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*Julijana CIRIC*

(as told to Jasna ĆIRIĆ)

## YEARS OF HIDING AND FEAR



*Julijana Ćirić was born in Zvornik on June 1, 1920, to Aron and Sofija Hajon, née Blam. She had four brothers and a sister. She hid in Niš with her parents under a false name until the liberation and remained in the city until the end of her life.*

*She lived in a happy marriage with Ratomir Ćirić for 32 years until his death in 1980. They had two children, Emil and Jasna.*

*Julijana Ćirić died in Niš in 1998.*

My father, Aron Hajon, was born in Kozluk in 1884 and my mother, Sofija Blam, in Zvornik in 1889. They were married in accordance with Jewish law in 1910 in a synagogue in Zvornik. They had six children: Henrih, Braco, Emil, Isidor, Matilda and me, Julijana.

Aron Hajon was a merchant in Zvornik, then ran a tavern in which he sold no alcohol and rented rooms to Jews. He moved to Belgrade with his family in 1939, where he had a tavern called Složna Braća in Njegoševa Street.

Two of Aron and Sofija's children, Henrih and Braco, died very young, while the rest of the family lived happily in Belgrade until April 6, 1941 when the second world war began. Our family didn't escape the tragic fate of the millions of Jews who perished in this time of Fascism. Emil and Isidor were killed near Šabac on January 14 and no one

knows where they are buried. Other members of the family were killed in Jasenovac, Đurinci and Sajmište, where there is no information about the graves of entire families.

But life can be like a lottery sometimes, and we four Hajons, Aron, Sofija, Matilda and Julijana, managed to escape the tragic fate of so many Jews.

The war caught us in Belgrade and so the running and the hiding began. First it was Višnjica near Belgrade, then Kozluk, Zvornik and Loznica. At the end of the first year of war, on December 1, 1941, we returned to Belgrade. However on December 15, all Jews in Belgrade received a notice ordering them to report within 24 hours with the keys to their apartments to the Command in Palmotićeve Street to arrange their departure to a camp. More than nine thousand of Belgrade's twelve thousand Jews, including women, children and elderly people from Banat, responded to this call; the rest had already been sent to camps or had managed to flee the capital.



*Happiness on their faces: Sofija, Julijana and Aron*

Our family did not respond, instead we fled again, this time to Niš. We didn't know anyone there. We set off during the night, by train, with just one rucksack with our belongings, as though we were Serb refugees from Bosnia. Father, mother and I found private accommodation in Niš using false identification papers issued in the names of Aca, Dara and Mirjana Marković.

My sister Matilda and our cousin, Olga Blam, also hid in Niš, using false documents in the names of Milena and Olga Blažić. However they were discovered. The Belgrade police sent an arrest warrant to the Niš police asking them to apprehend these two Jews and bring them to Belgrade under guard. The information reached them before it reached the police and they managed to flee Niš.

The Marković family, that is to say we Hajons, lived in Niš from December 15, 1941, until February 19, 1945, without being discovered by the Germans or local traitors. There is just one word for these four years: fear. It was essential that no one knew we were Jews, because our lives depended on it. I was asked for my papers many times and was in many raids. I was repeatedly taken to the police. We had to live through all this and remain level-headed. We skillfully concealed our identity and survived many difficulties. My father was once recognised in Niš by the head of the Zvornik district, but managed to convince him that he was Aca Marković.



*Lucky to survive: the Hajon family*

And what can I say about the time when our neighbour asked us to help with preparations for her family's saint's day? Dara was given the job of preparing the traditional cake and I was to serve the guests. Fear did the job: Jewish Sofija baked fine traditional Orthodox cake and I served the guests very decently. There was just one comment, that I washed my hands very frequently "as though she were a Jew",

and Ms Dara also made the sign of the cross in a strange way. Nonetheless we were one of the very few Jewish families who were not denounced and arrested. We survived the war in Niš, hiding under false Serbian names.

Mirjana Marković, in other words I, Julijana Hajon, worked in the Car Konstantin printing company during those war years. This was where, as so often happens in life, love sprang up between me and the then boss of the printing company, Ratomir Ćirić. But the secret had to be kept even then and even where love was concerned: it eventually came out only before our wedding in 1948. The secret Julijana Hajon behind the name Mirjana Marković remained hidden for a very long time, but this secret never changed anything in our relationship and our love. This was confirmed by his assurance that my being a Jew wouldn't be a problem for him in our marriage and that perhaps he had even discovered the secret earlier, because of my red hair and freckles.

Life told a very different story for some people during the war. For our family, the Hajons, this story and this long-kept secret brought life and salvation.

My father, Aron, died in Niš in 1967 and my mother Sofija in 1973, also in Niš.

The Stevanović and Blagojević families from Belgrade who, during the war, had falsely testified that the Hajons were actually the Marković family and were Serbs from Bosnia, were recognised by the state of Israel as Righteous among the Nations and awarded the medal of the Righteous.

Matilda Hajon and Olga Blam also survived the war and are still alive.