

סאנסקי מוסט

SANSKI MOST

DERVENTA דרוונטה

TRAVNIK טראוויניק

BIJELJINA ביילינה

BRČKO זאווידוביצי' ברוציקו

DOBOJ דובוי

ZAVIDOVIC

ואגרב

TUZLA טוזלה

ZAGREB

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

CONTENTS

FOREWORD	9
INTRODUCTION	11
I WITH THE PARTISANS	13
Cadik Danon: <i>The life story of a Rabbi</i>	15
Bjanka Auslender: <i>Destiny's child</i>	39
Drago Auslender: <i>We were unaware of what was coming</i>	54
Josip Elazar: <i>With a rifle and a guitar through the storm of the war</i>	61
Livia Babić: <i>A life between jewelry and socialism</i>	72
Olivera Đurđić: <i>My memory is the only monument to my family</i>	82
Dr Jaša Romano: <i>Through life – honestly and lovingly</i>	92
Eliezer Katan: <i>Through forests and mountains</i>	100
Regina Kamhi: <i>I dried diapers on my breasts</i>	117
Lenka Lea Strahinjić: <i>Run, they are rounding us up!</i>	123
II IN THE CAMPS	129
Lea Šrajer: <i>Why did i let go of mother's hand?!</i>	133
Eva Arsenić: <i>The stolen loaf saved my life</i>	141
Dina Remer: <i>I was saved by a transport which i could not avoid</i>	149
Vera Štajn: <i>Thank you to the german woman Hilda Miller</i>	163
Ješua Abinun: <i>I stayed alive by coincidence</i>	175
Jonas Fischbach: <i>Ljubo Miloš: „I want to shoot directly into the serbian heart!“</i>	192
Eva Đorđević: <i>Scars in the wounded heart</i>	202
Jelena Viculin: <i>Return from a hopeless journey</i>	211
Jakob Atijas: <i>Optimism sustained me</i>	219
III ITALY, SWITZERLAND	233
Samuilo Alkalaj: <i>Diary</i>	235
Kornel Neumann: <i>Remember?</i>	252

Isak-Iso Finci: <i>I remember not my parents, i know not my saviors</i>	262
IV HIDING IN THE TERRITORY OF YUGOSLAVIA	267
Dr Estera Mrčarica: <i>The neighbours did not betray us</i>	269
Natalija Kovačević-Tajtacak: <i>A long race with death</i>	275
V PROTECTED BY MIXED MARRIAGE	281
Berta Postružnik: <i>Halid Muftić – saviour of the jewish family</i>	283
Dr Lucija Rajner: <i>For those who have long been gone</i>	291
Ivan Ninić: <i>The perishing of my dearest</i>	299
VI IMMIGRATING TO PALESTINE.....	309
Stela Švarc: <i>A long journey to the port of salvation</i>	311
Cvi Raam: <i>A long way to salvation in Israel</i>	317
VII FORCED LABOUR IN AUSTRIA	323
Ruža Lihtner Krndić: <i>People of negotin, thank you for saving my life!</i>	325
VIII AT FORCED LABOR	339
Dr Đorđe Bošanj: <i>From the line for execution my mother</i> <i>pushed me into life</i>	341
IX KASTNER'S GROUP.....	347
Marta Flato Ladanj: <i>Saved from the raid as six-months old baby</i>	349
X BORN IN THE CAMP	355
Drita Tutunović: <i>Born in the camp</i>	357
XI APPENDICES	365
GLOSSARY.....	383
Contents of the first volume of „We Survived“	389
Contents of the second volume of „We Survived“	391
Contents of the third volume of „We Survived“	394

Eva ARSENIĆ

THE STOLEN LOAF SAVED MY LIFE



Eva was born on 13 February 1922 in Budapest, of father Gyenes Ernő, a doctor, and mother Alice Pollacsek.

She completed her primary and secondary education in Budapest. Since she could not enroll to study at university she did a photography apprenticeship and a one year course for English language teachers.

She came to Belgrade in 1945 and married Jovan Arsenić, forestry engineer, who died in 1970. In Belgrade she graduated from the Medical Faculty, specialized in internal medicine and did master studies in diabetology. She had the rank of primarius. She was the founder of the Society for Suppression of Diabetes in Belgrade and the Counseling Service for Diabetic Patients. She retired from the post of head of polyclinic of the Institute for urgent internal and cerebrovascular diseases.

From her marriage to Jovan Arsenić she has a son Vladimir, doctor, two grandsons and one great granddaughter.

I grew up surrounded by love, but also taught discipline and obedience. My paternal grandfather dr Jakob Grünblatt was also a doctor. Grandmother was a housewife. (At that time Hungarian Jews changed their family names into Hungarian ones and my father took the family name Gyenes).

On my maternal side I had met and remembered my grandmother and grandfather. Grandfather was a timber trader. On my maternal side, the head of the household was in fact great grandmother Marija. She lived

to be 95. She had three marriages and twelve children. At the time of my grandmother's youth, Hungary was part of the Austria-Hungarian empire. Members of this great family lived in different parts of the Austria-Hungarian empire – some in Czechoslovakia, others in Yugoslavia, Romania and Hungary. They all came from time to time to visit my great-grandmother Marija, so I had met and gotten to know some of them.

Many Jews in Hungary tried very hard to achieve assimilation, since they felt Hungarians of Jewish religion.

My family observed the religious traditions: on Friday evening, with father's blessing, candles were lit. For high holidays father would go to the synagogue.

I attended the German elementary school in Budapest („Reichs-deutsche Schule zu Budapest“), where I had excellent regular and religious teachers. Under the influence of the religious teacher, for Passover I would eat only matzot, unleavened bread.

After I completed four grades of elementary school my teacher advised my father to continue my education at the same school, since already by that time Hitler's pictures were posted everywhere, and I therefore continued my education at the girls' grammar school („Mária Terézi leánygimnázium“), from which I matriculated. By the way, my mother attended and graduated from the same school.

My father had ambitions for me to be a doctor, since his father and grandfather were doctors as well, and he wanted to preserve this tradition. I gladly decided that I would, sooner or later, study medicine. When I matriculated in 1940, studying medicine was not possible for me as a Jew.

My father was a supporter of socialist ideas, and I followed in his footsteps already in my youth.

During the short Hungarian Commune father was an assistant lecturer at the faculty, his area of study was histology, he produced exceptional illustrations. Soon, of course, he was removed from the faculty. He specialized in pediatric medicine and was a reputable scholar in that discipline.

He died young, in 1937, at the age of 46.

While I was still at grammar school one of my friends, Livia Konta, took me to the choir of the music academy and they admitted me as first soprano. It was a huge choir and we were preparing for Easter to sing Bach's Oratorium, one year according to Mathew, another year according to John. Singing in the choir gave me a huge pleasure and I regularly went for choir practice and sang in concerts. In the company that I had at that time I also met and became friends with the young orchestra conductor Andrash Koro-dy, who assembled a chamber choir, and we sang medieval music: Mad-

rigales by Orlando di Lasa and the like. We sang also the „Liebeslieder Walzer“ by Brahms. I did not mention, but as a girl, for several years I had piano lessons.

After my matriculation, being a Jew, I could not continue to study anything at university, especially not medicine and, in order not to sit idle at home, I went for a cooking course and with nuns I completed a private school for English teachers. I started to work for a friend, photographer, who had a well-known atelier Várkonyi in the very centre of Budapest. I learned the photographic trade, passed the technical examination and became an apprentice.

After my father's early death our family income was very low, only the rents that we collected for rented apartments which my mother bought after receiving my father's life insurance; I used my savings (I gave private lessons to pupils in different subjects as a tutor) to buy for myself a Rolleiflex automatic camera and accessories for development and copying of prints and films, a small spot light for the atelier and I started doing photography, mostly photographs of children for which the clients paid me. I had many contacts and knew many parents with children as a result of my father's work as pediatrician with a developed practice.

My parents had a very happy marriage which was the result of their love from early youth. After my father's death, my mother was beyond consolation and under the influence of a friend of hers she joined a religious sect „Christ's Brothers“. The sect members mostly studied and read the Bible, and in this my mother found some consolation and became an outstanding member of that community. Being fluent in foreign languages, she was always in charge of welcoming and taking care of foreign guests. She spoke German, French and English.

My circle of friends was quite big, some of them from the fashionable Jewish circle. Through my school friend Marion Spiero I met younger members of the Hungarian affluent society, owners of the huge steel works at the Csepel island on the Danube near Budapest, Manfred Weiss, and textile mogul Goldberger. Most of them had villas in the most fashionable district of Pest, in the Fashor Alley. That is where they organized parties and receptions to entertain friends.

Another circle of my friends were mostly students, many of whom were dissatisfied with the current situation, supporters of leftist ideas, such as those that I learned and accepted already from my late father. We met regularly, and discussed things. Discussion groups were formed in which we studied leftist literature and had certain tasks to complete. This lasted until the whole group was arrested on 3 June 1943. We were taken to a Budapest suburb and put in a building in Shoroksari street, in the basement

if I remember correctly. We were sitting on straw, turned to the wall and were not to talk among ourselves. The agents brought us there and called us individually for interrogation, and in the meanwhile mercilessly beat us on our feet, fingers and used electricity stimulation. The beating happened every day during the month that we were in the so-called DEF (Department for Counter-Intelligence), along with interrogation, until we all signed some protocols dictated by the agents who were beating us. Afterwards we were transferred to the remand prison called Konti, named after the street in which it was located.

The trial took place before the court marshal located in Margit Körut. The prosecutor asked for a death sentence for all of us. Finally, I was sentenced to five years in prison. In the Konti prison several of us shared the same cell. The guards were soldiers. As it was a remand prison, we were not given anything for dinner. In the spring of 1944 our group, as we were all sentenced by final court sentences, was transferred to Márianosztra, a prison in the hills of north Hungary, where we met with a group of political prisoners from different parts of Hungary.

All the staff in Márianosztra (guards and others) was made up of nuns, while outside guards were men. We worked in the fields and we almost liked it. The nuns would come up to us and tried to convert us to Christianity. When the Germans occupied Hungary on 19 March 1944, the Jews among us were separated and right away we had to wear the yellow star. In June that year we were transferred to the collection prison Gyűjtő fogház in Budapest, housing all convicted Jews from all over Hungary, where we lived under a very strict regime, walked barefoot and in the middle of summer wore coarse fabric prison uniforms marked with the yellow star. I was assigned the post of doing cleaning work outside and distributing food. There were among us a few women prisoners who were allowed to receive packages. Since we were a collective we all shared the food among us. I was one of those who would be covertly taking that food around to different cells. I would hide the food in the sleeves of the uniform, sewn on the bottom. After staying in Gyűjtő fogház from June to October, the Jewish inmates were transferred to the Komárom fortress and on 20 October we were given over to the Germans. We were loaded on freight wagons and transported to Germany, first to the Dachau camp, specifically its part called Allach. We stayed there for about ten days, and were subsequently transported to Bergen Belsen. Upon arrival, we were put into barracks with Slovak Jews. There were bunk-beds.

I remember the time in Bergen Belsen for the bad treatment and torture. Primarily I remember one of our first encounters with a German officer. As I was fluent in German, at the request of my comrades – inmates, I and

another inmate came out in front of the others and requested from him to treat our group as political prisoners with special rights. The German officer, surprised by our act, started shouting at us saying that we were communist dogs and that he would show us our rights. Fortunately, it did not go further than that. It is a fact that they did not shave our hair and had not seized our possessions. Initially, we were put into conditions which, considering that it was a concentration camp, were quite decent. I also remember some unpleasant details: in early morning they would force us out for the roll call – Zählappell. And we would stand there, in terrible cold, not moving, and some people would collapse.

Some of us were given certain tasks. I worked in the kitchen preparing vegetables: our food consisted of fodder beat, or „Schälküche“. Due to my knowledge of German, I was in charge of a group of us working together. We would get up at 3AM, wait in the line for washing, and at 5AM we had to be at our work.

During my stay in the camp everything happened in the so-called collectives. Any food that we would get was shared according to an established schedule. Whoever would break the established order would be shunned by the others. Our food was beyond scarce and miserable: in the morning – a black liquid, which they called coffee. We were given a loaf of bread for a number of us (over time, the loaf was getting smaller and smaller and the group to which it was distributed was getting bigger). At noon – cooked fodder beat, every day, and only sometimes, I guess twice a month, it was some sauerkraut. In the evening it was margarine, sometimes marmalade.

Once, while I was working in the kitchen, I managed to get a whole loaf of bread which I hid under my clothes. The German who regularly checked us found that loaf, took it from me and I was expelled from the kitchen which, as it turned out, saved my life. By coincidence it turned out that soon news spread that the camp leader (lagerälteste), a woman prisoner from Poland, was poisoned. The kitchen staff was accused of this and all the kitchen staff were executed without any interrogation.

Sometimes in the middle of February 1945 the first case of spotted typhoid occurred. The epidemic spread like fire, the food portions were becoming increasingly small, and the loaves of bread were shared by a greater group, and we were dying both of the typhoid and of starvation. As the epidemic was getting stronger, the biggest problem was how to get the dead ones out of the barracks, because in the end those who were dead and those still alive were lying there together. Some of us were still doing at least some work for the “Gemüse Kommando“: the work in fact consisted of transporting the vegetables to the kitchen. In doing this work we were playing the roles of horses or oxen, pulling or pushing the carts transport-

ing the vegetables. Finally, in the barrack in which we were at the time, there were no more beds, and we were living on the bare floors. Food was getting ever more scarce in the last days, although we were not aware of the fact that these were the last days – and finally there was practically no food at all. Warmer weather came, which accelerated the process of disintegration of dead bodies.

During those spring days a good friend of mine Judita Kon from Kolozsvár and I were talking and forecasting our imminent end. At that time I was utterly exhausted; my legs were covered with wounds. There was practically no food anymore and, which was even worse, no water ...

And then, on 15 April 1945, the British liberated the camp.

Immediately before the British entered the camp we saw the white flags – blankets.

All the blocks were closed, we saw a senior rank German officer being driven away in a vehicle.

The liberators immediately distributed to us cans of very rich and tasty food and excellent soup. Starved as we were we eagerly ate the food and got sick, suffered severe pain, and many died because our starved bodies could not take the rich food; neither we nor the British soldiers could have anticipated such an outcome.

We were sprayed with disinfectant. We threw away all the contaminated clothes and burnt them. We took showers, got new clothes and were transferred to barracks in nearby Bergen.

Fifteen kilometers from the camp, in Fallingbostel, there were Yugoslav prisoners who were liberated a day later, on 16. April. They were in a much better state than the camp inmates and they decided to come to our camp and help the Yugoslav women inmates. Our Yugoslav comrades accepted this help provided that they would also help the Hungarian women among us, so we shared the same destiny throughout this period. So, they visited us, brought food and clothes, organized help for those who were severely sick or exhausted, and I was among them.

I was immediately given the task of interpreter. For this reason I was given a white arm band with inscription „INTERPRETER“. As I was beginning to explain to the British soldiers the conditions in the camp, I fell ill with typhoid.

Thus, it was in the barrack in Bergen that I suffered the typhoid and I recovered from it. A group of serious patients was transported from Bergen to Bad Rehburg for medical treatment, those who suffered exhaustion were transferred to Steinhude am Meer, a vacation house in which we were accommodated in hotels and were given very rich food consisting of 5–6 daily

meals. This group in recovery was managed by my future husband, Jovan Arsenić.

In Steinhude am Meer he was in charge of our accommodation, food and other needs of former camp inmates. That is how we met, came to love each other and decided to get married. We even made a prenuptial agreement, witnessed by some friends of Jovan. We were recovering and soon it was time to return home.

We started our journey back home in August 1945. Jovan and I parted in Osijek – he went home to Vinkovci, where his brother lived with his family, and I went to Budapest to find my mother.

I had with me a document in the Russian language stating that I was returning home from a concentration camp. I walked on foot for about 15 kilometers to Beli Manastir, and was sleeping on a field under a tree. When I crossed into Hungary, I took a train to Pest where I arrived on 20 August 1945. I went to „our house“ in Torockó street. My mother was not there, and I waited for her on the stairs at the entry. Apart from my mother, I also found my grandmother Ilka and aunt Margita. I heard that my great-grandmother had died in 1943, aged 95.

That was the end of my calvary and the content of my memories of my experiences.

When I arrived home, Hungary was suffering under strong inflation and hunger was looming. I received food at the Jewish Community. Right away I enrolled to study at the Medical Faculty. I was in contact with Jovan and he promised that he would get me the necessary documents to come to Yugoslavia.

Sometimes in October 1945 a letter arrived containing documents necessary for immigration to Yugoslavia. I was to travel with a truck that was carrying materials for the “Rad” printing plant in Belgrade. Whatever I found of any value I packed in one case and two suitcases and on the set day I left my mother and my homeland.

At the border crossing it turned out that a seal was missing on my pass and I was taken to OZNA (Department for National Security). Luckily, a friend of my Vera Vajs, married Štajner, with whom I was in prison together, was now working in this organization and I was soon transferred to a displaced persons shelter. As I had wounds on my lower leg, at the intervention of a good friend of mine Magda Dušika Seneš I was admitted to hospital.

Finally, in November, I was given permission to go to Belgrade.

After many difficulties I arrived in Belgrade, to Jovan’s address. We lived in a rented apartment. I enrolled in the second semester of studies on 9

March 1946 and the same day Jovan and I were married. The following year, on 6 January 1947 our son Vladimir was born, and he presently lives and works as doctor in Zrenjanin. He has two sons and a grand-daughter.

After I graduated from the Medical Faculty, I started to work. I specialized internal medicine and received my master's degree in diabetology. I was the founder of the Society for Suppression of Diabetes in Belgrade and the Counseling Service for Diabetic Patients. I retired from the post of head of polyclinic of the Institute for urgent internal and cerebrovascular diseases.