

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

Eva ĐORĐEVIĆ

SCARS IN THE WOUNDED HEART



*E*va Đorđević, née Ižak, was born on 27 July 1927 in the small town Mako, in Hungary, of father Dezider, born in 1890 in Seleuš, southern Banat, and mother Marta, née Glik (Glück), born in 1907 in Apatfalva, Hungary.

Her father was killed by the Nazis during the first year of the war. Many of her family members perished in the Holocaust.

After returning from the camp to Belgrade she completed her secondary education and graduated from the Medical Faculty. Along with attending the school for children

affected by the war, she was working as interpreter for the British doctors at the Clinic for Plastic Surgery in Belgrade.

From her marriage to Dušan Đorđević, psychologist, professor of the University of Belgrade, she has three daughters. She also has two grandsons. She worked as specialist of professional medicine in Pančevo, until her retirement in 1982.

My father was a grains trader and my mother a housewife. From 1927 to 1938 we lived in Bucharest, Romania, where my father worked in the branch of a company engaged in grains trading, with headquarters in Vienna, Austria. At the time of the Anschluss, the German occupation of Austria, my father lost his job on the grounds of being a Jew. In Romania we lived as Yugoslav citizens with residence permits. At the time when my father lost his job, the government of Romania was pro-Fascist, and denied

my father further residence in the country, so in April 1938 we came to Belgrade, where my father got a job. We lived in the neighborhood of Dorćol, in the vicinity of Bajloni market place.

There were many Jews living in Dorćol, which is why this district was very much the target of Nazi bombing on 6 April 1941. The building that we lived in, address Cara Dušana 73/I, was hit hard by a devastating bomb and, having received multiple hands and face injuries, we could hardly manage to get to the basement which was used as shelter. We could not return to our apartment due to the damages and the destroyed staircase. As my father had relatives in Pančevo, on 11 April 1941 we went to stay with relatives, just hours before the Pančevo bridge was blown up. Until that day we were hiding around Belgrade, in different shelters. Father reported to the army every day. The army always sent him back, saying that they would call for him if needed. Thus, on 12 April 1941 we woke up to a German occupation. That is when the Nazi atrocities against the Jews began: the mandatory wearing of the yellow armband with the Magen David and the word „Jude“, prohibition to go to public places, limited movement in the streets, forced labor. The worst was the humiliation of the Jews and constant fear of raids and executions.

During the night between 13 and 14 August 1941 the Nazis stormed our flat in Pančevo and forced us to leave our home within half an hour and take with us the basic necessities, by all means money and jewelry. When we got out in the street, there was already a lineup of Jews sharing the same suffering and rounded up before us. They made us go in the direction of the town hall. There they took our money and jewelry, including my gold necklace which I got as a present from my parents for my birthday. It is impossible to describe the fear and the suffering that we felt not knowing what will happen. Once we were robbed, they loaded us on a line of transport vehicles that were to take us under guard in the direction of Belgrade. Again, there was an overwhelming atmosphere of fear. The bridge had been destroyed, so we thought that we would be thrown into the Danube. That did not happen, rather before crossing to the other side by ferries we were met there by the representative of the Jewish Community, our religious teacher, Rabbi Kaufman, who told us that we would cross by ferries to Belgrade and that everyone who had friends or relatives should go to them for accommodation while those who did not would be accommodated in the synagogue.

Our friends, family Šlezinger, took us in in their home in Kneginje Ljubice Street 21a, across the street from the Federation of Jewish Communities which, under the occupation, was called „Jewish Office“. We had to report at the collection point in Džordža Vašingtona street, where they recorded our

data, opened our files and distributed to us badges that we must wear on our chests and our backs: on yellow background a black Magen David star and a yellow armband with the writing *Jude* on it.

In a matter of days there was an announcement that all Jewish men should report at the place in front of the Jewish Community, on a certain day at a certain hour, under threat of execution for those who fail to obey. That was how my father went to report. Thus, all men were taken away. Initially, we did not know where, nothing was said, and we were terrified about what could happen. Only subsequently did we hear that they were taken to the camp Topovske šupe, in Belgrade, near the Autokomanda square. Of course, we hurried there, my mother, I and all women whose family had been taken away. We tried to find them.

Somehow we managed, through the holes in the camp fence, to talk to our dearest. We did so covertly, one inmate would summon the other to the fence so shortly we saw and heard our family members, but the guards forced us off the fence pointing the butts of their guns at us. We went back. We went there even twice a day, hoping to see our father and talk to him. Once I even managed to get into the camp, and father took me in to show me where he was staying. Mother was waiting outside. He was on the upper floor: a big room with straw mats on the floor packed next to each other. To this day I wonder how I managed to get in, although only for some minutes. It was awful for me to see my father, who for me was the image of everything superlative to be incarcerated like that, snatched from his family, so humiliated. Yet, I was happy that I could see him and embrace and kiss him.

I shall remember the day of 6 October 1941 as long as I live. On that day, as usual, we were waiting near the camp gate hoping that we would manage to ask some guard or inmate to call our father to the gate or the fence. To our surprise, we suddenly saw my father coming out of the camp and pushing in front of him the cart loaded with waste to dispose of it a bit further away from the gate. We used this opportunity to see him, talk to him, because he said that he could stay only very shortly. We were not fortunate to have some more time with him. Suddenly, there was a whistle blown, and there was shouting that all inmates should line up inside the camp grounds. Thus, he had to go inside the camp. At the same time we saw some vehicles entering the camp. We waited outside, not for long, when we heard that inmates would be transferred from this camp to another and that this „relocation“ will be happening gradually, ever day a certain number of inmates would be relocated. The following morning we came again to see father and we briefly spoke with him through the fence until the villains came with the butts of their guns and forced us away. We came again at noon.

The following day and the days after when we came we saw a number of open trucks full of inmates who were being taken away from the camp. Father was still there. That lasted until 14 October 1941. Having the presentiment that the parting would happen soon, I approached the guard and asked him to call my father so we could see him. The guard asked me where my father was from. All the men in the camp at that time were rounded up in Banat and Belgrade. I said he was from Pančevo. The guard said that he was from Pančevo as well and called my father. There was still something humane in him that those who gave him orders did not manage to destroy. He let us talk for about ten minutes. We said that we would be coming again in the afternoon. When we did so, we heard that my father had been taken away on that day. That day, 14 October, was the last day that I saw my father. For me that was the saddest day of my life which shall stay in my memory forever. People started guessing where they were taken, and there were different rumors around: some said Šabac, others said they were taken for labor to Germany, but there was no specific news about my father. Our fearful hearts were filled with gloomy forebodings.

Women and children were still „free“. At end of October we were offered the possibility to flee to Hungary. There were rumors that women would be put into camps, and that children would be separated from the mothers. I was against us leaving as I was hoping that we would get some news about father. Relatives and friends were persuading us to use this opportunity as we were facing great danger. Finally, we did leave on 31 October 1941. Regretfully, we did not have this opportunity earlier, while father was still with us.

Our fleeing to Hungary was arranged by a wonderful woman, a German woman married to our relative, a Jew. I do regret that I did nothing to nominate her for the Righteous Among Nations, but maybe it is not too late even now, although she had died a long time ago. Her name was Marija Tomić, born in 1913 in Bački Gračac, she was a retired civilian disabled as victim of war. She lived in Novi Sad, in Narodnih heroja street 19/I. She saved us and tens of other Jews, by organizing escape in German military trucks. At the border between the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) and Hungary declarations were presented that the trucks were transporting cargo. We were instructed to keep completely still, practically without even breathing, in order not to be discovered. When we arrived in Novi Sad the police had discovered the scheme. We managed to flee the house where we were put up and in which Marija lived. She and her husband were arrested, tortured, and later released. While fleeing, we left in the apartment a suitcase with our documents, and the police probably seized it. We were a group of about twenty fugitives. On foot, without an-

anything, we set off to find a friend of my father's in Novi Sad. We told him everything and he took us the same night by train to Budapest and put us up with his relatives.

The relative arranged for counterfeited documents, a fake residence permit for us, without a trace to the police. From the places of our birth they got our birth certificates. So we lived by moving from relatives to relatives. Jews in Hungary were still free, although certain restrictions were already being introduced. A cousin of ours, who had a shop making women's underwear, took me in as apprentice, and introduced me to other workers as a relative from Novi Sad which at that time was under the Hungarian occupation.

Before the war I had completed the third grade of grammar school, but I could not continue my education in Budapest because I was there illegally. The relatives arranged for me to learn English, together with their children. After we stayed with relatives for some time, they found for us a boarding home managed by some Jews who were hiding immigrants. There were Jews there from Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia. One morning, in February 1943, there was a raid and we were arrested. Our friends suggested that, if apprehended and asked who helped us to come to Hungary, we should name someone who had been dead for some time.

We were taken to two different camps in Budapest, and subsequently to the camp *Rice*, on the border with Czechoslovakia, where we stayed three and a half months. We were made to clean the camp perimeter, to take buckets of sand to a hill 300 meters high, eight hours a day. Again, with the help of relatives, my mother, my aunt (who was with us all the time, Ana Švarc from Vršac) and I managed to get medical certificates stating that we were ill, and we were released from the camp, with the obligation to regularly report to the Budapest Department for Foreign Citizens. We were told by the department that we have to report every month and were not allowed to leave Budapest. We did so until 19 March 1944, when Hungary was occupied by Germany. At that time again we had to go underground and change our residence all the time. I stopped working in the shop, and my mother and I did work for different families, my mother as a cook and me as maid. As soon as they would start questioning us about who we were, we had to leave and move on. Bombing by Allied forces started. In shelters we were suspicious, the janitors became the key informers and the situation became precarious.

On 15 October 1944 extreme Hungarian Fascists – *Nilai* came to power, infamous for their cruelty. The same month an announcement was made that all Jewish men and women aged from 14 to 60 should report on 25 October at a certain place and time. Whoever disobeyed would be executed.

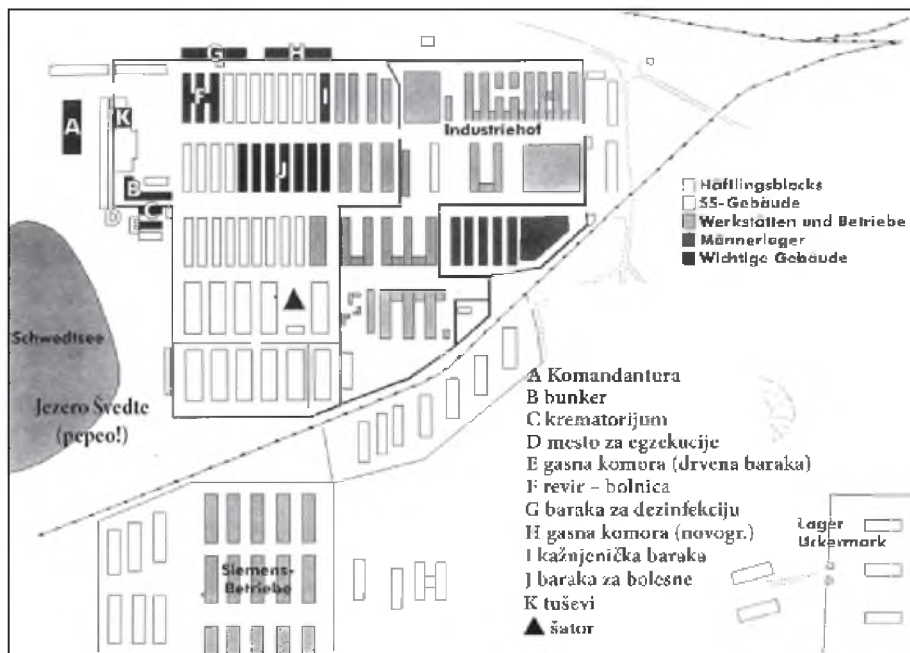
As we had exhausted every possibility of where we could stay, we reported. As of that day we were made to walk 30 – 40 kilometers per day, in pouring rain and cold, towards the Austrian border. At night they would force us into pigsties or stables with cattle, and the following day the suffering would continue. The clothes we were wearing could not get dry, the shoes were torn. Sometimes, we spent the night outdoors, if it did not rain. During this journey we were stopped at the place Szentgyörgypuszta, where we were to dig trenches. Our guards, Nilai, Hungarian Fascists, were cruel, they tortured and humiliated us. After we completed the digging of trenches, we moved on foot towards the Austrian border, and while doing so we were forced to carry heavy shovels.

In November we arrived at the Austrian border and the Hungarian Fascists handed us over to the German Fascists. There they packed us into trains and the trains took off into the unknown. After a while, the train stopped at a railway station, where we saw workers in striped uniforms, with numbers on their sleeves above red triangles. Through the window we called one of them. It turned out that he was a Yugoslav, a political prisoner. The railway station proved to be Buchenwald.

That man told us what was ahead. He wished us all the best. The train moved on and after a while we arrived to Rawensbrück, where we were exposed to unbelievable physical and psychological torture. We were pushed into a packed full barrack with three level bunk beds, and we placed three per bed, on straw mats filled with lice and one lice filled blanket. They took our clothes away, gave us some flimsy summer dresses and thin jackets, and they kept our shoes because they were already torn due to the long walking. We were woken up at four in the morning, in a most unpleasant of ways – shouting, cursing, whipping by the capos Lili and Jađa, from Poland. Then we were forced out of the barracks for roll call, where they kept us until eight o'clock, often at temperatures as low as –10 to –20 degrees, the distance between inmates one meter so that we cannot warm each other by our closeness. Whoever tried to do so was beaten. After standing at the awful *Appell-platz*, which was the name of the roll call site, where we were lined up, already exhausted and frozen, with a pot of dark liquid, called coffee, and a thin slice of bread made of flour and saw dust, we were forced to work outdoors and in cold warehouses at very low temperatures which we could see on thermometers located near the guards at the camp gate.

We were tasked with loading coal onto trucks with our bare hands, pushing these trucks, filling bags with flour and carrying them to the trucks (the bags were 50 to 80 kilograms), digging the frozen soil with heavy hacks, unloading vegetables from trucks and pushing the unloaded vegetables to

the warehouses in heavy carts. It often happened that in the evening after the hard day's work, they would force us to continue working under the spotlights. We were taken to the railway station outside the camp, with lined up carriages full of different cargo – furniture, kitchenware, textile ... robbed across the whole of Europe. We were to unload and move those things to warehouses. After returning from work, we were searched by guards and capos.



The layout of the Ravensbrück camp where Eva Đorđević was an inmate

We suffered terrible starvation, we could not maintain personal hygiene, and were covered with lice. The camp was intended for women, about 45,000 from all over Europe. Every day upon returning from work we would find in the camp dozens of dead bodies, piled up like wood – inmates of ours who could not stand the torture.

To our great surprise, when a new transport arrived, we saw among those arriving the woman who saved us – Marija Tomić who was brought there from Hungary, where she was repeatedly arrested for assisting Partisans, Serbs and Jews. She had been released from prison in 1942 and she went to live illegally in Budapest. She was found in 1944 during a raid, and she stated on that occasion that Hitler had lost the war, after which she was deported to Rawensbrück.

On 5 March 1945 we were transported to the Burgau camp, a section of the Dachau concentration camp. The journey took 17 days. We were loaded 10 *Häftling* per cargo carriage. Once in two or three days we were given a piece of bread and a piece of very salty salami. When we asked for water, we were beaten on our heads by the *Aufseherin*. There was a bucket for us to relieve ourselves, and the bucket was emptied once in two or three days.

To Burgau we arrived totally exhausted, the roll call continued, as well as the cruelty and humiliation. They could not send us for forced labor as we were by that time just living skeletons. Some three weeks later, we were transferred by trucks to Türkheim, also part of Dachau. There we were put in underground premises, again on lice-filled straw mats and blankets, along with the mandatory roll call.

About a week before liberation, we were transferred to Landsberg, yet another section of Dachau. The accommodation was the same as in previous camps, food every second day, bread made with wood saw.

We were liberated on 27 April 1945 by the US Army. Exhausted, sick with spotted typhoid, we were moved by the liberators to the improvised hospital in Bad Wörishofen, which previously was used as place for recovery of German officers.

After a long recovery, we were repatriated via Osijek to Belgrade. We arrived to Belgrade on 12 August 1945.

My mother and I immediately went to the Federation of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia to inquire about my father, and we found out about the tragic destiny of my father, our relatives and friends. All inmates from Topovske Šupe camp were executed the same day when taken away from the camp, in the vicinity of Pančevo, on the way to Jabuka. We heard from many residents of Pančevo that they had seen or heard the convoys going day after day towards Jabuka, carrying camp inmates.

I have no words to describe my sorrow for my lost father. My mother and I have placed a modest stone plate with the inscription saying *Desider Ižak, 1890–1941, victim of Fascist terror, forever mourned by his family*. We placed the plate on the grave of his mother, Rozalija Ižak, buried at the Jewish cemetery in Pančevo.

After all the physical and psychological suffering, I started a new life, completed my secondary education and graduated from the Medical Faculty. During evening hours I attended classes for pupils affected by the war, attending the grades 4, 5, 6, and 7; during the day I working as interpreter for the British doctors at the Clinic for Plastic Surgery in Belgrade. I attended the eighth grade as a regular student in Novi Sad. My work at the clinic

motivated me for the medical studies. I married, and I have a wonderful husband, Dušan Đorđević. We have three daughters and two grandchildren who are now students. I worked as specialist of professional medicine in Pančevo until my retirement in 1982. The new life gave me lots of joy, but there remained forever an unhealed scar on my wounded soul and body. The irreparable loss of my father, relatives and friends, the loss of home, the physical and psychological suffering, humiliation and torture – it is something I will not be able to forget as long as I live.

What I had written here is only a part of what I lived through during the horrific years of war, but after two heavy heart attacks I could hardly muster the courage for this much.