

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

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 diepers 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

Stela ŠVARC

A LONG JOURNEY TO THE PORT OF SALVATION

*E*stera-Stela Švarc was born in Belgrade on 8 November 1925, of father Leon and mother Mirula-Mila Sid, née Manojlović. She had a younger brother Marko Sid who died in November 2005.

Of her direct family those who perished in the Holocaust include two of her mother's sisters and a grandfather; on her paternal side, in Pirot, three brothers and two sisters perished with their families. They were taken by Bulgarian Fascists in 1943 to the Treblinka camp.

In Belgrade she completed the private elementary school and the private German school and enrolled to study at the Commercial Academy which she attended until April 1941.

After arrival to Palestine, in 1942, she completed the two-year agricultural school and lived in kibbutz Ganigar. She worked in Jerusalem in a saccharin manufacturing plant and at the same time learned to improve her English and typing. From 1948 she served in the Israeli Army and from there was invited in 1951 to work for the Yugoslav Consular Office in Jaffa. For seventeen years she worked as translator, translating the Israeli press into the Serbian language, and as an English correspondent.

Subsequently, until her retirement in 1994, she worked in the gas industry.

She was married to Mark Švarc, a Bulgarian Jew, who died in a traffic accident. She has a daughter Hedva (living in the USA) and son Amnon, and two grandchildren.

While in Belgrade, we lived in the neighborhood of Dorćol, often visiting grandmother Klara-Veza and grandfather Josif Manojlović, who lived in the Rige od Fere street. We were also close with my mother's sisters.

During the bombing of Belgrade, which started on 6 April 1941, we hid in the shelter of the Main Post Office building. Seven days later we returned to our house, in Jevrejska street, which was partly damaged by bomb shrapnels, but we could continue to live there. Until April 1941 we had a good life and in good relations with our neighbors. I did not really feel too comfortable in the German school. But, as it was a private school, I could not transfer to the public school.

Already in school I could feel the signs of anti-Semitism. The school principal was a very kind man. While Hitler's speeches were broadcast, when the whole school would assemble in the music hall to listen, the principal let me go home. The images of children going to the music hall and the voices of those speeches still resound in my memory.

For two years I was the best pupil in that school. The school principal once invited me to his office and said: „You know, I cannot hand to you your certificate in front of the whole school“. It was not a big school, it had one class for every grade. More or less, the pupils were children of the German “fifth column” people from regions of Bačka and Banat, close to the German embassy. My classmate was the daughter of the German Ambassador, Barbara fon Heren. We were friends. The pupils did not treat me bad, but I did feel bad since I knew what was happening in Germany, especially after the Crystal Night.

I remember very clearly: it was a very good school. It was located below the restaurant „London“, two blocks away. At that time we had a swimming pool. The reason I attended the German school was because my father had thought that I would not go very far knowing only the Serbian language, that I was intelligent enough and that I should learn languages. My brother did not go to this school. Namely, when I started it, it was still not bad. I started learning the German language already in kinder-garten.

At home we mostly observed Jewish traditions. I went to Ken. I realized that the friends from school were not really right for me so I joined Hashomer Hatzair. From that time I remember Lilika (Sarina Alkalaj). There were about six or seven of us girls, Lilika was 4–5 years older, and she was our madriha. We met on Sundays, and always had a lecture on different topics. We went for outings, walks, there was much to do. At the time I was between 12 and 14 years old. In summer we would go for vocations in Slovenia for two weeks, camping in tents.

At home we spoke Serbian, and with our relatives the Judeo-Espagnol, which I still speak well to this day. There would be special meals for Passover,

the Community distributed matzo and bojus. It was some kind of hard pie which we grated. We were not strongly religious. Two times a year we went to the synagogue, for Yom Kippur and Passover. We all fasted. I remember that my parents observed the kosher rules. We children would also buy ham, and mother instructed us not to put it on plates, but keep it wrapped in paper. Grandmother also told us the same, not to mix it with other food. At that time I did not realize why it should be so.

During the bombing of Belgrade we hid in the shelters of the Main Post Office. Once a day we were given bean soup. It was distributed by the Red Cross. At that time I was chubby, but due to the fear and the poor conditions, I lost something like five kilos. All day and night long we were sitting there in darkness. The sanitation was very poor, no water. Toilets on the floors above were clogged. So, all week long we were given a plate of bean soup per day and we did not starve, but we did not feel like eating.

We returned home. Waited to see what was to come. In visible places the Germans posted their decrees. According to one such decree all men were to report at Tašmajdan. Father went to register, but he complained of his sciatica and he was let go. It was still possible, at the beginning, to be exempted.

So, April and May went by, and June came. At school I was sitting next to the daughter of the secretary of the Bulgarian Embassy. Her name was Milka Vasileva. Her father called my father and told him: „You were born in Pirot. Go back there. We are organizing a train to send our people back to Pirot, to Bulgaria“. When father came home and told us of this call by Vasilev, I was jumping with joy and cheering: „Lets go, lets go!“. „But how can we go, and where?“, asked he while I was persistent with my „Let's go, let's go!“. We had two suitcases packed, we took a horse drawn wagon with one horse and in the morning at 4 o'clock we went to the railway station. Our names were on the list of the Bulgarian Embassy. I think it was the last train. There were many people travelling on it, fleeing the war. Many people were returning to Pirot, even Serbs. Germans and Bulgarians were Allies and did not get there as enemies, as was the case in Serbia. We left the house to my mother's sister Cana, Sarina Tajtacak.

If I remember correctly, we travelled two or three days, via Niš, sleeping on straw. There were no check points. We were afraid of the Germans. It was in cattle wagons that we travelled, stopping at every station until arrival in Pirot.

My father's brothers were overwhelmed with joy that we had come. A month later we rented a small apartment with small tiny rooms. Since he was fluent in foreign languages my father got a job with the Bulgarians.

Since he was taken by the Bulgarians as prisoner of war during World War One he spoke Bulgarian. He worked as secretary of the Jewish Community.

While still in Belgrade we had a little sack to which father would sometimes put some money, the so-called „Napoleons“. I took the sack with me when we were leaving for Pirot, and placed it below my skirt waist, next to my skin. If they had checked me I would not have kept it. But, they did not, and we used that money from time to time and we did not starve.

We were given a hearty welcome in Pirot. School started. I enrolled in the fifth grade of grammar school and I met Jelena Đorđević. Her father was killed by the Germans when they came to Pirot. He had a shop and he protested against something, so ... Jelena had two sisters and their mother. At that time I was wearing the yellow Magen David armband since the Bulgarians requested it. While walking the streets, Jelena put her arm around me so as to cover the star, since the town was full of Germans.

Bulgarian officers could not aspire for better positions if they could not speak German. My teacher recommended me to teach them German, so officers came to our place for lessons, and that was additional income for the whole family. Ten lev per lesson. That was how it was in 1942.

We managed to get into contact with our uncle and aunt (on my mother's side), Avram and Raša Majer. The uncle was a clerk of the French-Serbian bank in Belgrade and some years before the war he was seconded to Turkey to work for the subsidiary of the same bank in Ankara and that was where they were when the war began. The Sohnut moved to Turkey, which was a neutral country, to assist as much as possible in saving the Jews. The aunt managed to get two certificates for the „Jugend Aliyah“, for my brother and myself, so with a small group of five children and youth we managed to get from Bulgaria first into Turkey and continue to Palestine.

In Pirot I also had some Bulgarian friends. The daughter of the head of district went to school with me, I taught her German. When we were leaving, her father made a permit for my parents to accompany my brother and me and see us off in Sofia, where we had relatives. My father's mother was a Bulgarian Jew, grandmother Stela, and I was named after her. We left for Palestine on 10 November 1942.

The five of us children came to Istanbul, and subsequently we travelled to Halep in Syria, where we were met by a Sohnut representative. From Halep we continued to Beirut, and from Beirut by taxi to Haifa. Those who travelled together with me were: Izi Percec, 16, from Sofia; Rahel Beraha, also from Sofia; Jona Alkalaj, a relative to my aunt's husband; my brother Marko and I. Marko was 12 and I was 15. My date of birth was changed so that I could qualify for that Aliyah, and I am still registered as born in 1926.

We came to a place called *bet olim*, a home for the immigrants. We were met there by Henrieta Sold, an important person in Sohnut of that time. We were sent to the agricultural school, to Ben Shemen, where we learned Hebrew and how to work the land. Life was very good, in groups. The influence of political parties was already being felt there. Every time that an Aliyah arrived he or she would enter a party. I became member of Mapaj, the present day Avoda, with Shimon Peres. It was a center party. Hashomer Hatzair was more to the left. However, we knew almost nothing about it at the time. We stayed at school for two years. We learnt the language quickly. Half a day we would work and half a day study. I became qualified for the chickens, to operate the incubators. And my brother started studying for a machine operator. He became member of Hevrat Jeladim, a children's society, while I was with the Noar, the youth.

We were concerned for our parents. Every day we listened to the news that the Bulgarians would expel them. And truly, the Jews from Pirot were rounded up in March 1943, at 2 o'clock after midnight.

My parents had a different destiny. Father explained how they were saved.* We were reunited with our parents in February 1943. Since I was sick, my brother went to Haifa to meet our parents who arrived via Turkey to Palestine. They settled in Jerusalem, where they had a small shop and worked very hard. Near the end of their lives they came back to Haifa and lived with my brother. Our mother died aged 70, and father lived to be 81.

After two and a half years in Ben Shemen, I spent two or three months in a kibbutz, and moved to Jerusalem to help my parents.

In Palestine we did not know much about the war, we did not know that there were death camps in Europe. It was only after the war was over that we heard from those who were coming to Israel what was going on in Europe.

I registered for the Army, and was scheduled for the artillery, where I served as a major's secretary. We were making plans of how the army should be structured. Two years later I was invited by my boss who told me that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was asking for me, that they wanted me specifically due to my knowledge of Serbian and that he had to let me go. They tested me to do a translation of a Hebrew text into Serbian. I was employed at the Serbian representative office, to work for the first envoy to Israel, I think his name was Milutinović. I stayed in that service for seventeen years, until 1967. A new envoy would come every two or three years, and I was said to be their "inventory".

The most difficult moment for me, and the happiest at the same time, was when I was saying goodbye to my parents in Sofia, knowing that by do-

*See the testimony of Leon Sinda in the fifth edition of "We survived ... 5".

ing so my brother and I would be saved. That also meant being saved from being sent to Niš, where horrendous things were happening. I always remember the scene: my brother sitting in my mother's lap and crying. He was 11. I was sitting next to them, feeling very, very sad, but we were leaving ...

What could be my most difficult moment during the war in Belgrade...? I remember two events. The Germans were in the streets. Getting food was very difficult. There were no foodstuffs. Everything was very scarce. SO, I went to the banks of the Danube. It was said that people were bringing bread for sale from the other side by boats. I did not manage to get any, because a young man standing behind me was behaving very indecently. I ran home without any bread. That moment I cannot forget.

And another one. Again it was about bread being sold. Near the Jevrejska street there was a bakery. A German soldier was distributing numbers for people standing in the queue. I got an idea to make use of my German. The soldier was looking at me wondering how come a small girl could speak such good German. He gave me a number, and I did not want to take anything and again I was running home, because as a Jew I was not entitled to even stand in that line, although at the moment I was not wearing the yellow star. He followed me. I came home and told my mother that the soldier was following me. I was not wearing the yellow armband. Mother took me immediately to my grandmother's place in Rige od Fere street. The following day the soldier came to my mother and entered the house. They could enter wherever they wanted. He asked my mother if she had a cooling device for ice. If we had had one he would have taken it away. My mother thought that he was well-intentioned and she asked him why they hate Jews. He said: „We do not, but it is those above us who tell us that we should hate Jews“. So, I stayed with my grandmother for ten days. One day someone was knocking at the door – it was that same soldier! He was going from one room to another, I stood behind the door, terrified, glued to the wall. Luckily, he did not see me. That was why, once we receive the invitation to go to Pirot I was jumping with joy and saying: „Let's go, let's go!“

Thanks to that and other favorable circumstances all four of us managed to be saved.