

סאנסקי מוסט

SANSKI MOST

DERVENTA דרוונטה

TRAVNIK טראוויניק

BIJELJINA ביילינה

BRČKO זאווידוביצי' ברוציקו

DOBOJ דובוי

ZAVIDOVIC

ואגרב

TUZLA טוזלה

ZAGRE

VLASENICA ולאסניצה

ZENICA זניצה

VISOKO ויסוקו

ŽEPČE ז'פצ'ה

SARAJEVO

VIŠEGRAD

בלגראד

וישגראד

BEOGRAD

WE MOSTAR מוסטאר

SURVIVED...4

YUGOSLAV JEWS ON THE HOLOCAUST

סקופייה

SKOPLJE

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Cadik DANON

THE LIFE STORY OF A RABBI



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

* * *

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

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



CADIK in 1932 in Sarajevo as student of the Theological Seminary

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

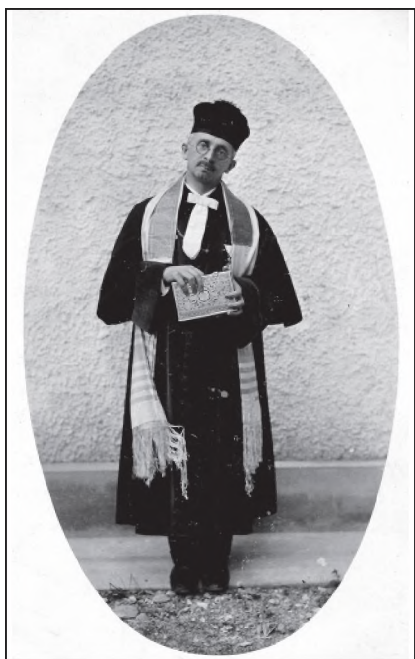
In August 1941 a prohibition was introduced banning Jewish children to enroll primary and secondary schools, followed by a decision to displace Jewish families to Korčula, Vela Luka, and a number of locations in Italy, where they were to live in confinement. Thus, for many, Split became just a transit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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

„Difficult does not mean impossible“, replied Geršković.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

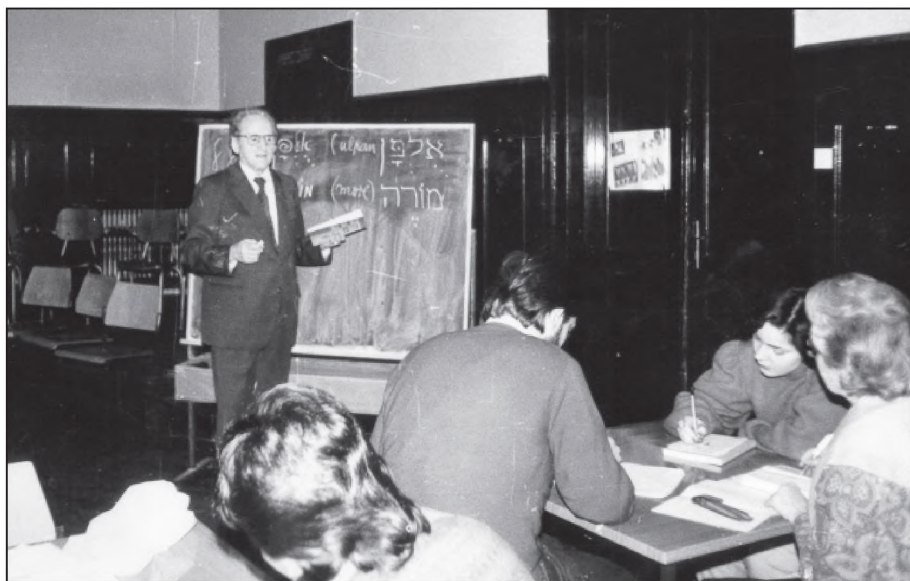
I got the unpleasant duty to tell him about going to the hospital, without telling him what he is suffering from. I started cautiously, with a brief introduction, that he is severely ill, that it is our wish and duty to do everything possible to heal him, and so on and so forth. He listened patiently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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

* * *

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

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

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

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

Some days later the war was over.

ABOUT THE FAMILY

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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