not be easy to endure, you are hungry, but believe me the system works. With food you should be moderate and think a step ahead. In the kibbutz we eat well. Although I rarely eat in the soup kitchen, I can confirm that the food is good. I prepare my meals myself because I'm very careful not to get fat. Every day I eat three vegetables and a fried chicken wing. I eat little and humbly because I want to stay slim. For thirty years I have had 42 kilograms. It ensures vitality, so I feel more secure in myself. For me it is a requirement to be independent, and independence is very important for me.

Eva Panić Nahir was a dietician at the kibbutz soup kitchen for twelve years. She designed menus for the chronically ill, always respecting the instructions of her mentor from Tel Aviv – you should eat in small quantities.

- I spent half a year in another kibbutz learning how to cook for diabetics, people with stomach problems, all sorts of diseases. My advisor was from a big hospital, and as in the beginning I spoke bad Hebrew, she explained everything to me in German.

At the mention of food, Eva inevitably recalls cottage cheese with sour cream which she always looks forward to when coming to Croatia.

- Cottage cheese with cream is a Croatian thing, it is not eaten anywhere else. I love it. Whenever I come to Čakovec, as a guest of the Pal family, who are very nice people, they always prepare it for me. There are also cakes, but I haven't been eating them for ten years. I do not touch anything sweet, although every week I make cakes for my family.

Each month Eva Panić Nahir receives a pension and gives the kibbutz 9,800 shekels¹⁶. The rest of 7900 shekels she has for herself, but every month she helps three Asaf's daughters with five hundred shekels each.



Asaf Nahir's (Moshe's son) daughters: Ajefer, Nadar, Nama, Idit and Segal

- Every month we get the calculation of our consumption. It is specified how much we've spent in the store, eaten at a restaurant, our overheads, everything but the apartment rent. Each month around 3,500 shekels are left, and I can help my family. I've always lived very modestly and sparingly, it is simply my principle. My sister-in-law says: "What shall we do with her when she is such a proletarian". Every Friday night I visit Amos to show him I am alive and kicking. I have a good family that I brought up and that is

¹⁶ One US dollar is worth 4.5 shekels.

very committed to me. Tijana's relationship with all of them is excellent. I can say that I have always had a positive attitude about everything and that it greatly affected my life and the lives of the people dear to me.

Eva is not considerate only towards her family. She treats other inhabitants of the kibbutz in the same way, especially the elderly - although the eldest ones are younger than her. Every day, at 4 p.m. she visits the people who live alone. She will help them with something if necessary, talk a little to them, sometimes have decaffeinated coffee, and after spending about ten minutes there, she is off.

- My peers and friends are mostly dead. There are ninety-six years behind me. I had friends from Croatia, but no one from Čakovec. In the kibbutz there were no people from my town. But you know, I'm good with young people, with everyone. I live a very nice and good life in the kibbutz. Every day at 4 o'clock I go to visit people who are lonely or sick, help them a little with the basics, bring their mail and newspapers, fresh laundry, maybe something from the store if needed. But most of all, they need to talk to someone. I talk to each of them a little. When I was getting ready for a trip to Čakovec, they asked me how they would live without me for eleven days? I am glad that I am independent and I can make somebody's day a little happier. I do not need any help, except that once a week an Arabian woman cleans my windows. I'd do it myself, but I do not dare to get up on a chair. I'm old.

Complete care of the elderly population is handled in two old people's homes. People who were not the residents of the kibbutz are placed there, thereby generating additional income for the community. Health care of the residents is taken care of by physicians and nurses in the clinic and the Emergency Department.

Because of her angina pectoris, Eva takes a lot of drugs. However, to the question if she is healthy, she will answer that she is and that she feels fine.

- I have a spray for angina pectoris in several places in the apartment, so I can immediately respond if I have an attack. Besides that, I'm OK.

There is a personal satisfaction that Eva has never wanted to give up - since arriving in Israel to this day. These are concerts of classical music. She has been subscribed to the concert hall in Haifa, where she has had the same seat for forty-five years. In the beginning, the question of going to the concert was the subject of discussion with her husband.

- When I started living with Moshe, I told him I would like to go to a concert, and he said: "When your turn comes." This means that the kibbutz regularly buys five tickets for one concert for its members and when all who want to go take their turns, I'll be able to go to a concert. It was not an option! I told him that I would buy the season ticket and go, and if he didn't want to go with me, he didn't have to. Moshe objected. He was afraid of my disobedience, because he personally was very disciplined and complied with all regulations of the life in the kibbutz. He would go to a concert once in a decade. For me, music is a vital basic need. I bought the season ticket, immediately.

Haifa is located eighteen kilometres away from the kibbutz, so Eva goes to concerts by bus. Her family has told her on more occasions that at her age it is far more convenient and safer to take a taxi.

- I say to my family that buses are for people, not for cattle, so there is no problem. But they only comment that I was, and still am a proletarian. You know, I'm very pleased that I haven't been spoiled.

Woman

When talking about her diet and physical vitality, Eva Panić Nahir does not leave any questions open. Especially when talking about herself as a woman.

- I've always been skinny, but being old I am even more careful about my weight. That's why I am very well dressed. Many women from the kibbutz donate me clothes which they cannot wear any longer because they've put on weight. Sometimes they just leave a bag with clothes at my front door.

Her fingernails are always painted red, she nurtures her hands with special care because in her opinion they are a reflection of basic tidiness, and she never leaves the house not dressed up. Eva Panić Nahir believes that everything on a woman should look neat, that a woman should always take care of her hygiene, and her clothing and footwear must be well preserved to be wearable as long as possible.

- I think that a woman should in particular nurture her hands and keep her nails neat. Mine are always red. Of course, I did not polish them at the time when I was really poor. After all, when I lived in the countryside, I worked a lot and polishing nails did not even

cross my mind then, neither in the time of war. Generally speaking, I do not like people to see me not dressed up. When I go out I put on lipstick, draw my eyebrows and go out tidy and elegant. I'm a woman. A woman always has to look good.

Talking about appearances takes Eva back to the days of her youth. She recalls how elegant she always looked.

- First of all, we were a rich family and in our store there were always beautiful fabrics and clothing. Everything from abroad. Mom bought silk in Paris. For one ball she brought me white taffeta material with roses. I had a new elegant dress for every ball. Čakovec was such a town, then. You couldn't go for a walk without a hat, gloves and stockings. Very classy. I loved dressing up very much. Later I became very poor. It didn't bother me at all, nothing ever bothered me because I had my Rade. We lived a good life, we loved each other knowing that the only important thing for us was to be together.

Satisfaction with small things

Eva has never shown particular interest in politics. She likes everyday topics, discussions in the circle of the family and friends, she is sincerely and warmly interested in the people around her. However, her character does not allow ambiguity when it comes to personal system of values and the country in which she lives.

- I am proud of the fact that I have never, ever done anything against my conscience. I've always been a free person. I also came to Israel to the leftist kibbutz following my conscience. I live modestly, but well. People need to know that a modest life can be a good life. Today I am very happy that I was a woman in black protesting and requesting that the occupied Palestinian territory should be returned to its legal owners. I do not need big Israel, the country getting rich at the expense of others. I get on very well with the Arab minority. They are not to blame for anything. Every time when I come back to Israel from my travels, an Arab and a Bedouin wait for me to take me to the kibbutz. The Croatian ambassador told me that he had never seen an old Jewish woman being hugged by a Bedouin. I am aware that the kibbutz is not exactly suitable for the current government, because Israel has become arrogant since it became great and powerful. I do not need a big Israel, it brings only bad news. People get mad about the territory, about the money. Being an invader is a very bad thing, psychologically and physically. It is about choosing bad presidents, and for me Benjamin Netanyahu is a horrible choice.

Čakovec, May 2014

Eva Panić Nahir: *I fought against fascism according to my conscience and never had a complex of expulsion of the Jews in the period of World War II. I had my ideology. I thought that all Jews should go to fight, and not allow to be thrown out of their homes and deported to concentration camps. Do you know who Slavko Goldstein¹⁷ is? You see, his father was arrested by Ustashe and sent to Auschwitz, when he was fourteen years old, and his younger brother Danko eight. Lea, their mother, took them and went to the partisans. At first, she hid her younger son, and later he became a courier. She was a nurse in the medical corps, and Slavko returned as an officer after the war ended. That's how it should work. We need to fight.*

Tijana, Emily and Jason

Eva's daughter and grandchildren live in America. Eva's daughter Tijana lives in Dallas (Texas), granddaughter Emily in San Francisco, and Jason in San Diego (California). - While Moshe was alive, together we went to America to help Tijana with the children. We took them to school, cooked, spent time together. Emily and Jason were really connected to us, and we were happy when every summer they visited us, came to spend holidays with us in Israel. Jason graduated from the Academy of Arts, and Emily finished law and Chinese language and today works for immigrants as a lawyer in San Francisco, representing them and preparing all the necessary documents to help them get citizenship and find their way in America. Once she wrote a letter to Moshe which read: "Thank you saba¹⁸ Moshe. You taught me to like other nations. A Palestinian girl is coming to the USA, and I'm doing citizenship work for her" Tijana comes to visit me twice a year. She takes after her father Rade more and more, and for twenty years now she has been telling me: "Mom, you're old".

¹⁷ Slavko Goldstein is a Croatian politician and writer born in 1928 in Sarajevo. His father Ivo Goldstein was a prominent book merchant in Karlovac. He was taken away and executed in 1942. At the Faculty of Philosophy in Zagreb, he studied literature and philosophy, but he never graduated. He worked as a journalist, he was editor of the *Vjesnik* and the publishing house *Stvarnost*. He is the founder of the publishing house *Liber* and *Novi liber*, as the publisher has worked on over four hundred titles. He was president of the Zagreb Jewish Community and co-founder of the political party HSL 1989. He has directed five documentary films, written screenplays for movies *Akcija stadion* and *Prometej s otoka Viševice*, edited 150 books. For the book *1941 – godina koja se vraća* in 2007 he received the award *Kiklop - the journalistic work of the year*. His brother Danko changed his name to Daniel Ivin. His son John has been a Croatian Ambassador to France since 2012. (source: Croatian Society of Writers, Večernji List / Biographies)

¹⁸ Saba in Hebrew means grandfather.



With her granddaughter Emily Eva feels special love and mutual understanding



Eva's grandson Jason Wages with his wife Olga

Dallas, November 2014

Tijana Wages: Jason lives in San Diego, California with his wife Olga. He graduated from the Art Institute - Computer Animation, and works with computers and acting.



Eva, Tiana and Emily in San Francisco in 2006



Eva's granddaughter Emily Wages with her husband Rick

Honorary citizen visiting Čakovec for the last time (?)

On the Day of the Town of Čakovec, on May 29, awards are conferred on the citizens and organizations whose social engagement has left a distinctive mark on the community. The Town Council of Čakovec brought the decision on giving awards of public recognition of the Town of Čakovec at their meeting on 15 May 2014, and for the first time declared an honorary citizen of Čakovec. Eva Panić Nahir is the first one to receive this honour, at the suggestion of the President of the Jewish Community Čakovec, Mr Andrej Pal.

On the occasion of marking the 70th anniversary of taking Jews from Čakovec, Međimurje to concentration camps in 1944, from 22 to 25 May 2014 a program entitled “70 years of memory – not to forget the crimes” was held. In such a way the Jewish Community Čakovec has reminded everyone of the Jewish community that lived in Međimurje, especially in Čakovec until the Second World War, of their displacement and suffering in death camps.

The central programme of the anniversary held on May 22 at the Cultural Centre



On May 22nd 2014, the mayor of Čakovec Stjepan Kovač awarded Eva Panić Nahir the the title of honorary citizen of Čakovec, on the occasion of remembering the event when the Jews of Čakovec and Međimurje were deported to concentration camps. The program was named “70 years of memory – not to forget the crimes”.

was used for that symbolic, but important and solemn moment of awarding the title of honorary citizen to Eva Panić Nahir. Stjepan Kovač, the Mayor of Čakovec explained the decision of the Town Council and handed the title to the extraordinary woman with a fascinating life story. He pointed out that “Eva, with her life path, the survival of the Holocaust and the Second World War, persecution by the communist rule and hard labour on Sveti Grgur, truly deserved to receive the status of the honorary citizen.”

In front of a packed auditorium, an impressed and delighted Eva said:

- I am very happy that I've come to Čakovec. I am proud of the friends that I have here and I would like to thank the Town Council that adopted the decision to give this award to me. I'm honoured. I've never thought that I would ever receive the status of honorary citizen. I was born in Čakovec, my parents' house and my father's shop were where today is Zagrebačka banka. I'm glad to see that the streets in this town bear the names of my friends and acquaintances, brothers Weiss, brothers Graner, Neumann. Čakovec knew that they were communists, but still named the streets after them. I am especially pleased with the street named after Weiss brothers because Miki Weiss was my best friend.



In May 2014 in Čakovec - Eva with Marina Payerl-Pal, MD (left), president of the Jewish Community Čakovec Andrej Pal, MD (right) and Themal couple from Kiryat Tivon, a sister city of Čakovec

Touched and with full heart Eva Panić Nahir could continue her planned trip to Belgrade and Mala Kruševica in Serbia, where she was about to say goodbye to all - living and deceased. In Belgrade her daughter's classmates, family members and journalists who wanted to meet her were waiting for her. Kruševica, on the other hand, is a different story. Once it was her home, and there is still the grave of her greatest love Radoslav Panić.



Strolling through Čakovec in 2014

Čakovec, May 2014

Eva Panić Nahir: *When preparing for coming here everybody always asks me how I'm going to travel? I always say that this is my last trip, that I will not go anywhere anymore. I've been saying this for a long time. But I think this is really my last visit to Čakovec, although I am very happy that I'm here. Marina and Andrej Pal, who are my hosts have a very nice family, I always feel good with them. At the ceremony celebrating the 70th anniversary, the arrival of Juraj Bujanić and his wife from Montenegro made me very happy. Juraj lived in the house a little further from the former Café Royal¹⁹, his mother was a Jew, nee Zsor. His father was a doctor. I remember his parents well. Next to the Royal, today's Dom sindikata, was the house of the attorney Volak. Right next to it was a small park and from his house you could practically enter the park.*

Opposite was the Scheier Cafe, I know that today it is the Scheier building as well, with a coffee shop and a reading room on the ground floor. Upstairs, there was a cinema, where balls, dance schools, meetings were also held. The building next door, which today accommodates people of lower social status, was the house of Janči Moses, and today's clinic was the house of Elmer Vajda. He had sons Peter and Ivan, who was called Hanzi. He went to the same class with me. The last time we met in Switzerland fifteen years ago, and the meeting was arranged by Vlatko Velebit. In Geneva Hanzi met me at the railway station, and we stayed sitting for hours in a nearby cafe. Can you imagine, he greeted me with a stick in his hand, and commented: "Eva, you're running like a squirrel." In time of the war Vajda exported to Switzerland, and so he managed to save his family.

Today, when talking about all of this, people, events, Čakovec, from today's point of view, I'm glad that I managed to keep all the contacts. As for my house in the centre of the town, our family sold the upper floor long ago after repossession. However, as for the business premises where Zagrebačka Banka is located, I'm glad that there is a possibility that my daughter will be paid a rent for it. Once it was the workspace and home of my family. I'm grateful to the Town of Čakovec for the title of the honorary citizen. I'll return to Israel very proud.

¹⁹ This refers to the house which is now the Millennium Business Centre in Matice hrvatske Street.



Eva Panić Nahir was the initiator of the establishment of a friendly relation between the two cities - Kiryat Tivon, a town located near the kibbutz, and Čakovec. At the time of finishing this biography Eva Panić Nahir is 97 years old and lives in the kibbutz Sha'ar HaAmakim (Gate of Two Valleys) in Israel. In addition to live interviews, we often communicated via e-mail. Her answers always came within short periods of time and were very concise. They would always begin or end with: "I'm fine".

Authentic authorization of Eva Panić Nahir

Dear Aleksandra,

I've read the whole text, thank you for your hard work, everything is fine and I am very grateful because I feel friendship and positive attitude in it. I am very touched by your work. My life hasn't been easy, but I'm happy that I've never given in, preferred not to submit and did not lose the courage and give up my beloved Panić.

When we were shooting the movie on Goli Otok, there were my daughter Tijana and granddaughter Emily. Tijana forgave me for leaving her, and now we have the ideal relationship. It is very important, vitally important. Thank you for your efforts. I hug you.

I'm fine.

Eva

Abstract

Eva Panić Nahir was born in 1918 in Čakovec as the youngest of three daughters of Ema and Bela Kelemen. She was raised in a wealthy Jewish family with her sisters Klara and Žuža. She accepted the Zionist movement, but after the dissolution of the Čakovec organization she turned to the communist ideology together with her friends, and before coming of age she meets a military officer, her future husband Radoslav Panić.

After five years of courting they got married despite all the obstacles, and went to live in Belgrade. They lived their marital bliss for a very short period of time before the Second World War. Radoslav was mobilized, and Eva in the night of air attack on Belgrade got evicted from their apartment and went on foot to the Panić family in Kruševica.

Later, after the Chetniks put her on the list of undesirable persons, Eva and her husband went to Belgrade where they began their counter-intelligence activities, in that way saving 1,500 people by sending them to the Partisans.

Shortly after the war Tijana, their daughter was born.

In October 1951 UDBA took her husband into custody where Radoslav committed suicide. A few days later Eva was arrested, too. After six months of detention, she was deported to the island of Sveti Grgur, where in the Female camp she was forced into hard labour, subjected to torture and psychological abuse. Due to the pressure from abroad the camp was dissolved and Eva, together with other prisoners, left the island in November 1953. When free, she started searching for the truth about her late husband, in which she succeeded and became the only person compensated by the former state as innocent.

Her daughter Tijana emigrated to Israel in 1964, and two years later Eva did the same. She moved to Sha'ar HaAmakim – a kibbutz between Haifa and Nazareth, where she still lives. She married a prominent agronomist Moshe Nahir, worked as a dietician in the kibbutz nursing home, has been engaged in voluntary and humanitarian work, and for 45 years has been sitting at the same place in the audience of the concert hall in Haifa. Moshe passed away in 1997.

Today, Eva Panić Nahir is still, at 97, fascinatingly vital, simple, refined with the wisdom created during her long, turbulent life that is worth getting to know better. She still visits the elderly residents of the kibbutz, helps them with their daily needs, socializes with children of her late husband, grandchildren, friends. Her daughter Tijana Wages lives in Dallas (Texas), granddaughter Emily in San Francisco, and grandson Jason in San Diego (California).

Marking the Day of the Town of Čakovec on May 29, 2014, Eva Panić Nahir was awarded the title of the honorary citizen of Čakovec. Stjepan Kovač, the Mayor, handed her the title on May 22, 2014 during the celebration *70 years of memory - not to forget the crimes*, organized by the Jewish Community Čakovec.

Aleksandra Ličanin

Afterword

In January 2014 the branch of Matica Hrvatska Čakovec together with the Jewish Community Čakovec printed the book by Branimir Bunjac entitled *From the Ashes of the Čakovec Synagogue - Biography of Eva Schwarz*. In the last sentence of the Afterword I wrote: *I hope that someone patient and serious like the author of this book will record the memories of the living encyclopaedia Eva Nahir*. Exactly one year later, here it is, the biography organically intertwined with the previously mentioned one. *Spiritus movens* of this book is also the Jewish Community Čakovec, which was very prosperous in the period between the two World Wars. Its tragic destiny affected the protagonists of this story, not only during the Holocaust, but also after the Second World War. Another regime, this time communist, showed all its brutality towards the weakest. After her husband was killed, totally innocent Eva Panić was sent to prison, which was not much different from a concentration camp. She was exposed to unimaginable physical and mental suffering, her family broken, robbed and humiliated. After everything she had gone through, she and her daughter went to live in a kibbutz in Israel. Her visits to Čakovec in the nineties of her life are an attempt to reconstruct everything she has lost, to rescue from permanent oblivion what was on two occasions violently interrupted, and that is the continuity of life, the right to a family and to the results of her dedicated work. This book is another stone in the broken mosaic of the lives of the Čakovec Jewish community, which is to preserve even a trace of memories about everything that was and will remain among us as a finger raised in warning at how easily one can sink in crime if the imperative of personal responsibility for all we do is forgotten only for a moment.

The author of this book, Aleksandra Ličanin, is the journalist whose articles never leave the readers indifferent. As her interviews with Eva Panić Nahir had already been published, Andrej Pal and I (as the representatives of the publisher) quickly agreed to propose to her to do this demanding job. She accepted and after a year the book is here. It is written in publicistic style, unlike the first one, with some fictional flashes. Interchange of three different perspectives (Eva's, Tijana's and the author's) is the best segment of the entire text, which makes it more convincing, gives the testimony authenticity and greater volume. It's a pity that Tijana is not even more radically present with her vision of events, which would make it a real epic, although this way it is already multi-layered.

I hope that this book will strengthen the cooperation between the branch of Matica hrvatska in Čakovec and the Jewish Community Čakovec even more, and in the future we are hoping to try to clarify our recent past, documenting and with testimonies illuminating what should not be forgotten. Perhaps the time is ripe for a man to tell his story about those violent times.

Ivan Pranjić

They should have fought

the narrative identity of Eva Panić Nahir between belief and sacrifice

Firstly, a story is never a mirror image of the reality. This, at least, is what contemporary linguistic and sociological theories say, and these are the theories that deal with the phenomenon of narrating as the basic procedure by means of which, every human being tries to bring logic into the experienced chaos. Being able to understand narration is being able to understand a person and his motives. Nevertheless, people say that narration is not a copy of the real life. Thus, this is how events that really did occur are distinguished from the how a person experienced the events, and then again, these two distinguish how a person remembers the events, and finally, all of these together, up to how a person talks about the events. Each and every one of us is, undoubtedly, more or less convinced that what we are saying is absolutely true, but science has proven that the reliability and verity of memories are subjective. Our mind deceives us, and sometimes we too take part in this deception. When talking about our personal experiences, we stress some parts of the story, forget or pass over some other part, rationalize or shape memories in order to match them with our own moral values. We do all this in order to present ourselves as just people, possibly as victims and possibly as heroes.

Secondly, it has been said, a story is never free. Building a narrative often depends on the possibilities of a particular language, and on the repertoire of the narrative structure of the community, as well as on what is acceptable and what is ineffable. It also depends on the listener and his assumed expectations. As Žižek says, we all feel free because we do not possess a language by means of which we could express our lack of freedom. Due to the fact that, mostly, we are neither philosophers nor are we poets who, by means of language, open new areas of freedom, we tell stories that are possibly unexpected, and are somewhat surprising and possibly unpredictable, but they are always-predictable. Rarely are we people willing to jump out of these boots.

Thirdly, it has been said that a person grows and shows oneself when telling a story. Yet, only in dialogue, when talking and opposing the Other One does narration have sense.

Let's call all we have read in the book a story, let's forget for a while the fact that it is not fiction, that Eva Panić Nahir talks about unbelievable events in which she is the leading participant. What have we read, what has the story done to us, what has moved us, shaken us, astounded us?

Is it the fact that Eva, who with amazing skill lifted a couple of layers off Čakovec as we know it today, has revealed some of its historical layers to us, and now it is here as some kind of a Pannonian mini-Atlantis. She has pointed out to us that a building that is a bank today used to be a posh apartment in which a hundred years ago a wealthy tradesman lived with his family. We can picture them dining and making comments in German and Hungarian, chatting about yesterday's ball, talking about how they will spend their holidays in the country, in Štrigova. Eva talks about a Čakovec where you do not go for a walk on the promenade without a hat and gloves, where, in today's Town Cafe - then known as "Kavana Royal" the town's elite gathered.

Does the history in Eva's story scare us? Can we feel free after Eva tells us about a time, not so long ago, when marriages were arranged, when a marriage based on love was an act of pure rebellion, when there was a law which forbade officers to marry Jewish girls, a time when Jewish girls were not allowed to get married to a Serb? Can we really believe that, only five decades ago, there were prisons in which prisoners were subjected to the worst kinds of humiliation and torture, and those prisoners did not know what crime they had committed against Yugoslavia - the Yugoslavia they also had built? Does it shock us to imagine that there will be a time when we, as well, will be sentenced for something that seems perfectly normal today.

All that has been stated, this story that has moved us, definitely makes this moving autobiographical testimony unforgettable.

What is really moving is the manner in which Eva describes the real world, how she places herself in this world and how she shows us the role of her people and herself, and finally how she gives answers to her listener, the journalist Aleksandra Ličanin, to questions "who am I", "how did I survive", "why did I do what I did", "how did I become what I am today". She does it without self-pity and without exaggeration. It is only between the lines that her personality emerges. Listening to her we can see that she is a person who made sacrifices for love and for a better world - and she survived. There is no pathos in her story because if it weren't for the story she lived, there would be no story to tell.

Even though science views man as a narrative animal, there is nothing more moving than the fact that Eva's story is true, that it is free, that we want to believe it because we need it, because it gives us hope. And, thirdly, this story shows that before there is a story, there is a person. Even though a person wants to hide in the background, the person is the prerequisite for the story. Otherwise, the story is hollow.

If we allow ourselves the idea that Eva Panić Nahir somehow designed herself in her story, a question arises and we need to answer it with the following: what are the basic features of Eva Panić Nahir's narrative identity?

A superficial analysis leads to the following:

- she refuses to be shown as a victim;
- Jewish identity means less to her than political orientation and ideals;
- she is critical towards the passivity of her compatriots during the holocaust;
- she is willing to do whatever it takes for her personal opinions, her role is to be active;
- even though she becomes a victim of the totalitarian system she was part of, she does not relativize-looking back she has no regrets and she still considers herself to be a communist.

Eva Panić Nahir is aware of her Jewish background. She was raised in a traditional family, but when she was a young girl she abandons the Zionist ideal and turns to Communism. Her story reveals that many other young people who found themselves in Eva's situation bravely accepted the same ideology. Eva did not dare to tell her father because she was afraid of him, but she admitted everything to her mother. Her narration shows that she does not elaborate, she only makes conclusions. Her role is not conformity - it is to fight.

The fact remains that she does not avoid conflict when matters she cares for are in question, such as love and beliefs. The officer Radoslav Panić was not of Jewish origin, but this had no effect on her decision to marry him. We have chosen the word "decision" deliberately, because her feelings had much to do with her decision, even though it is important to make a distinction between the words decision and feelings.

It is important to stress her radically critical attitude towards her Zionist oriented compatriots who had silently become victims. She does not mourn them, nor does she feel sorry for them, she does not try to justify them, she only believes that they had a choice. The following statement proves this:

I have never been to see Auschwitz. I am not interested in it at all. Do you know why? Because I did not think that people needed to go to the camps humiliated and silent, I was convinced they had to fight. I despised that Jewish weakness. They were supposed to fight. People are not cattle to be treated as one! You have to resist and fight.

This statement shows, and other parts in the text confirm, this important determinant of her narrative identity. Eva never presents herself as a victim - not in any part of her story.

She is willing to do everything for her beliefs. After the Chetniks had sentenced her to death, she and her wounded husband travelled through Serbia, buying survival with the family's possessions. Finally, in Belgrade, she and her husband become informers. Risking to get killed, they inform the Partisans about the Chetniks' intentions. When she tells this part of the story, she does not waste time on an attempt to justify her acts. They did what had to be done in order to survive. The reasons were mostly personal, but she also places her activities into the context of the struggle against Fascism. Either way, there was no place for hesitance.

I decided to go to our apartment and if someone was there - I would kill them.

After the war, Eva and Rade have a good life. Eva believes that they had deserved it. But shortly after that, the regime revealed its other face. Rade, being investigated by the UDBA, committed suicide. He had hung himself. While telling this, Eva does not appear to be surprised, which suggests that suicides were frequent at that time. In this part of the story, Eva tries to find reasons as to why he did do what he had done. In order to survive her loss, she has to find an explanation. She finds it in her husband's feeling for justice in a disturbed environment. He could not bear to be humiliated so much, by the Government he had fought for.

Eva does not give up on her husband, even though the notorious UDBA asks her to and is threatened by prison. Eva's minor daughter is with her family, but this is not a sufficient reason for Eva to give up on her beliefs. Thus, she experiences the same fate as her husband, but her attempt to commit suicide failed. In 1952, she was sent to the island Sveti Grgur to serve her sentence (without a verdict!). Her descriptions of the humiliation the prisoners were subjected to, and meaninglessness of it all transforms the story into a testimony about a system that arose after the victory over Fascism, and which turned into something similar. Many prisoners - ex partisans, Eva included, had no idea why they were serving a sentence, and what kind of information they were supposed to give to their investigators. They were physically and psychologically abused and they developed their own system of punishing one another - they fought against one another in order to prove that they had "changed" and that they "hated the enemy" which did not even exist.

Another important moment of Eva's narrative identity is revealed here. Eva tells us that then, completely empty and without any strength, she started considering the thought to relieve her suffering on the island by "punishing" a helpless, weak prisoner named Gordana, and thus prove that her hatred is strong enough. Although in given circumstances such behaviour could be justified, it is not an option for Eva. Despite saying:

Tonight I will spit at Gordana.

...eventually, with no additional elaboration, she does not do what many of the other prisoners had done:

...and then the evening came, and I could not do it.

Even though the socialist system she had been part of forced her husband to commit suicide, and even though she had suffered because of it, she did not give up her beliefs. She does not think about who deserves what, and about the functioning of a system that was supposed to have been based on righteousness and equality, she only declares that she does not have to prove anything to anyone anymore.

Even in her 96th year of life, while telling her story, she thinks of herself as a socialist who lives in a kibbutz, where she had emigrated to in the sixties. The third part of her story is also about life based on social democratic principles. Reports focused on this part of the biography are full of tranquillity and a simpler life focused on the family. Nevertheless, beliefs and refusal to conformism are still present. Eva, for example, advocates the return of the Palestinian territory to its owners and she has friends among the Arabs and Palestinians.

We can conclude that although the structure of Eva Panić Nahir's narrative identity shows shortage of emotion, it does not lack emotion. Eva has experienced everything, she has made peace with it all, despite the fact that she lives it all again in her dreams, despite the fact that her only true love was and still is her first husband. She does not scream or moan, she only talks about her role in this world. No person can deny such a story.

Eva does not want to convince us that we can stop the world when it starts turning in the wrong direction. She clearly states that there is no such thing as a perfect act for an individual, but there are always two choices. One of them is resignation, flight and passivity. If we were all to make this choice, the human race would lose one battle more. Eva made the other choice. That is what makes her biography a biography of an outstanding person.

Finally, it is important to say that a narrative identity is not achieved through a monologue, it is achieved through a dialogue with the Other One. In this case, the Other One is Aleksandra Ličanin. As a journalist, she can choose. Contemporary fiction is not afraid of the personal touch when describing a phenomenon. It is also legitimate. The imperative to be objective is unreachable. And yet, the author of this book lets Eva be the leading and (apart from her daughter) only participant in this story - the one that gives meaning to the story. Aleksandra does not interrupt with her personal opinions. And yet, the author is not completely hidden. She is the readers' colleague who knows more, draws attention to the important moments in the story, and when necessary directs and clarifies. The result is an interview that will live, a powerful text that makes you think about the present and the future, and a text that warns us that we do not have enough knowledge to solve current problems by constantly referring to the worst moments in our history.

This type of fiction seems to provide comfort. Not only to an outstanding person such as Eva Panić Nahir, but to all of us, to every little and unimportant individual who cannot be the wind of historical changes, an individual who lives, watches and dies and is part of the history. It provides comfort because it gives hope that we will not be forgotten if we are just and brave when necessary. There might be someone who will want to write about us. If, in the right moment, we raise our voices and act as human beings should, we might last forever.

Kristian Novak

Aleksandra Ličanin
Two Wars and One Love of Eva Panić Nahir

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