
Vera TOMANIĆ

JEWISH IN BELGRADE



Vera Tomanić was born on January 9, 1917, in Bistrince near Osijek, to Elza (née Grinvald) and Pavle Blum. She has a younger sister, Lili, (married as Alpar) who is temporarily living in Frankfurt.

Her father, mother, grandmother Eleonora Grinvald and her mother's sister Berta, all of whom lived in the same home, were killed in the Holocaust.

After the war, as the wife of an active officer, she managed the household and raised the children. She has a daughter, Mirjana, born in 1941, who is a paediatrician, and a son, Rodoljub, seven years younger, a geodetic engineer, as well as four grandchildren and a great grandson, Stefan, who was born in Jerusalem.

My name is Vera Tomanić (née Blum) and I come from a Jewish family from near Osijek. My father was a very religious man and the Jewish holidays were all observed in our home.

After marrying a Serb, I moved to Belgrade. I happened to be there for the bombing on April 6, 1941, and when the war and the occupation of Serbia began. I was about to give birth and so went to my parents in Osijek. The situation was similar there, the Ustasha Independent State of Croatia had been established, so Jews had to wear yellow armbands, synagogues were being set on fire, people were being arrested as hostages and the first convoy of Jews was deported to the Jasenovac camp.

At the beginning of 1942 I returned to Belgrade where there were no longer any free Jews. The German authorities were insisting that Jews register, so I went to report and was given a yellow armband which I had to wear. My husband was an officer on active service in the old Yugoslav Army and was captured in Germany. Because of this I was given a special identity card from the Special Police, Department for Jews on the basis of the Gestapo decree for Serbia. This document allowed me to live in Belgrade, but I was not permitted to leave the city, nor my place of residence. I got the document from 21 George Washington Street and it was verified in the *Feldskommandatura*, the building

<p>SPEZIALPOLIZEI Abteilung für Juden</p> <p>BESCHEINIGUNG</p> <p>Die Jüdin <u>TOMANIĆ M. VERA</u> geb. am <u>9.1.1917</u> in <u>Bistrinci</u> wohnhalt <u>Koste. Taušanovića 3.</u> kann, auf Grund anliegender Genehmigung des Chefs der Einsatzgruppe der Sicherheits- polizei und des S.D., Abt. IV/3D., vom <u>23.6.1942</u> weiter in Belgrad verbleiben.</p> <p>Belgrad, den <u>29. VI. 1942</u></p> <p><i>Kilner</i> 44. Gaißlerstr. 10</p>	<p>SPECIJALNA POLICIJA Odeljenje za Jevreje</p> <p>OBJAVA</p> <p>Jevrejka <u>TOMANIĆ M. VERA</u> rodjena <u>9-1.1917</u> u <u>Bistrinci</u> sa slanom <u>Koste. Taušanovića 3.</u> može, na temelju priloženog odobrenja GESTAPO-a Odel. IV/3D., od 23.6.1942. da ostane i dalje u Beogradu.</p> <p>Belgrad, <u>29. VI. 1942</u></p> <p><i>Kilner</i> policijski komesar.</p>
---	--

Document issued in 1942 based on Gestapo approval for Vera Tomanić to remain in Belgrade. This is the only document she kept from the time of the occupation

opposite the National Theatre which today houses the National Museum. I had no documents for my daughter, Mirjana, and so had to keep her hidden. It was not until October 16, 1943, that I obtained an identity card for myself and a minor under the age of 16. I got this from the Presidency of the Council of Ministers – Department of Prisoner Welfare on the grounds that I was the wife of a prisoner of war, Mirko Tomanić, and it allowed me to move around more freely.

In the apartment where I lived there would be checks several times a month to see if I was hiding someone. These checks would be done at night. My liberty was very curtailed: the slightest suspicion would be enough for me and my child to be taken to a camp. Because of this, I immediately removed the radio from the house so that I would not be suspected of listening to Radio London or some other "enemy radio station".



Four generations: photograph sent in 1942 to Vera's husband, Milorad, who was imprisoned in Germany.

I would see other Jews, my fellow citizens, in the streets, clearing away debris from the bombing. I also saw announcements about Jews being executed in retaliation for various acts of sabotage. On one of these posters I found the name of my cousin, Ernest Grinvald, who had lived in Strahinjića Bana Street.

When six Jewish officers were brought from a camp in Germany in June, 1942, because they were sick, I discovered that among them was an acquaintance of mine, the pharmacist Bela Gutman. I visited him several times in hospital and tried to arrange for him to get to Osijek, because the Jews in Osijek were still free at that time. However, after several days, this group was taken away and executed.

Life in Belgrade during the occupation was really difficult, not only materially but also because of the total lack of security. I sold everything anyone would pay for just to be able to survive. Despite the

difficulties I managed to send parcels to my father in the concentration camp but, after two or three months, I no longer heard from him and so I stopped sending the parcels. There was no chance to send even one parcel to my mother because she was executed as soon as she arrived in the Stara Gradiška camp, along with the other women from Osijek. I would also send parcels to my husband who was in a prison camp. This was the way my life was during the war years, fraught with worry and fear for myself and my child, for my family in the camp, for my prisoner-of-war husband.

Only Jewish women from mixed marriages remained free in Serbia. Jewish men married to Serbian women were deported immediately in 1941 and subsequently executed. My parents and about seventy members of my extended family were taken to Jasenovac, Stara Gradiška and Poland; my father's family was executed in Hungary.

After the liberation, only my sister Lilika returned alive.

The only document I have kept is the one which enabled me to survive as a Jew in occupied Belgrade.



*Monument on the bank of the Danube in Dorćol to Belgrade Jews executed during World War Two, Sculptor, Nandor Glid.
(photograph by Malvina Humski).*