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SURVIVED...3

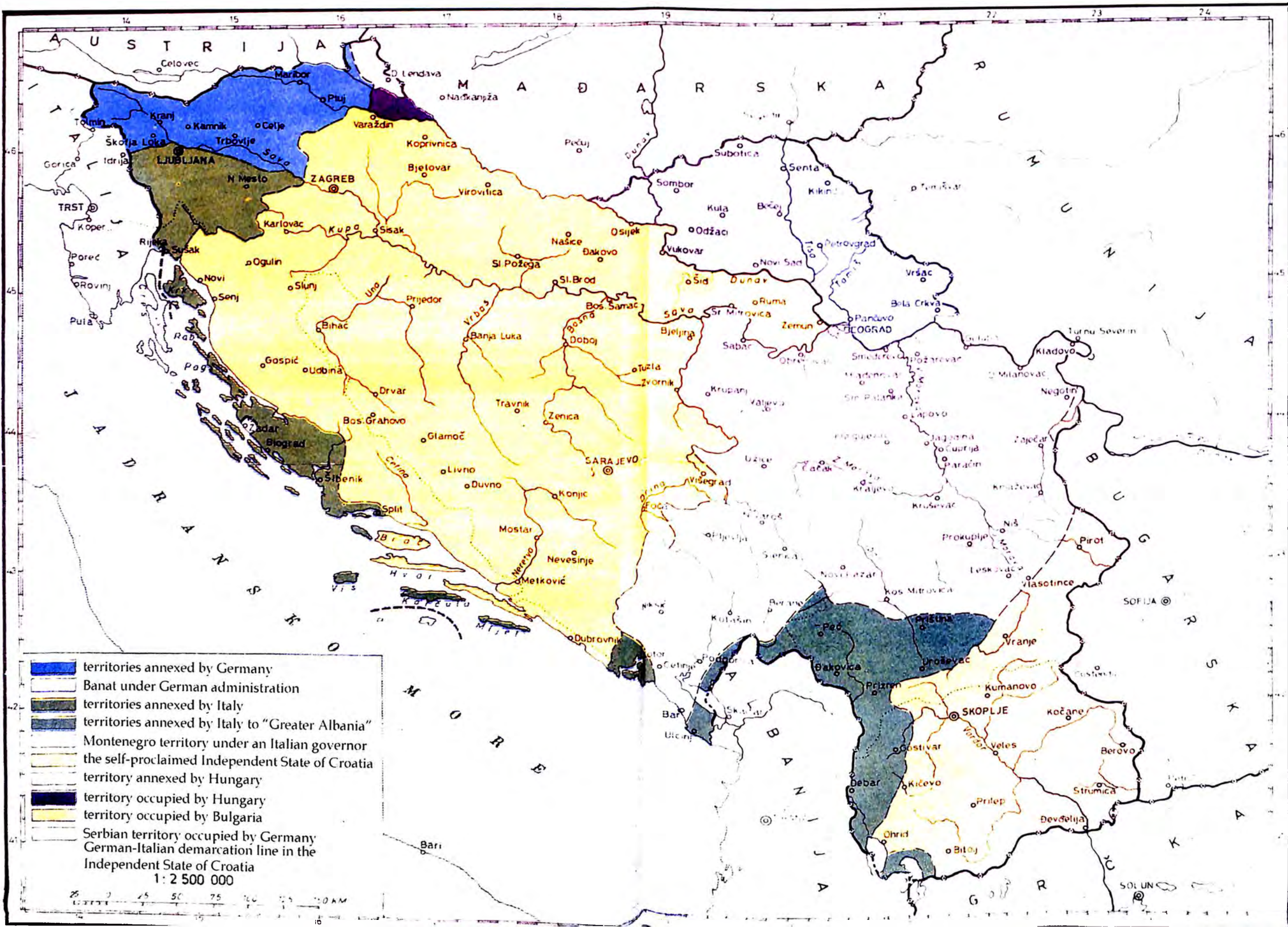
YUGOSLAV JEWS ON THE HOLOCAUST

סקופייה

SKOPLJE



DIVISION AND OCCUPATION OF YUGOSLAVIA AFTER THE APRIL 1941 COLLAPSE



*This book is dedicated to the memory  
of the Jews of Yugoslavia who perished  
in the Holocaust from 1941 to 1945*

WE SURVIVED... 3  
Jews on the Holocaust

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# **WE SURVIVED... 3**

**Yugoslav Jews on the Holocaust**

**BELGRADE, 2009.**



**Claims Conference** ועידת התביעות  
The Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany

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## PREFACE

Six years ago a group of survivors had the idea of collecting and publishing memoirs of the atrocities passed through by Jews who had managed to survive the Holocaust. At the time this group, which quickly grew into an editorial board, had no idea they had embarked on a truly pioneering mission which, over time, was to acquire a broad social dimension and historical importance.

The personal testimonies of the authors collected in this third volume are deeply imbued with the tension of the emotional recounting of personal experiences and ways of surviving and are at the same level as those published in the first two books. All the horror, suffering, torture and humiliation which these witnesses had the strength, persistence and luck to survive during the implementation of the project to exterminate the Jewish people is presented in this book as though on film. Each story is special and different, even those which deal with the same place, the same camp, but they all share the deep human striving to persevere, even in conditions which were created precisely so that no one would survive them. Readers of this book will not be spared the bitterness and the harrowing experience of these testimonies, and the questions will constantly hover before them: how was all this possible, how far can human endurance stretch and how low is the depth of evil to which a human being can sink? Even the members of the editorial board, seven of whom survived the Holocaust themselves, are aware that these questions will remain unanswered.

The Holocaust, as the product of a deranged mind, unique in the history of mankind and of civilisation, is something which many world organisations and the greatest minds of the modern world have focused on for more than six decades. To this day no one has answered the question of how it was possible for a vicious plan to eradicate an entire people from the face of the earth to emerge in the twentieth century. Human consciousness falls short of discoveries which would help identify the roots of this evil, let alone justify it.

The preface to the second book, when briefly addressing the sufferings of the last two millennia, made mention of the persecution of the Jews from the beginning of their enslavement under the pharaohs of Egypt, their loss of independence and exodus at the hands of the Romans, their expulsion from Spain during the Inquisition, all the way through to the genocide carried out in the Holocaust, the greatest organised crime in the history of civilisation. The suffering of Jews in the camps of Nazi Germany and the states which supported it during the second world war exceeded any pogrom against any people to that point in history. About fifty million people perished in the second world war, of whom thirty million were civilians and of these six million were Jews. With this number of children, women and people from European soil killed in concentration camps, crematoriums and other execution sites, more Jews perished, by percentage, than any other nation and were brought almost to the point of physical disappearance. Despite this, the consequences of the Holocaust have still not been fully investigated, nor has there been an overview of the magnitude of this evil which, at one point, simply flared up in the madness of the leaders of one continent and one circle of civilisation, and one, at that, which aspired to enlightenment.

Even today there is no excess of research in this area because, it seems, human evil is difficult to eradicate. Even today, it insolently rears its head in many milieus, as though civilisation at the beginning of the third millennium has learnt no lessons from the hellish and partly implemented plans from the recent past. This evil is repeated in ever-present hatred and, unfortunately, in the form of a revival of anti-Semitism in those countries which have still not healed the traumas of the period which will remain as a black point in the development of human society. This seed of evil is germinating in many places and is finding a footing even in those environments in which the authors of the testimonies of this book lived or still live. This leads to the conclusion that evil has not been defeated, that it must constantly be fought, that it must not be underestimated. If the emergence of anti-Semitism at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is ignored, then there is no certainty that this vicious derangement of the human mind will not again take its toll on the lives of a new generation of Jews and other nations.

The first two books in this series have already made a major contribution to informing the general public about the suffering of Jews on

the territory of the former Kingdom of Yugoslavia and also about their contribution to the victory over Fascism. Because of this it is worth paying attention to the effort to save from oblivion, and leave as a legacy for new generations, a vision of the important traces and contributions of Jewish communities in all forms of development and creativity in the environments in which they existed.

It must be noted that the efforts of the editorial board would have produced no visible results had the pioneering nature of the work not been recognised by many individuals whose donations made it possible to publish this book of memoirs. The response from Jewish communities and organisations, as well as the general public, to the first book was reason enough to translate it into English as soon as possible, so that both individuals and institutions in this broadest of language communities may become acquainted with the suffering of Jews from these regions. There is still insufficient awareness of this both in Jewish communities and in the general public. The picture will be made more complete with the publication of the second book in English which is to follow in the near future.

The editorial board expresses gratitude to all who, together with the principal donor Haim Mile Pinkas, have made it possible through their contributions to publish these books and to those who continue to show this generosity, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture and other institutions in which the board was met with understanding in the provision of material assistance. Gratitude is also owed to the Jewish Historical Museum and the Federation of Jewish Municipalities in Belgrade for creating the conditions for this project and including it in their program undertakings.

In order to present the themes and authors published in the first two volumes to readers who have not had the opportunity to see these, the contents of those volumes are here published in an appendix.

*Milinko RADEVIĆ*



I

WITH THE PARTISANS



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*Žamila-Anđela KOLONOMOS*

IN BATTLE FROM DAY ONE



*Žamila-Anđela Kolonomos was born in Bitola on June 18, 1922, to father Isak Kalef Kolonomos and mother Esterina Samuel Fransez, from Skopje. They had five children: Žamila, Bela, Rašela, Kalef and Menahem.*

*Her mother, Esterina, died in March, 1941, from a heart attack. Her father, Isak, was the director of the French-Serbian Bank. Her sister Bela married Mois Kasorl. Together with her three-month-old baby, she and her student siblings, Kalef, Menahem and Rašela, all perished in the*

*Treblinka camp. Her grandmother Žamila, grandmother Rahel, grandfather Samuel and all their relatives also perished in the Treblinka camp on March 11, 1943. Of her entire immediate and extended family, Žamila was the only one to survive the Holocaust.*

*She matriculated from the French school in Bitola in 1940. From 1941 to 1945 she was involved with the National Liberation Movement in Macedonia. As the battle developed the number of fighters grew and, as new units were being formed, Žamila worked her way up from being a deputy company political officer, to that of a battalion, then of a brigade, eventually becoming deputy political commissioner of the 42nd Division of the Yugoslav Army.*

*After the war she was a political official: an MP in several parliaments, president of the Union of Women's Associations, of the Council for the Care and Education of Children, of the War Veterans' Union and*



*others. She retired as a member of the Council of the Republic of Macedonia.*

*In 1961 she graduated from the Faculty of Philosophy and was appointed a senior lecturer in the Department of Romance Languages. In 1962-63 at the École des hautes études of the Sorbonne University in Paris, with her mentor, Professor Izrael Revah, she published a paper entitled "Les parles judeo-espanjol de Bitola (Monastir) et Skopje (Üsküzb)". She is the author of a number of published works on the Judaeo-Spanish language and of articles on the role of Jews in the National Liberation Struggle and the life of Jews in Bitola. She is the author of a collection of documents entitled "Evreite vo Makedonija vo vtora svetovna vojna 1941-1945", and of the book "Proverbs, Sayings and Stories of Sephardic Jews of Macedonia", editor of the books "Sefardski odglasi", "Cvetovi vo Plamen" (documents on the participation of young people in the National Liberation Struggle), "Collection of Proverbs of Sephardic Jews of Bosnia and Herzegovina", consulting editor of the books "Women in the National Liberation Struggle", "Bitola Jews", "Estreja Ovadja Mara national hero", and others. She is a holder of the Partisan Commemorative Medal, 1941, and of a number of military and peacetime decorations and awards.*

In April, 1941, following some minor gunfire, the Germans occupied Bitola. Hakham Ham Zaharija was at our house at the time, having come to take the lamp which was burning to mark my mother's death which had occurred in the month of March. He didn't want to stay and wait for the situation to calm down. We could hear occasional bursts of machine-gun fire. We went down to the basement and, from a small window, saw a motorcycle with an SS sign pull up outside the French-Serbian Bank building. We were pretty frightened. My father suggested that we pack as soon as possible and move to our nearby house. The Bulgarian Fascist Army also arrived soon after. This was the beginning of dark days for us Jews. Together with the Germans, the Fascists plundered all Jewish shops and many apartments. Signs began to appear reading "No entry for Jews, Gypsies and dogs". My father, as director of the French-Serbian Bank was taken by the Germans, by force, to open the vault of the bank, which was immediately robbed. He lost his job and, just like all other Jews who were dismissed from all services,

he was left without a pension. More than 42 laws, bans and orders against Jews were passed, with the signature of the Bulgarian Czar Boris. All shops were closed, all business, cultural and social activities were banned. Properties were being confiscated every day. We were left with no means of support, people were selling everything that hadn't been stolen: family jewellery, wedding rings, dowries. There was a very high level of solidarity among the Jews. We were given yellow Stars of David and banned from leaving the town and travelling. As members of Hashomer Hatzair, almost all of us joined the National Liberation Movement. The Jews has no choice, so more than twenty per cent of the population helped the National Liberation Struggle in Bitola in various ways. Sheltering people without papers, Partisans, the wounded, having illegal meetings, stockpiling food, printing leaflets in Pepo Hason's house and distributing leaflets around the town were just some of the illegal activities being carried out in Jewish houses by young Jewish people. All of this work was done more or less as though it was legal because there were no informers in the Jewish settlements.

The terror of the Bulgarian police was becoming more and more cruel and the fear of the population greater and greater. The development of the National Liberation Movement was slow. There was no chance of accommodating all the young people who wanted to join Partisan units.

In March, 1943, we still knew nothing about the existence of death camps. The newspapers published nothing about the reprisals and deportations. Communication with relatives abroad and Jewish communities was cut off. The Bulgarians spread information that they would mobilise young people for work in Bulgaria. We were all very anxious. We would go to bed fully dressed, not turning the lights off at night, we were making bags and baking bread, just in case. There was a message passed around that anyone who could cross into Greece or Albania and hide there should do so as soon as possible and later they would be put in touch with the Partisans. However very few young people managed to leave town. Salamon Sami Sadikario, Albert Ruso and Albert Kasorla found shelter with Boris Altiparm. I was given an address by Bora Miljovski for a place I could find shelter. On March 9, I hid in a kiosk owned by Bogoje Siljanovski, a disabled man with one leg, and spent the night there. In the morning, I returned home to make lunch, tidy up and feed my grandmother, who had had a stroke, and to prepare a rucksack with one change of clothes for each of us. My father

had nowhere to hide with his invalid mother and young brothers and sisters. No one had any idea of the coming mass deportation to Poland and the total destruction of the Jewish population.

In the evening I went to the kiosk again. We didn't even say our goodbyes, thinking that I'd return home in the morning. I took Estela Levi with me so that I wouldn't be alone. The kiosk was close to the Bulgarian police station; agents and police officers would come there to buy cigarettes. The kiosk, of about three square metres, was divided into two parts, one for sales and the other, separated by a straw curtain, was storage space. That's where we spent the night with another two people without papers. There was no space to stretch out our legs, we had no water, no food, no light or heating and not even a toilet. We shivered in the dark from the cold and fear. We waited, not sleeping, for the dawn to break. Halfway through the night we heard people rushing, talking, the sound of horses and cars. Something was happening and we had no idea what. Soon we heard a loud noise like thunder. Gradually we began to recognise voices, shouting, pleading, begging, the cries of women and children, even prayers, "Shema Yisroel". These cries tore our souls and hearts apart. We hear them to this day in nightmares. This is something I cannot forget. Locked in as we were, we began crying. We couldn't get out, there was not even a window in the kiosk. Through the keyhole we could see the snow falling in big flakes. We could hear the orders given by the police officers; "Hurry, hurry!" The cries were slowly fading into the distance, in the direction of the town centre as the column headed towards the railway station. Soon silence took over, as though the town were dead.

On March 11, no one went out. Even our boss didn't come. We spent the whole day waiting. In the evening, Bogoja came with Pavle, with the secretary of the Local Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, Estreja Ovađa, with Adela Faradi, Roza Kamhi and Đoka Tapanđiefski. They had been hiding in a store in the Jewish quarter and had seen everything the Fascist police officers and soldiers did while rounding up Jews and taking them away. They took their money, their blankets, even their coats. They were allowed to take only one bundle each. They crammed the sick and the frail, elderly people into carts drawn by old horses. In the general panic, the Jews were taking their places in the sad procession, not knowing what was happening to them. Not until 1945 did we learn that they were loaded into cattle cars and taken to Skopje where they were packed into tobacco warehouses in

Monopol, as a temporary camp. It was here that our compatriots underwent unprecedented suffering: hunger, thirst, insanitary conditions, cold, illnesses, suffocation from the lack of air, from boarded up windows and from the stench. They were crammed in on top of one



*Zamila Kolonomos' membership card of the Young Communist League of Yugoslavia (above);  
Zamila as a National Liberation Movement fighter in Kičevo, 1943 (right)*

another, living like this until the month of April when they were turned over to the Germans. They were deported in several groups. As soon as they arrived in Treblinka they were pushed into the so-called bathrooms, immediately suffocated and then incinerated. Not one survived. The Jewish communities of Bitola and the whole of Macedonia were extinguished forever.

We five Jewish women hid in the kiosk for a month, waiting for a contact with the Partisans. Bulgarian police officers and agents were coming by all the time to buy cigarettes. They would hang around, talking to the boss and swearing. We listened to all of this. We were separated



from them only by a thin straw curtain. We couldn't breathe loudly, couldn't cough or move around. If there was even the slightest creaking sound from the rotting floorboards, Bogoje would bang his hands and laugh loudly to camouflage the sound. He couldn't carry anything with him in case the Bulgarian guards became suspicious. He would bring water in a small container and, occasionally, a bit of bread wrapped up in the stump of his amputated leg. We were starving dreadfully. The little shop began to smell filthy and the agents became suspicious. The boss promised to clean and paint it. Before we left the kiosk, Adela Faradi and I had to collect the valuables that our people had left behind. We exposed ourselves to great danger with this and it was only luck that we weren't discovered. Unfortunately everything had fallen into the hands of the police so neither we nor the National Liberation Movement had any benefit from them. For two nights we hid at Pavle's, and during the day we were closed up in a closet. Meanwhile Bogoje painted the kiosk and let the police see that it was empty. We returned to the kiosk without any food, water or blankets and stayed sitting upright. Estreja Ovađa fell ill and developed a high temperature. We had no water to give her, not to mention medicine. Her whole body was trembling from the fever and we were hugging her to keep her warm. We begged them to rescue us as soon as possible and send us to join the Partisans. After a lot of haggling and argument, thanks to our persistence, a patrol came to escort us. Only Roza was given the password and the name of the place where we were to meet up with the couriers.

We thanked Bogoje and came out of the kiosk, one after another. At a crossroads we lost contact with Roza. We were in a difficult situation, not knowing where to go. I remembered Bora Miljovski's flat at the other end of town. The curfew had begun.

We waited in his house. He finally arrived and immediately took us to Elen Skobern's house, again at the other end of the town. We ran into a police patrol and escaped by a hair's breadth. Elen put us in an empty shed in the yard. We froze there for two days until a new contact came. We were given a password and a meeting place. We had to cross the whole town once more to get to the park. Thanks to the fact that I knew this part of town well, we reached the designated place by taking back streets. There we waited for two hours, sitting on the snow beside a bush. A police patrol on horse passed by, lighting up the park with a powerful torch. We pulled our coats over our heads and huddled together: the torch beam swung past our feet, they didn't see us. Finally after



a long delay we heard someone whistling the song “Lili Marlen”. We reached the Partisan couriers and, with rapid steps, headed for the direction of the Greek border. Meanwhile Roza had been captured by the police and everyone was exposed. Our saviours, Bogoje, Pavle and Bora Miljovski were arrested. We were also exposed, but by then we were out of the clutches of the police.

In the Damjan Gruev Partisan unit, in April 1943, we met a group of young Jewish men. Everyone wanted to know what had happened to our people. We had no idea what had happened after the deportation from Skopje. The warm and friendly reception and the knowledge that we were to fight against the Nazis, the enemies of the Jews, heartened us. About ten of us Partisan Jews were assembled and took an oath that we would fight well and bravely.



*Žamila Kolonomos and husband  
Avram Sadikario in 2000*

Bulgarian propaganda was disseminating information that there were very few Macedonians in the Partisans and that most of them were Vlachs, Jews and communists. There was also a story around that Jews were not good fighters, that they were cowards. But, on the contrary, we were exemplary, decent and brave, we all held responsible positions in the military units. Estreja Ovađa was pro-

claimed a National Hero of Yugoslavia and we all received major military decorations. We eleven Jews from Macedonia hold the Partisan Commemorative Medal 1941. We had to endure many battles with Germans, Italians and Balists.

In April 1943, a group of ten or so very exhausted young men arrived in the free Greek territory where we were resting temporarily. They asked for water and I gave them a canteen. While they drank, one took some *matzo* from his bag. I became very excited and, in Ladino, asked if they were perhaps Jews, and they gave me an affirmative reply, also in Ladino. They told us they were Jews who had been deported

from Thessalonica and that they had barely escaped. Their leader had a fierce argument with our commander and they signalled to us that they were going back. I ran to ask why they weren't being taken into our units. They told me that there was an agreement with the leadership of the Greek Partisans that their fighters be sent to their own units. There were Germans in the vicinity and they probably fell into their hands. I was depressed. After the war, in Thessalonica, I enquired about their fate, but no one knew anything about them, not even people who had been in Greek units.

There was another case which really affected me. In March 1943, in Skopje Montenegro, seventeen young Skopje Jews waited for several days for a contact to join the Partisans. For reasons unknown the couriers never appeared, although they had been promised that they would come. They all fell into the hands of the police, were taken to the Monopol camp and ended up in Treblinka.

All those people who spoke in thunderous tones during and after the war about the Jews not wanting to join the Partisans and fight against Fascism should be ashamed, even on the basis of these two "accidental" cases alone. And there were other similar cases.

The first Macedonian-Kosovo assault brigade set off in February 1944 to expand the free territory occupied by the Bulgarian Fascist army. It was a very cold winter with winds, snowstorms and a lot of precipitation. The police and army quickly discovered us because of the tracks we left in the snow. Together with German units they surrounded us. The offensive lasted fifteen days. We were constantly encircled, but kept breaking out of the encirclement and fought battles day and night. With no rest, without food, poorly equipped and dressed, in deep snow, on mountain tops, we began to lose momentum. For the first time I saw the meaning of white death. Exhausted fighters would take cover behind a bush in an attempt to snatch some rest. They would fall asleep there and death would quickly follow. We forced the fighters to move around. Many of them were hallucinating. We would see them smiling, their arms outstretched as though they were warming themselves, some of them would cut up their rucksacks or clothes, thinking they were bread. I didn't escape this danger myself: I thought I heard dogs barking. I was seeing us getting closer to houses and myself eating roast meat.

In a number of difficult Partisan battles and situations, Čedo Filipovski – a national hero whom I called "my saviour" – had saved my life several times. He had often exposed himself to mortal danger to

save me. Now, once again, he was quick to respond and asked an English officer from the Brigade military mission to give me a sugar cube. The officer didn't refuse. This sugar cube helped me to come back to my senses. Assistance arrived from the Second and Third Macedonian Brigades who took over the battles with the Germans and Bulgarians. We crossed over to the liberated Greek territory. I was left without shoes, they had fallen apart from the damp. I would wrap my feet in rags. A wound developed on my leg and the doctor, having no medicines, was pessimistic in his prognosis. An old lady helped me with a balm made of wax, cooking oil and grass.

There were many difficult events that I lived through in 1944. At the beginning of 1945 I was demobilised and began work at the Provincial Committee of Anti-Fascist Youth. I married my "saviour", but good fortune was not with us. In June, 1945, he was killed on a seized motorcycle, as the commander of the 48<sup>th</sup> Division. But soon after, on July 27, 1945, I gave birth to my daughter and she kept me alive after the loss of my whole family and my husband. But misfortune kept following me. In 1963, at the age of eighteen, my daughter was killed in the Skopje earthquake.

I have lived to see my days as a pensioner and my old age with many good and bad events. I am married to Dr Avram Sadikari, we have a son, Samuel, who is a doctor of science, and a professor at the Medical Faculty. He is married and has two daughters, Hana and Lea, who are now in Israel.

It took a great deal of courage, endurance and luck to survive the Holocaust, as well as the luck of meeting people who were willing to help.

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*Vukica KAJON-STUPAR*

FRIENDS ALWAYS COME TO THE RESCUE



*S*ara-Vukica Kajon-Stupar was born in Višegrad on October 20, 1911, to father Isak and mother Hana, née Levi. She had a brother, Rafael, who was three years younger.

*Her parents, two aunts, a cousin with her two children and many members of her extended family perished in the Holocaust.*

*She completed pharmaceutical studies in Zagreb in 1935.*

*She lives in Belgrade with her husband, Voja Stupar. From her first marriage to Nikola Rikov she has a son, Zoran, who holds a master's degree in economics and lives in Switzerland with his wife Slobodanka and his son Nikola.*

When I remember my family from before the war, I think I spent the least time in it. My father had a shop in Višegrad. Like all other Jews, we lived modestly. All the Višegrad Jews were more or less traders. I think that only one of them, Isak Papo, was wealthier. My family life wasn't governed by strict religious customs, but we did observe all the major festivals, especially the Sabbath. Father read all the prayers appropriate for each particular festival. We children usually didn't understand them, but I particularly liked it when they would say, at Passover, "*Ken tijene amber ke venga i koma*" (All who are hungry, come and eat). Then we would open the doors and if anyone wanted to

come in they would. Whenever I think of our festivals I feel that there is no great joy in them except for Purim, but my memory always returns me to Passover.

Višegrad was a lively little place in Eastern Bosnia where a not inconsiderable number of Muslims and Serbs lived. There was no feeling of anti-Semitism. During the economic crisis in 1933, my father helped a Muslim farmer, a friend of our family, a great deal. Many years later, he helped us too, when we needed it.

I completed only four years of primary school in Višegrad before my father sent me to Sarajevo for further education and it was there that I matriculated. My brother also completed secondary school there. When he was old enough for college, he didn't want to study, but joined the business with my father. They began working with leather and this was better, because retail trade wasn't really something one could live from.

I can't say anything bad about the attitude to Jews in Sarajevo during my time at the secondary school. I also had a close Muslim friend there. When his girlfriend came from Paris, he asked me if she could stay with me and, of course, I agreed. After secondary school I enrolled in the Faculty of Pharmacy at Zagreb University because at that time pharmacy was not taught in either Sarajevo or Belgrade. While I was studying in Zagreb I took my meals in the Jewish refectory. This was a very good situation for me because I had three meals provided a day. In the second year and later, I no longer went there for breakfast because I was losing too much time. The atmosphere in the refectory was pleasant and there were a lot of us of various affiliations, both communists and non-communists. Payment at the refectory depended on the financial status of the student and there was a special committee in charge of determining this. One person I remember from the canteen was Herbert Kraus, who was older than me. I didn't socialise with him but we all respected him. With his posture and thoroughly considered stance on everything, he earned the respect of all of us and his opinions were always held in high regard. I also remember, just as I was finishing my studies, Eta Špicic coming to the refectory. At the time she hadn't begun coming regularly, but later she and her husband, Alfred Najfeld, would come regularly. The cook was Mrs Rausnic. I remember many incidents from that period, both pleasant and unpleasant. Sometimes, because of my exams, I couldn't go in for lunch, even for Passover. There were even times when I went hungry, and I wasn't the only one. To this day I don't understand how I managed to study and finish



college. There's no doubt that my parents made many sacrifices to put me through school and had to give up many things. Still, if I hadn't had the scholarship from La Benevolencia, it's unlikely that I would have persevered. I should also note that a cousin of my mother and the husband of one of my cousins helped me out later on.

After I completed my studies I returned to Višegrad although I didn't have a job there. For a while, in Rogatica, I stood in for a pharmacist named Papa. At the time this was a sleepy provincial place, but I took all that in my stride and was quite alright, even there.

Then I got a job in Sarajevo. It was there that I met my first husband, Nikola Rikov, whose father was the main cantor in the synagogue. His name was Salamon Rikov. My husband, Nikola, was a second lieutenant in the army and, in this capacity, he was captured in Doboj in 1941, when the Yugoslav Army fell apart. My husband was taken prisoner of war. He was held in Osnabrück as an officer. Once the situation over there had settled down a little, letters began arriving. We corresponded as much as the war situation allowed us to. He returned after the war but soon fell very ill and died at the age of 42. There's no doubt that



*Vukica Kajon with her parents and her brother Aleksandar in Višegrad at the time when no one sensed the evil soon to come*

everything he lived through had had a very adverse effect on him. Before the war he had a mother, a brother, a sister-in-law and an uncle, but when he returned he found none of them alive! He was a very good man. My husband's mother and father were Russian Jews who fled from Russia to Hungary in 1905 and my husband was born there in 1910, in a place called Siklos. He had begun to study economy but had interrupted his studies after his father died.

When my husband was captured, I moved out of my apartment intending to live with his mother, Cecilija. My mother-in-law lived in a building which also housed the Protestant church. Because they had lived there for years, they were on good terms with the Protestant priest. They didn't denounce my mother-in-law and her family, so they lived there very peacefully for a long time. A respectable Muslim, a manager in the insurance company where my husband's brother Jakov worked, assured my husband's older brother and his wife that no one would take them from their apartment. However there came a time when the manager was away on business and both he and his wife were taken away and they both perished.

I worked in the pharmacy until 1942, when they appointed a commissioner. From the first days of the war I had been giving anything I could collect in the pharmacy to a Muslim friend of mine. This included all kinds of medical supplies, bandages, cotton wool and whatever medication was available. I also had two girlfriends who were taking medication for the National Liberation Movement. They told me once that lice had appeared somewhere so I collected creams to deal with this plague and sent it to the Partisans through an illegal contact. I myself had no intention of joining the Partisans.

I wore a yellow armband but only once had an unpleasant experience because of this. Two men seized me from the street for compulsory labour. I was supposed to peel potatoes. However the woman in charge wasn't happy with the way I worked at this job so she fired me. I never went to compulsory labour again.

As a precaution, I didn't live in my mother-in-law's apartment in Sarajevo, because I couldn't count on the protection of her Protestant neighbours. I hid with a Croatian communist girlfriend who was married to a Muslim. While I was hiding this way in Sarajevo, a cousin of mine from Mostar sent me a fake identification document and so I used this to travel to Mostar. That year, 1942, I lived as a refugee in Mostar with Erna Kajon, with whom I shared good and bad. Before the war she had worked for Putnik. Given the circumstances, it could be said that we were alright in Mostar. I had no contact with the Jewish community, nor did I wear a yellow armband. Mostar was under Italian administration and I was fleeing to where the Italians were. I had cousins in Nevesinje, so I stayed with them for a while. When I heard that Višegrad had also come under Italian rule, I still had no idea what had happened to my parents and brother, so I went to Višegrad to see them.

Among our close acquaintances in Višegrad was an engineer named Duško whose wife was Jewish. We socialised with this family all the time, and they were on good terms with an Italian lieutenant who was a teacher. The behaviour of this Italian lieutenant is a testament to the importance of even short-term friendships and acquaintances in difficult times. One summer evening he called out under the window of the building we lived in. Duško went straight down, the lieutenant told him that all Jews should pack and leave Višegrad because the Germans were coming to town. And so we left Višegrad and went to Prijepolje, in Sandžak.

We found accommodation in a small rented apartment. I gave a woman there my fake identification and she managed to bring my mother-in-law to us. Because we also had to flee from there, my rather elderly mother-in-law stayed on with a younger cousin of mine who was unable to come with us because he developed an unexplained stiffness in his legs. His name was Joži Demajo and he was a SKOJ member from Sarajevo. I was counting on them to save themselves, but they didn't, neither he nor my mother-in-law. The Germans captured them and from that time we never heard anything of them again.



*Vukica with a group of Partisan fellow-fighters in Slavnik, October 1944*

From Prijepolje, we somehow got to Berane, a town in Montenegro. We lived there for quite a long time, right up to when the Germans arrived there as well, after Italy capitulated. The little money

we had we spent on living very modestly. We rented an apartment with a family with whom we got along nicely. In order to survive, they had a cow and hens and they would give us something too. I remember our hostess saying to my mother one day that we must have a lot of money because we ate so well. My mother replied that we didn't have a third of what they spent on food, that we had much less, but that they didn't know how to make the most of what they had. Mother taught her many cooking skills for the preparation of food.

Before the Germans arrived in Berane, after Italy capitulated in 1943, I left to join the Partisans. First my mother, my father and I went to Pljevlja. I had earlier packed up the whole pharmacy. Everything I had which was needed, I took with me to the Partisans. Father also joined the Partisans. My mother, who was rather large and had difficulty moving around, and was, moreover, not young, stayed behind there. Unfortunately she didn't manage to save herself, but perished in 1944 in Pljevlja. In order to frighten the Partisans and discourage the National Liberation Movement, the Germans killed the parents of all Partisan fighters. At the time, I had still not learnt about my mother's death. My brother found her among the dead when he arrived in the town with his unit. He recognised her by her clothes and some other marks. He buried her in Pljevlja.

My father also died. For a while he was with us in the Partisans but, because of his ill health, he returned as soon as possible to Berane, to the family with whom we had stayed earlier. Because I was also stationed near Berane with my unit, I came to visit Father whenever I could, walking a couple of hours to get there. Because at that time they were already sending the wounded and sick to Italy, I asked Peko Dapčević, the commander of my corps, to send my father to Italy. He agreed to this. My comrades and I carried him onto a plane, but the effort was in vain. Father didn't survive – he died in Italy and was buried there.

We moved with the Partisans around smaller places. I was in the Main Command for Sandžak and after that went to a unit, the Third Sandžak Brigade. However the chief, Dr Čurić, of the Second Proletarian Brigade wanted a pharmacist. He knew that I wasn't essential to my unit so he called me and I went to the Second Proletarian. I always had work. There weren't any special kinds of medication but we had most of the things needed by the sick. Once, when we were left without anything, the quartermaster somehow got hold of a large bottle of juniper brandy, from which I made compresses until we received proper medicines.

Every war results in surgical procedures, from simple to the most difficult ones. Later on I was involved in this responsible medical work. A surgical team for the whole Army was assembled. A Russian doctor worked day and night, saving the lives of fighters. We were all there together and if getting killed was what was needed – we would get killed. I was only afraid of being wounded, but I was lucky because this never happened. It was our major and constant obligation to care for and attend to the wounded. Whenever we arrived somewhere, we knew it would be calm for at least a couple of days, so we would immediately set up a hospital. The nurses saw to it that beds were prepared and that material for bandaging and injections, everything we had, was put in order. The transport of the wounded created the greatest problems for us. There were many seriously wounded people and being transported in oxcarts over rugged terrain caused them unbearable pain, because of the vibration. There were cases when there was no other way to transport the wounded but for soldiers to carry them. We never left wounded behind.

Two encounters in the Partisans have remained in my memory. The first I associate with the appearance of a man called Kic. I learnt later that this was short for his surname, Kabiljo. We approached each other immediately. The other meeting is connected with two women. One of them was Nisim Albahari's sister and the other her friend. Although we had not met before, we detected some kind of closeness and approached one another.

I was in Vlasotinci for the liberation. I remember everyone firing guns, singing, rejoicing. I was also there at the time of the liberation of Belgrade. I came to Belgrade with the Partisans and was assigned to work in the Second Army.

Following the liberation I wanted to return to Sarajevo because, in the meantime, my husband had returned from captivity. I asked for a transfer and moved to Sarajevo. When I became pregnant, I asked them to transfer me somewhere and they moved me to a warehouse to work with drugs. Two months after I gave birth they returned me to the Army, where I worked all the way through to 1960, when I moved to Belgrade.

The post-war period could be described as buoyant. We worked all the time and if we weren't working we were in meetings. In Sarajevo I was the head, and in Belgrade Jela Žugić was the head of all the pharmacists. In Belgrade I worked until my retirement in the pharmacy of the Army garrison belonging to the City Command.

From the time I arrived in Belgrade I have been a member of the Jewish community and been active in the Women's Division.



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*Dr Igor NAJFELD and Dr Vesna NAJFELD*

## DR ALFRED NAJFELD – CONVERSATIONS WITH OUR FATHER



*A*mong our memories of our father, the most lasting impressions are of conversations with him. Our father had an unusual ability to easily engage in communication with everyone, from the street carriers with whom he played chess in Kalemegdan to philosophers with whom he discussed abstract ideas and social processes. He was able to bring inspiration to all of them to conduct a meaningful debate. Whatever their educational or social level, everyone he spoke to had the feeling that they were talking not only to a doctor but to a man who respected them. As well as being part of his profession, this ability stemmed from his gift for lecturing and his ability to resolve complex situations with an analytical approach. We would like to record some details from these conversations which, to some degree, depict how he experienced and lived through the pre-war and war years.

*He was born in 1911 in a town called Rzesow (Reisha in Yiddish), in the south of Poland (Galicia) which at that time had a population of 20,000, of whom 18,000 were Jews. He had two younger brothers. One of them, Poldek, perished with his wife and son in the Belzec concentration camp. The youngest brother, Otto, with his wife and her family saved himself by somehow managing to get to Siberia. Having returned*

*from Siberia after the war, he once again faced a pogrom in Kielce. He then fled Poland and settled in Israel.*

Grandfather Mauricije was a lawyer. Because of the notorious anti-Semitism in Poland, both among the people and that encouraged by the authorities, his legal practice was not doing well. Because of this, the family would move to ever-smaller places in order to avoid competition with Polish lawyers. However even this did not bring success and the family continued to fall into ruin. Under very harsh conditions, the children had to go to school in a larger town nearby so that our father, by the age of ten, had left his parents' house and virtually never returned there again.

Grandfather Mauricije died a natural death before the war. Our grandmother Hermina was in a hospital where she had undergone surgery for cancer when the Germans came into town in 1939. While still in hospital she sent a card to our father describing her desperate situation. As soon as the Germans arrived in Rzesow she was thrown out of the hospital. She was extremely ill at the time and was taken in by some Jewish neighbours, but died soon afterwards.

After matriculating from the classical secondary school in Rzesow in 1929, our father wanted to enrol in the Medical Faculty of Cracow University. He was refused three times because the *Numerus Clausus*, the quota system for Jews was already in force. Because our grandfather's brother, Dr Filip Najfeld, had already been transferred as a judge to this part of the world back at the time of the Austro-Hungarian annexation of Bosnia, our father decided to enrol in medicine at the University of Zagreb, counting on support from the family. He supported himself by giving classes to high school students, ate at the Jewish Students refectory, played sport with the Maccabis, the Jewish sporting organisation, and lived very modestly, almost on the edge of poverty. It was at the refectory that he met our mother, Eta Špicer, whom he married in 1941.

Father finished medical school in 1938. However, as a Polish citizen, he was banished from Yugoslavia before the war and so had to live illegally in Zagreb. With the assistance of Professor Andrija Štampar he obtained a position as a doctor in Koprivnica, but soon returned to Zagreb because it wasn't safe for him in that town. At the time when it became certain that the Germans would enter Yugoslavia, he voluntarily reported to the Yugoslav Army in order to fight Fascism and, at the

same time, to legalise his status. He didn't succeed in this because the Germans and the Ustaša pre-empted him, entering Zagreb on that same day, April 10, 1941. With his uniform in his hand he and our mother watched the citizens of Zagreb welcoming the Germans and the Ustaša: the streets were covered in the flowers, fruit and sweets with which the people were enthusiastically showering them.

With the rise to power of the Ustaša in the new, fascist Independent State of Croatia, anti-Jewish laws were immediately put in place. Among other things, Jews were banned from using the service of public health institutions (clinics, hospitals and so on). The Jewish Community in Zagreb immediately organised its own health service. Our father was among the first to sign up to work there. He called on the sick in their homes and visited the Jewish inmates in Kerestinec (a camp close to Zagreb). He soon learnt that a campaign to combat endemic syphilis was being organised in Bosnia. The aim of this campaign was to demonstrate the concern of the Ustaša authorities for the Muslims in Bosnia (which was occupied by the Independent State of Croatia). Endemic syphilis was widespread among the Muslim population. For Jewish doctors this was compulsory labour. According to our parents, about eighty Jewish doctors took part in this campaign. Sooner or later they joined the resistance movement and became the nucleus of the future Yugoslav People's Army Medical Corps. Our parents said that one of the reasons for this humanitarian campaign was the desire of the Croatian doctors to get rid of competition from Jewish doctors who enjoyed great professional respect and had pleasant and well-equipped surgeries. Our father simply had the desire to save himself and our mother, because doctors doing this work enjoyed some kind of protection from the camps for themselves and their family members. Father signed up for this campaign and, in the autumn of 1941, my parents left for Eastern Bosnia. They were assigned to the local Health Centre in Tuzla, which deployed them in the area of the Banovići mine, where there were five villages. There they both worked in the Muslim villages under very difficult conditions, constantly in fear of the Ustaša authorities and always suspected of collaborating with the resistance movement. And, truth to tell, they did provide medications and advice to the persecuted Serbian population from the surrounding villages and also had contacts with the Partisans.

At the beginning of 1942, they suddenly found themselves in a difficult situation when the Ustaša began rounding up the entire Tuzla

Jewish community and took a good friend from the refugee camp with her daughter, He Tuzla and was in contact with her for them when their landlord, a sweet old lady, a Polish Jew, the childless widow of a postman, had arrived in Tuzla back in the time of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. When she heard that a Dr Alfred Najfeld had come to Tuzla, she immediately contacted Dr Filip Najfeld, the former judge from Tuzla. Having learnt that the judge was our father's cousin, she immediately invited our parents to live in her apartment and they gladly accepted. She came to love our father like a son, taking care of him and trying to please him in various ways. My father repaid her kindness by taking care of her health because she had a serious heart condition. And so they lived in harmony, like the closest of relatives, for about a year until the Ustaša began taking Jews away to camps. When they came into the house to take her, my father put up a very strong resistance and tried to save her by telling the Ustaša that, as a seriously ill heart patient, she was unable to walk because of her swollen legs. Unfortunately nothing helped. The Ustaša were persistent, they loaded her onto a freight cart in order to do their job and hasten her to her death. And that was exactly what happened: Mrs Zlocover didn't get far, she died on the cart half an hour later.



*Always one step ahead of the many mortal dangers: Dr Alfred Najfeld in Partisan uniform*

Before Mrs Zlocover departed for the camp at which she never arrived, our parents had managed to free our maternal grandmother

from the Đakovo camp by using the documents which protected them and their families. She lived with our parents and our older sister in the apartment with Mrs Zlocover.

Because my father was suspected of collaborating with the Partisans, the director of the local Health Centre in Tuzla managed to arrange for him to be transferred to Bosanska Krupa (Western Bosnia) in June, 1943. There our parents managed to make contact with the Podgrmeč detachment and they began to work as intelligence agents, providing information on the movements of the German Army. This was very dangerous work because they were under constant surveillance by the Ustaša and Germans who suspected they were connected with the Partisan movement.

In a difficult situation, one day an officer in German uniform came and asked for our father. In line with German military rules he set a guard of two soldiers outside the house. The situation became tense and Father went with him to a separate room. Mother was beside herself, expecting the worst. After some time the officer left the house. When Father calmed down, it turned out that the officer in German uniform was actually a Partisan collaborator who had brought news from our father's cousin. Our cousins, Dr Leon and Irena Vilf, had already joined the Fifth Corps of the National Liberation Army and wanted to let our parents know about this. In the constantly tense situation in Bosanska Krupa, our parents were living in uncertainty and great concern, because they also had with them our grandmother, who had just returned from the camp, and our two-year-old sister, Ira. Because of the insecure and grave situation in the town, Father began touring nearby villages, searching for adequate accommodation for the family.

Then tragedy struck. While father was looking for accommodation, the Allied bombing of Bosanska Krupa began, on May 29, 1944. Our sister Ira and our grandmother Helena were killed in this bombing.

We two, brother and sister, were in deep distress from our earliest days, from the time we learned of this tragedy which had befallen our parents with the death of our sister, their first child, and Grandmother, our mother's mother, under the bombs in the winds of war. We keenly felt the pain of our parents over their lost child and parent. We know that this tragedy left a permanent imprint on them and, together with everything else they suffered through and lost during the war, it haunted our father until the end of his life and our mother has not succeeded in freeing herself of it to this day.

After this incident, which followed a series of earlier ones, our parents decided to inform their Partisan contact that their situation in Bosanska Krupa had become far too dangerous for intelligence work and that they should be transferred to the liberated territory.

The departure took place under dramatic conditions. Mother was pregnant and the day they were assigned to meet the Partisans in a designated place, they were caught in crossfire between Germans on one side, who were patrolling the railway station and hinting that something was happening, and Partisans on the other, who were securing Mother and Father's transfer to the liberated territory. The battle lasted almost an hour and our mother almost lost her life. That evening, when they arrived in a small village, high on a mountain, she gave birth. We would often hear about this event (documented in Yad Vashem in Jerusalem and described in *We Survived I*) when our parents' wartime friends met in our house to recall the memories of those tragic events.



*Routine work on the battlefield: Dr Alfred Najfeld  
in an improvised war hospital*

On their arrival in the liberated territory, Father was assigned to head the hospital of the 39<sup>th</sup> Krajina Division, which was operating in

the territory of Western Bosnia, around Banjaluka. Despite having a newborn son, Mother worked as a doctor in the typhoid ward in the same hospital. Father felt that he should go into battle as soon as possible. He was reassigned to a mobile hospital with the combat units. In this position he treated the wounded and sick who had liberated cities from the Germans and Ustaša, beginning with Banjaluka in Bosnia and Zagreb and all the way to Trieste.

The war came to an end. Our parents searched for their relatives and friends, trying to discover who had survived. Unfortunately there were great losses on both our father's and our mother's side, and among their friends from the refectory. We have heard many stories about the Jewish refectory which was, for our parents and their refectory friends, the centre of life during their student days. Many moving memories of friends who disappeared in the first days of the war were recounted to us with the same kind of sadness one feels for lost relatives. The nine of them who survived met up again for the first and only time when Lutek Meblo arrived in Belgrade from Poland. This meeting took place at our house in 1956 and it was an event full of excitement and anxiety, sadness and joy, which left an indelible impression on us children.

After the war, thanks to his organisational and professional skills, Father quickly advanced in the military and medical service. He completed specialisations in physiology and neuropsychiatry and, finally, in aviation neuropsychiatry in the USA. He was responsible for a new direction in the use of neuropsychiatry in Yugoslav wartime aviation. At the end of his military and professional career he was a colonel and head of the Yugoslav Military Air Force Medical Corps. He retired in 1970 and died in 1989.

In our story about our father and his successful career, we would be guilty of an injustice were we not to mention our mother as well. She was also a doctor with an enviable reputation and, in her, he had great and constant support. It was as though she subordinated her life and her personal career to the advancement of our father and his professional and scientific work. This was not the result of any patriarchal relationship or upbringing, rather it was understanding born of the great love which existed between them throughout their life together. Thus we can say that the greatest quality which we two, brother and sister, felt and received from the warmth of our family home is this love which imbued

their relationship and which was passed onto us in abundance, making our childhood and our whole lives happy and complete.

We feel great pride in our very vivid memories of our father because of his human characteristics, professional achievements, warmth and the love with which he surrounded us. He has been our role model and the best confirmation of how a valuable, meaningful and honourable life can be forged despite painful and unforgettable losses.



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*Avram SADIKARIO*

## UNDERGROUND



*Avram Sadikario was born on May 14, 1919, in Bitola where he finished primary and secondary school. In 1938 he began studying medicine in Belgrade but returned to Bitola in 1941.*

*He graduated in 1945 in Sofia and returned to Macedonia where he worked as a doctor at the Children's Clinic until his retirement in 1984. He retired as a Professor of the Medical Faculty, head of the Paediatrics Department and director of the Children's Clinic.*

*He published about three hundred scientific papers and was involved in the production of a large number of textbooks on paediatrics, particularly in the field of haematology. In 1984 he was named as a Membre Correspondant Étranger of the French Academy of Sciences for medicine. He was decorated with the Order of Merit for the People and the Order of Brotherhood and Unity, 1<sup>st</sup> Rank.*

*He has achieved enviable success in literature, particularly as a poet. He has published eight books of poetry, three of which are on Jewish themes. He is the recipient of the Award of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia for the collection of poetry entitled "Three Thousand Years of Jerusalem".*

The Bulgarians arrived in Bitola in the spring of 1941. They occupied Macedonia and established Fascist rule. Immediately they pro-

claimed the Law on the Protection of the Nation. This law affected Jews more than anyone else. Jews were proclaimed foreign citizens and enemies of the Bulgarian people. We were given identification documents stating that we were "foreigners" who could be deported from the country. Jews were not permitted to work in educational institutions, in theatres, cinemas or hotels, or as accountants. For some time they were still allowed to work in trades and as small merchants. They did not have the right to own agricultural land. They could be employed as workers on someone else's land, but not in state institutions. They weren't allowed to work as pharmacists.

The had to hand over all funds raised from the liquidation of their companies and shops to banks where the money was held in "frozen accounts". This also applied to savings accounts. Under a special decree Jews had to report all their real estate and other property, and all income, down to the very last spoon. Later, all their property was seized: houses, shops and so on. My older brother lost all his savings in a bank and was left without a single dinar in his pocket.

Soon came a law under which Jews had to pay twenty per cent of the estimated value of their total assets. Everyone had to report everything, even down to their last, mended handkerchief, patched shoes, trousers, everything. A special committee was given the job of evaluating this and it would often triple the value of what had been reported. Any small error would result in confiscation! The real value was far less than what they would record. The most tragic were the *a lus kurtizus* the poorest of the poor. None of them had a penny and they were still asking for twenty per cent of nothing. Even my father had problems with that twenty per cent because he didn't have enough cash. Confiscated property was sold at auction because of the inability to pay.

From October 4, 1941, Jews were banned from working in trade and industry. What industry did the Bitola Jews have? They were the poorest in the Balkans. Small traders sold their goods dirt cheap because they had to close their shops down in three months. This fate awaited both my father and my brother. Tradesmen were free. However, on February 12, 1943, they were also banned from working. Total material destruction was in progress. Funds raised from the sale of tools had to be deposited in the banks in frozen accounts.

Jews did not serve in the Army, but they were summoned to work camps for Jews where they did hard physical labour, with dismal food

and accommodation. Despite working as compulsory labour, they also had to pay a military contribution, which wasn't small.

Jews were required to live in a ghetto. There was an ever-increasing number of streets where they weren't allowed to live and so they stayed only in the areas allowed. It was impossible to get to a doctor or to a pharmacy.

"Jews live here" had to be written on every gate. From September 1942, Jews were required to wear the "yellow star" on their right side. Work was proceeding on preparing the "final solution" There were a number of secret meetings. This had already begun in February 1942 and culminated on February 22, 1943 with the decision to expel 20,000 Jews to regions of East Germany. This deal between Belev (Bulgaria) and Daennecker (Germany) was common knowledge.



*Bulgaria 1942, (L to R): Isak Levi, died in Israel, Salvator Levi, killed in 1963 in an earthquake in Skopje, Avram Sadikario and an unknown friend, all wearing yellow stars*

And so came March 11, 1943. In two hours, several hundred people from the state security and the police were assembled. There were several hundred cars outside the police station. The city was blocked. The Bitola and Štip Jews were transported to Skopje where they were put in the Monopol Tobacco building, together with the Skopje Jews. They were searched again for the God-knows-how-manyth time outside the building and anything valuable was taken from them.

It's difficult to describe the organisation of life in the "preparatory camp". More than seven thousand Jews "lived" there for three weeks! The camp was guarded by machine-gun posts, mounted police and in other ways. The first food was distributed after five days. As many as five hundred people stayed in one room. They relieved themselves inside the room because there weren't enough toilets in the yard. It is difficult to imagine a room in which people are relieving themselves in every corner. Any attempt to open a window was punished by whipping.

At the insistence of their embassies, 167 people, mostly Spanish and Italian citizens, left the camp.



*1943 photograph of the Damjan Gruev Unit, which included about ten Jewish members*

On March 22, 1943, the first group of about 1,600 Jews was transported in forty cattle wagons. Some of these wagons had no windows. Who knows whether anyone survived in these windowless wagons? Another eight hundred were transported later. So many people were crammed into each wagon that there wasn't even room to stand.

The second transport departed on March 25, 1943. There were 2,402 people in this group, in the same conditions as the first group. The trip to Treblinka took eight days.

The third transport set off on March 29, 1943. There were 2,500 people. That's when Belev and Daennecker arrived and stood outside the wagons to check that everyone was going on the journey. Treblinka was unlike the other camps in that there was no place for inmates who were left to work in the camp for some time: instead everyone went straight to the gas chambers.

That was the fate of the Jews from Macedonia. (Ninety-eight of them perished, which, together with Lithuania, was the highest percentage). And that is also how all of my people perished – my brothers, aunts and others. There were 150 of my relatives. One of my cousins went to her death with her ten children.

Of my family, only my two brothers and I stayed out of the camps. We were among the first members of the resistance movement. I had become a member of the Young Communist League of Yugoslavia as far back as 1937. I contributed by distributing literature and holding courses on political economy.

One day, in history class, a classmate of mine was secretly reading an article from an illegal magazine which I had given him earlier. The teacher saw this, seized the magazine and turned it over to the headmaster. Afterwards, they kept us behind, separately, each of us in a special room, and called the police, who interrogated me. I said that I had bought the magazine from an antiquarian, and I gave them his name. When they interrogated him, he confirmed that I used to buy second-hand books and magazines from him and said that it was possible that I had also bought this one in his shop. He said he knew nothing about the contents of the books and magazines he sold because he was barely literate. My class teacher proposed that I be excluded from all Yugoslav schools. However some teachers defended me, saying that this had been naivety on my part because there was no evidence that I was a member of any organisation, and this was accepted. I also continued with this activity while I was studying in Belgrade. I took part in all Party activities at the time. I went to demonstrations, was in physical confrontations with the police, and was beaten more than once. In one of these conflicts I lost several teeth. That's how things were until April 1941 when, after the big demonstrations in Belgrade, I left the city and returned to Bitola.

In Bitola I was immediately included in operations. I was accepted into the Party and became a member. Viktor Pardo and Moric Šami were also in my cell. Our local party secretary was Done Pop Andonov.

I organised a group which became a cell. It included Nisim (Miki) Alba, Marsel Demajo and Simo Kalderon. They each organised three SKOJ groups. I organised a separate SKOJ group and a number of sympathiser groups. Everyone had previously been in Tekhelet Lavan so we managed to include almost the entire Tekhelet Lavan organisation. On the other side, Moric Šami and Viktor Pardo established SKOJ groups from the former Hashomer Hatzair. If we take these two cells into account, together with the large number of SKOJ and sympathiser cells, there were about a hundred members included through our cell. It is believed that about six hundred Bitola Jews were involved in the resistance movement. This was the strongest organisation in the town and had the greatest numbers. Even in the first Partisan units in relative terms the largest numbers were Jews. The units withdrew to Greece so, for some time, there was no one to accept new people who wanted to join.

At the time the Jews were deported I was in Sofia, where I had taken my brother for a medical examination. He returned quickly and through him I learnt about a number of "exposures". Such exposures were frequent, although there weren't any among the Jews. My basic cell was exposed at the end of 1941. That's how Moric Šami and Viktor Pardo ended up in prison. Because of their bravery I was not exposed, but I did spend some time underground. Not long after, I had to go underground again, only this time in Sofia. I was staying with a Jewish family. However, in July 1943, Jews from Sofia were also deported to other Bulgarian cities, with a plan for sending them from there off to concentration camps in Poland. I had to go with the family with whom I was hiding to Pleven, where we were in a camp in a school for some time. Later they disbanded this and we were moved to the Jewish ghetto in Pleven.

Again I was in a Jewish family with another three members of the underground. I was involved in their operations. One of these was to break into the Pleven prison and free the prisoners. We broke the guard, disarmed the police, seized their weapons and freed all the prisoners. In this prison were the leaders of the organisations from Bulgaria (led by Trajče Kostov) and Macedonia (led by Lazar Koliševski) organisations. Out in the street we were intercepted by the Army. However we managed to persuade them not to shoot at us and to cross over to our side. This happened on September 7, 1943. Two days later, on September 9, 1943, the Bulgarian National Front government was toppled.

After that, in Pleven, I took part in the arrest of former police agents, with whom we also had armed clashes. At the end of 1944 I went to Sofia, where the Macedonian Representative Office gave me approval and assistance to finish my studies.

My two brothers were killed as Partisans. Solomon Sadikario, known as Mo, a battalion political officer, was killed in 1944 in clashes with the Bulgarians. My other brother, Samuel Sadikario, was killed on the Srem front in 1945.

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*Đuro SELEŠ*

## MA CHE EBREI?



*Đuro Seleš was born in Sarajevo in 1923, the only child of mechanical engineer Herman Seleš and mother Roza, née Špacir. The 1941 war caught him as he was completing the eighth grade of secondary school.*

*After the war he studied English language and literature at the Faculty of Philosophy of Belgrade University. He worked in the Federal Secretariat for Foreign Affairs, from which he retired as an advisor in 1989. He has worked in diplomatic offices abroad, in Washington and New York.*

*He is married to academic painter Mirjana Zdravković-Seleš. They live in Belgrade.*

The war began on April 6, 1941, with the heavy bombing of Belgrade and the penetration of Nazi troops and their allies into Yugoslavia. Bombs also fell on Sarajevo that day and one of them fell exactly on the building in which we lived. We were in the shelter (our house being one of the few which had a shelter). After the alarm stopped, we returned to our apartment, now somewhat damaged, because materials from the building across from ours had ended up in our apartment, having been propelled in, during the bombing, through the broken glass of the windows.

This meant the complete end of the normal life we had lived up to that point, although at that time there were already dark clouds cover-



ing this region of ours, in a Europe of which the greater part was enslaved and caught up in the war. Of course, like everyone else (and particularly as Jews), we too were gripped by and filled with foreboding about the times ahead of us.

For several days we were in a state of confusion in which we knew very little about what was happening; there were all kinds of rumours about the fate awaiting this part of the country. This gave way to awareness of the capitulation of the Yugoslav Army and of the fact that the so-called Independent State of Croatia was being established. Bosnia and, therefore, Sarajevo would also become part of that Nazi creation.

Several days after the Nazi troops penetration into Yugoslavia, the German war machine also arrived in Sarajevo after days and nights of motorised troops thundering by and a festive welcome organised and presented by one part of the population, with flags bearing swastikas and Ustaša insignia. This was an omen of difficult times.

Among their columns the German troops had special vehicles in which they printed what they called “vouchers”, apparently worthless, but with which they browsed clean the city, which at that time was still well supplied. Within a few days there was nothing left in the shops. As for Jewish shops, state officials were appointed to them immediately. In this way they were seized from their owners.

We personally felt the beginning of the problems when a decree was passed according to which we had to personally bring our radios to designated places. When I did this, I had a chance to see the various other things that were being seized, such as typewriters, rugs and furniture. Very soon came various regulations, put up in public places, the most remarkable of which were those banning Jews from visiting public and cultural institutions, from sitting in parks and so on. Then came the obligation to wear the yellow band with the Star of David, the sign with the letter “J” and then came compulsory labour. My father was assigned to go to the nearby spa, Ilidža, which was heavily bombed because it was where the government-in-exile stayed for a short time. Following the bombing, bodies had to be dug out. Father never talked to me about this.

As for me, the first time I was called in was to clear out some warehouses and other buildings for school canteens. This was quite bearable compared to what others had experienced. However the next time I was called in was quite a different matter.

There were ten of us, of various ages. We were assigned to go to the main Sarajevo barracks, where the German Army was stationed, and to work in the big barracks courtyard, chopping wood. We worked for a number of hours in the mornings and afternoons, under the supervision of two staff sergeants, who took turns. It's interesting to note how differently they treated us. One of them was definitely a monster while the other showed some human feelings. For example, the first made a man from our group chop a very hard and knotty stump on and on without stopping. When this man (who was of a weak physical constitution), suffering with his stump, annoyed our supervisor, he personally took the axe in his hands and swung it a couple of times with such anger that the wood, already eaten into by the earlier chopping, broke into pieces. He then took a piece of the split log and threw it at the man's head. Fortunately he missed. We worked in this atmosphere for a week. Then our labour was extended a few more days.

Sometime in the middle of the week we heard an unusual roaring. Suddenly the gates of the courtyard opened and trucks began coming in, one after another. We were some distance away and at first weren't really aware of what was happening. The trucks were full of people of all ages and both genders. This is where they unloaded them. We could see that they were carrying rucksacks, bags and suitcases. They were Jews, our compatriots, who had been collected from all over the city in a sudden raid and brought to the barracks courtyard. It's not difficult to imagine how we felt at the time, not knowing whether members of our families, our friends and acquaintances were among those who had been rounded up. On the other hand we weren't allowed, even during our break, to approach them, nor were they allowed to come near the place where we were working. When the usual end of the working day arrived, we didn't even know what would happen to us because, logically, it was realistic to expect that they would simply put us in with the people who'd been brought in. That day the "better" staff sergeant was on duty. It seemed that he knew what was happening. He took us to a cellar, shut us inside and said he would go and get us official passes so that we could reach our homes more or less safely. We languished in this cellar for several hours, conjecturing about what would happen and consumed by dark imaginings. Finally the man came and brought the documents for us. We now needed to get to our homes. Of course the first thing that came to my mind was to wonder whether I would find my family at home, or whether I'd find a sealed door, which would

mean that my parents had been taken away. I shall never forget approaching my home. Luckily there was no seal and my mother, in tears, opened the door for me because she had learned what was happening. She was sure I had been kept behind with the people who had been taken away.

The raid ended and the people who had been rounded up were kept in the camp. We didn't know where to go so we continued to report for labour as before. Contact with the people who had been brought in was forbidden. Surprisingly, only one of the ten of us had the misery of having those closest to him – his wife and daughter – brought to the camp. When the “better” guard was on duty he allowed this man's wife and child to be with him during working hours and allowed him not to work. Each of their meetings was very hard on all of us because it brought home to us the situation we were in.

A few days later, just as we finished work, there was great relief. All those who had been brought to the camp were released and allowed to return to their homes, so we thought that our worst forebodings had been dispelled and that the situation would become relatively better. However, on the following day, we were shocked to learn that all these people had again been driven out of their homes during the night and taken to trains which had been prepared to take them to Jasenovac and other death camps. This meant that the plan was for total extermination of Jews from Sarajevo and, of course, not only from that city. They went as far (and fortunately I only heard about this) as to issue orders that Jews were to report to a designated Ustaša-police office to be given papers on the basis of which they would be registered. The unfortunate people who reported were given “identification documents”. However they were then shown out through a door behind which stood trucks in which they were taken away to an unknown destination.

Sometime around the end of the year I managed to use the identification which all members of railway workers' families had (my father was a railway engineer) to somehow reach the Italian occupation zone and to get to Dubrovnik. There the Ustaša only held local power formally, while the real power was in the hands of the Italians.

My parents also arrived in Dubrovnik. Thanks to some documents they had somehow, with great difficulty, managed to get out of Sarajevo taking only two suitcases with them.

Towards the end of the summer of 1942, we were informed by the Italian authorities that we were to assemble on a certain day at a certain

place, with the few things we had, in order to go into internment. We weren't very concerned, given the procedures up to that point, and we'd already heard about internment camps which couldn't be compared to the notorious ones from which we had narrowly escaped.

We were interned in the Kupari Camp, in the south Dubrovnik coastal region. At first we were allowed to freely go out and visit nearby places, but later our movements were restricted to the camp. Life was slowly getting organised within the camp; our stay there was tolerable, although this was some kind of a prison with suitably monotonous food and not very much of it. Fairly soon, in the spring of 1943, rumours began circulating that we would be moved to another camp. We were also told officially about the move, that is about being transferred to another camp. In the meantime, some German officers came to visit the camp, which made us inmates feel nervous. However it turned out that they were investigating the possibility of using it to accommodate convalescents from their army.

The day eventually came when, ready for departure, we waited for transport to take us to a ship on which we would travel to the island of Rab. The journey itself wasn't bad, because a decent passenger ship was used to transport us. As we embarked, the crew members looked in disbelief at the kind of people boarding the ship, especially as they were mostly elderly people, women and children. We were in a convoy with the Italian gendarmerie and army and they couldn't understand where they were taking us and why, so they asked us exactly that. We replied saying we were *Ebrei* (Jews). They didn't understand that either, and asked "Ma che Ebrei?" (What do you mean, Jews?) in the sense of what kind of crime was that, and was that really something people were persecuted for.

The following morning we found ourselves on Rab and were curious as to what awaited us. However we soon found out, and then also felt it on our own skin, that we had come to a real concentration camp, with barracks, encircled by a barbed wire fence and guard towers. Although the camp was on an island, the sea was nowhere in sight. No greenery, just dry earth, sand and rock. There were several thousand of us there. We gradually became accustomed to life in considerably aggravated conditions, and were comforted in the knowledge that the end of the war was in sight, together with the victory over Fascism. Even the guards, Italian soldiers, encouraged us, saying that very soon we would go *a casa* (home), which they themselves could hardly wait for.

But quite some time was to pass before that would happen. Italy capitulated at the beginning of September, 1943, and the camp was disbanded. We, the younger ones, joined the national liberation struggle, while various fates awaited the elderly.

My parents stayed on Rab a while longer. When, not long after, the Germans and the Ustaša set off for the island, there was a swift evacuation of people with the help of boats and two-masters. In this way they too managed at the very last minute to cross over to Italy, which was already occupied by the Allies. Unfortunately there were some who didn't manage to do this and this sealed their fate.

Of the people who perished, there is one whose tragedy I have to mention. He was a musician and composer whose name I no longer remember, an Austrian Jew who at the time of the *Anschluss*, when the Nazis seized power in Austria, managed to get to Yugoslavia. After many difficulties and moving from one place to another, he somehow found himself in Dubrovnik precisely at the time we were being moved from Dubrovnik to Kupari. He had all his music with him.

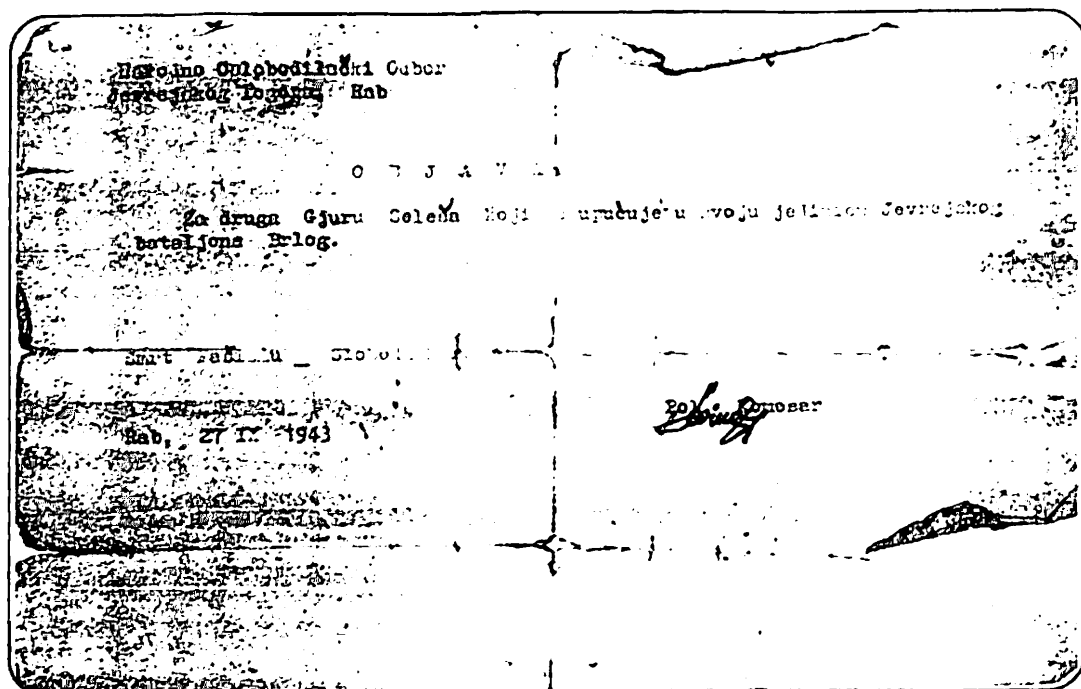
In the camp we tried to engage in some activities, such as cultural and sporting activities. In this way we came to the idea of making an operetta about our life in the camp. This musician composed the music and wrote a libretto for this. The whole thing was pretty successful, so the entire Italian command, led by their commander, attended the performance. Our performance was met with general approbation. In German the main aria went *Links die Palmen, rechts das Meer, und der Magen der ist leer* (Palms to the left, sea to the right and the stomach is empty.)

After the camp was disbanded, the composer stayed on the island. When the sudden evacuation happened he refused to leave without the trunk containing all his compositions and other music. There was no way to take it, nor was there room on the boat for the trunk, but he wouldn't part with it because it contained his life's work and his reason for living. Thus he became one of the victims.

A Jewish battalion was formed in the Rab camp. We reached the Banija Brigade units. Very soon the battalion was dissolved and we were reassigned to the units. This was necessary because we were inexperienced. I took part in the national liberation struggle in combat units and actions and in the units of the regional commands of Banija and Kordun.

Although young, we were quite exhausted by what we had been through. Despite having some theoretical preparations in the camp, we

lacked practical military-combat training and experience which had had to acquire on the spot. We were poorly dressed and shod because the pieces of Italian uniforms and footwear we had managed to acquire in the camp were not made of durable materials.



*Facsimile of a proclamation by the National Liberation Committee of the Jewish camp on Rab mobilising Đuro Seleš to a unit of the Jewish Battalion*

Shortly after arriving in the unit we were to go to combat positions. Efforts were being made to hinder and slow down the German units which were attempting to take over parts of territories held by the Italian Army forces, as well as to prevent the national liberation struggle units from taking advantage of the Italians' war material. This is when most of us had our baptism of fire. I myself, on several occasions, not being very familiar with the terrain, went out into the open, practically in front of Rommel's desert tanks which were moving around in that area and positioned there. Luckily there were no consequences. All this was happening around an important crossroads called Generalski Stol.

I remember exhausting marches which lasted for more than ten hours without any decent breaks, often at night when, at a forced pace, we crossed over to the terrains on which combat actions were taking place. As I had never been to that part of the former Yugoslavia before,

everything was new to me. I had trouble orienting myself and I believe this was also the case with all the others who had come from the camps. We mainly moved through the areas of Banija, Kordun and Cazinska Krajina, in north-west Bosnia.

As early as the autumn I took part in an attack on Cazin. We walked into the town. Its layout is such that the whole place is dominated by a hill with a fortification in which there were well-armed Ustaša and home guardsmen and from this vantage point they created many difficulties for us. There were also some wounded who, with great effort, we carried up a very steep hill to a safe place. I also had a chance to help a good friend of mine from the camp. The whole operation was successful: a considerable number of home guardsmen were also captured.

On a march through terrain that was soaked with frequent rains and snow, practically through mud pools, on a road through a clearing, several enemy aircraft, old Breguet 14 biplanes, suddenly appeared. There were quite a few of us, several detachments. Flying slowly in circles, unhindered because we had no anti-aircraft weapons, the planes opened heavy machine-gun fire on us. We all lay down along the road in shallow gullies for at least some protection. Unfortunately there were many casualties and I remember that, maybe two or three times, the machine-gun bursts passed very close to me, but luckily I was only splashed with mud. Several guys ahead of and behind me were victims of this attack and the situation was similar along the whole road. Like all the others, I barely managed to get to a nearby forest and so escape death.

Nor did this pass without serious repercussions for me. In the mud, especially as we were crossing ploughed fields, the shoes which I had taken from the Italian equipment had almost fallen apart. At the time there were no army warehouses and it was very difficult to find adequate footwear, so I had major problems. It was a very harsh winter, quite a lot of snow had fallen and I was half-barefoot. My feet soon froze through. I was unable to move around so I was sent off to hospital where they found that there was something wrong with my kidneys as well.

Life in the Partisan hospitals at that time was difficult. They were village houses which had been evacuated in terrains that were difficult to reach, there were shortages of medical supplies and there was a constant danger of enemy gangs breaking in. I remember that we were once evacuated at the very last minute when enemy gangs began appearing at the village entrance. We also couldn't always be separated from those

who were suffering from typhoid. Once I was better I was reassigned to the regional command, where I remained until the end of the war. I should also mention that for some time I was again in a combat unit, at the time of the raid on Drvar. At the regional command I worked on providing hospitals with security, transporting the wounded to places from where they were taken to Allied hospitals in Italy, and on other jobs in areas such as education and culture which aimed at returning life to normal in liberated areas.

Soon after the war ended I was demobilised so I could continue my education.

My parents returned to Sarajevo where I was reunited with them. Other members of our family weren't as lucky as we were to be alive at the end of the war.

My paternal grandfather, Dr Mavro Seleš, was a doctor in Banjaluka at the time when modern transport was a rarity, so he called on his patients in the villages throughout the area on a horse or in a hackney. Patients loved and respected him. At the beginning of 1941 he was in retirement. When Banjaluka fell under the Independent State of Croatia and the Ustaša terror took over there, many people who knew and respected my grandfather kept telling him that he was not in any danger because everyone was aware of what kind of man and what kind of doctor he was. And that's how it was for some time. However, the Ustaša criminal, Vitko Gutić, who called himself "the golden broom", appeared in Banjaluka on a mission to "cleanse" Banjaluka of all "unacceptable elements", especially Jews. And so, at the age of 72, my grandfather was taken off to Jasenovac.

My aunt's son, Hajim-Hari Elijas, was executed by firing squad in Belgrade's Tašmajdan park, as was every tenth member of the group with which he was taken there. His father Avram, an industrialist from Belgrade (owner of the Elka factory), managed to reach Split but, following the capitulation of Italy, was taken away by the Ustaša, never to return.



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Tina FINCI

## “IS THAT GOOD FOR JEWS?”



*This memoir of Tina Finci is based on the notes of her daughter Zvezdana, Tina's testimony in the 1979 "My Family" questionnaire, her presentations at various Jewish events and the memories of her friends, associates and admirers.*

*Tina Finci, née Hajon, was born in Split on April 30, 1910, to father Isak and mother Ester Kajon.*

*She had two brothers. Following the capitulation of Italy and the German occupation of Split, the elder, Josef Bepo, was taken, along with other Split Jews, to the Sajmište camp in Belgrade in October 1943. At the time this was a transitional camp from which inmates marked for death were transferred to Auschwitz and other death camps where all trace of them was lost. Her younger brother, Marko Mordehajn, left for Palestine in 1939 and lived in the Gat kibbutz in Israel until his death in 1999.*

*Tina graduated from the Commercial Academy and immediately began working. she was employed in various companies and institutions as a bookkeeper. When she came to Belgrade from Kruševac in 1959 she was a bookkeeper for the Federation of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia until her retirement in July, 1967.*

*After the end of the war she married engineer Salamon Finci. Her daughter Zvezdana–Dankica was born of this marriage and is now a scientific associate of the Hadassah University Hospital in Jerusalem. Despite being a good mother to her exemplary daughter Zvezdana and*

*an excellent life companion and devoted wife to her husband Salomon, it always seemed that her family obligations were slightly in the shadow of her commitment to the Jewish community.*

According to her daughter Zvezdana's memories of the family stories, Tina was raised in a patriarchal Sephardic family in which all festivals and the Jewish tradition were nurtured in the best sense of the word. There was a huge library in the house, with books in Italian, German, Serbo-Croatian, Hebrew and Ladino. Her mother and her uncles were brought up in the company of books.

From her early childhood she took part in various Jewish youth meetings and Hasharachs, and was a regular member of the Zionist youth organisation, Hashomer Hatzair. Her life was divided between her job and participation in all events within the Jewish community of Split. This community had a very active cultural and social life, which was focused in the Jarden Association, for which Tina worked as a secretary. But a secretary with a heart and soul. She was famous for her struggle for women's rights, and her daughter Zvezdana comments on this battle of Tina's: "The management of the association was led strictly by male members. Tina, their secretary, was the only exception. She fought for the equality of women within the community and outside it all her life. On the day of the Trumpledor Commemoration, she had planned to speak in the Temple, but was prevented from doing so by the people of the Community. They disagreed with the idea of a woman speaking in the Temple."



*Tina (R) at a Purim party on March 19, 1927 in Split*

When the country was occupied, many refugees from all parts of the former Yugoslavia (almost 3,000) found refuge in Split which was under Italian occupation. Tina immediately joined in the operation of assisting Jewish refugees to manage in their new situation. An Émigré Board for assistance to refugees was also established in Split at that time, and Tina was active in this. The Jewish community in Split made the greatest possible effort to assist the refugees and it could easily be said that there was “no smaller community, and no greater activity” when it came to showing solidarity to compatriots who had to flee before the Nazi invasion. At the same time she established contact with the National Liberation Movement, because she believed that this was the only possible affiliation for Jews. Once the danger of the Germans entering Split was imminent, Tina left, on September 11, 1943, and joined the Twentieth Dalmatian Division, where she worked as a nurse. She was in Partisan units at the time of the liberation of Yugoslavia. Tina’s family remained in Split. Her mother Ester and her brother Jozef were taken, in October 1943, to a camp, along with other Split Jews, and there they perished. Her father Isak came to a tragic end. While saving sacred items from the Jewish Temple, which the Italian Black Shirts had set on fire in the main square of Split, Isak was beaten with rifle butts and died two days after Tina joined the resistance fighters.



*Group of young people on an outing at Marjan, near Split,  
April 25, 1929 (Tina Finci sixth from left)*

The war ended and Tina moved to Belgrade with her family in August, 1959, continuing her activities in the Jewish community, deeply devoted to her Jewish affiliation.

She was well known for always asking the same question at various events throughout the world: "Is that good for Jews?" Tina devoted her activities to work in the Women's Division of the Jewish Community in Belgrade. The tea parties she organised were known for their excellent cultural programs, on which she insisted, and she persistently found lecturers and artists to adorn these events. There was no opposing Tina once she had a plan to implement some idea and to convince good speakers to take part in the Women's Division tea parties. Her persistence in reminding all members of the Women's Division to come to a tea party was well known, as was her hospitality when greeting guests. It was these characteristics of hers which made the tea parties very attractive, popular and pleasant for socialising and relaxing.

Friends, associates and admirers describe Tina as one of the most persistent and active figures of Jewish society.

She died in 1990, on her eightieth birthday, in the Dr Lavoslav Švarc Home in Zagreb.

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*Moric MONTILJO*

## WAR AND THE YOUNG MAN



*Moric Montiljo was born on December 22, 1922, in Sarajevo, to father David and mother Rena, née Montiljo. He was an only child in a Sephardic family who were not very religious. More than fifty members of his immediate family perished in the Holocaust. Among them were his grandfather Moše, his grandmother Rahela and his aunts and uncles and their families.*

*He completed training as a carpenter. After the war he attended a technical school for aviation and worked as an officer in the military service, retiring in January, 1971. He lived in Belgrade but, since November, 1993, has lived in Naharya in Israel. He has two children, a son David who is a graphics engineer, and a daughter Renata, a graphics technician. He has three grandchildren.*

*For twenty years he was a Gabbai of the Belgrade Temple. At the proposal of the Jewish Community of Zemun, he was entered in the Golden Book Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael for his years of work as secretary of the Community.*

My closest ancestors – parents, grandfathers and grandmothers – were born in Sarajevo. My father's father was Moše, known as Hasid, and my grandmother's name was Hana, née Elazar. My mother's father's name was Naftali, known as Il Bojađi, and the name of my mother's mother, my grandmother, was Rahela, née Pardo. My father

was the eldest of eleven children and he had to take care of his brothers and sisters which, I suppose, is why he only had me. My parents spoke Ladino at home. I spoke Serbian, but when they spoke to me I always replied in Ladino.

My father died on April 18, 1938, in Sarajevo. My mother and I were left alone without any income, because my father died at the age of 46 and we had no pension. We lived as best we could. Mother had to get a job in the Ključ hosiery factory, which was owned by Avram Levi Sadić. This is when I began learning my trade, and had to drop my schooling.

As a boy I sang in a boy's choir which was renewed every two years. It consisted of 22 boys, between the ages of ten and twelve. I sang in the choir from 1933 to 1935.

I was a member of Hashomer Hatzair in Sarajevo from primary school until 1941. This was a leftist youth organisation to which many young Sarajevo Jews belonged. We were divided into groups according to age. We each had our Menahels, our group leaders. My first Menahel was Žak Finci (who later joined the Partisans) and after him was Šmuel Kamhi (before the war he had been a member of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia Navy, he returned home in 1941, joined the Partisans and remained with them until the end of the war). Between these two my Menahel was Jakov Montiljo who now lives in Israel, in the Gat kibbutz.

At the beginning of the war I lived with my mother in our apartment at Bregalnička 16. During the war this street was renamed Karpuzova and after the war became Hristo Botev Street. There had been an atmosphere of fear in Sarajevo even before the beginning of the war, because rather a lot of refugees had already come from Czechoslovakia, Poland and other countries. From those days I remember Jozef Štok, who had joined the work of Hashomer Hatzair.



*Parents David and Hana with Moric, 1924 in Sarajevo*

The bombing began at Passover. Our Sephardic women were preparing nice food for the festival. I especially liked *fritulitas* (fritters made of matzo) and *guevos enjaminados* (hard-boiled eggs prepared with onion peel, a little oil, salt and pepper). I also liked Passover because of *albondigos* (soup dumplings). Grandfather Moše would assemble the whole family on Seder night. When the bombing began I was having these dishes for breakfast. Mother was shouting, in panic, that we should run, but I didn't want to. She fled, shouting that I should too because I would be killed by a bomb. In the end I interrupted my breakfast to flee and hide with my mother in the basement. There were other neighbours there too. The bombing lasted quite a long time, because it came in a number of waves.

Soon the Germans arrived in the town. The "cleansing" of Sarajevo of Jews began. Commissioners were appointed to Jewish shops and their assets were seized. They gave us yellow armbands with the Star of David and the word "Jew" in German and Serbo-Croatian. The Independent State of Croatia was established. They made us do compulsory labour in the city, recognising us by the armbands we wore. I was taken to unload wagons. We wouldn't stop work until a wagon was completely unloaded. The work was very hard, with a lot of dust everywhere. We also did other kinds of work. Whatever they needed, we had to do. Sometimes I would remove my armband, but this was very dangerous. I was arrested three times, just because I was Jewish and wasn't wearing an armband.

In October, 1941, Mosko Papo, Nisim Altarac and I were standing in the street. Two agents approached us and asked for our identification documents. They took us to a prison near Beledija. It was Sunday that day, some German holiday, and they kept us in prison for five days. They wrote in the arrest report that they had found us in a street from which Jews were banned. I remember that they immediately cut our hair. Izrael Papo cut our hair, he was my father's cousin and this was his compulsory labour. Every Monday the new prisoners would have their hair cut. I asked him to go to my mother and tell her that he'd seen me, that I was alive and well, and to ask her to send me a little food. In the prison we received only one loaf of bread each day, but when my mother sent food, only half a loaf. On the fifth day we were interrogated. An officer asked us why we were in prison and we said that we hadn't done anything. He said that we were in a banned street and that this was what the arrest report said. But I remembered that the street was only banned

in the afternoon. The agent had written the time of arrest in the report and it was in the morning. Because of this we were released. Nisim Altarac and Mosko Papo later joined the Partisans and, unfortunately, were killed there.

My mother was terrified. At three in the morning German agents knocked on a neighbour's door. They asked if Moric Montiljo was there and she told them she didn't know, so they left. Mother woke me up and explained, using gestures, that I should run away and keep quiet. I grabbed my winter coat and ran down to the basement. That morning they evacuated the entire street. In this way I avoided arrest and being sent off to camp.

I went to work for the tradesman Franja Štampfel, a religious Croat and a good man. He did not agree with the policy of the Ustaša and what they were doing to Jews. He was a decent man, and former director of the Sarajevo Furniture Factory.

This is when I was arrested for the second time. About half past one at night we were intercepted by a patrol in the street. I wasn't wearing my armband, but my identification card revealed that I was Jewish. They collected about a hundred men and, in the middle of the night, in winter, took us to the same prison from which I had been released a week earlier. I remember that because my hair was still freshly cut, they put us in rooms, thirty of us in one small room. It had been snowing on our way to the prison so we were all wet. Inside the room we had to take up as little space as possible, so we were all cramped and wet, the air was stuffy from the water vapour. And so, cramped up, we awaited the morning. Then suddenly an agent knocked on the door and asked "Is there anyone under 16 or over 50?" One of the detainees lifted me up from the



*The building of the La Benevolencija Jewish humanitarian association in Sarajevo where women and children were interned in 1941*



floor and said that I was under 16 (even though I was older), and the agent threatened me and said I had no idea what was in store for me if this was a lie. One elderly man and I were escorted to the police administration. We waited outside the office of the chief agent for our names to be called while, every now and then, people came out of his office having been beaten. I assumed that the same fate awaited us. However the chief came out of his office and asked what we were doing there. "Nothing," I replied, and he chased us away saying "Get lost!" We immediately seized the opportunity and ran out into the street. While waiting outside the office I had thought about escaping, because there was no one guarding us, but I was afraid it was some kind of setup. But when the chief agent told us to go I had an excuse to leave the building. Mother was very happy to see me at home.

The next move against us was our eviction from the apartment. We were forced out, they sealed the apartment and the keys were handed over to an agent, an Ustaša. I managed to put one key in my pocket. Together with all the other Jews who had been found in their apartments and houses, we were forced into the German barracks at the end of the city. These had been the barracks of the Army of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia which the Germans had occupied. The men were crammed into sheds with cobblestone floors. I remember sleeping on a wooden beam. The women and children were shut up in barracks used by the Germans as a canteen. There was nothing in there and everyone was sitting or lying on the bare floor. We remained there for seven days. The Germans obviously needed these facilities, so they moved us to a Jewish residential building belonging to the *La Benevolencia* humanitarian organisation. The apartments had been completely emptied. I escaped from there. The building had two entrances and there was only a guard at the first one. I was on the first floor. I jumped through a window into a hallway leading to the second entrance, where there weren't any guards, and I escaped. Others escaped too, including my mother, and we then moved in with her sister, Gracija, who had not yet been taken away.

In the course of these arrests I lost all my identification documents; they had all been left behind with the police because I did not ask for them to be returned. I lost my real identification, with all my personal information, during the first arrest. when I was arrested the second time I left my identification from the railways, which was where my father worked. I gave my student registration book with my photo and all my

personal information to the police during my third arrest and so, by the end, I had no identification documents whatsoever.

Master carpenter Franja Štampfel helped out a number of Jewish carpenters by employing them when they lost their jobs at the Jewish company Konforti. In this way he hired an excellent carpenter, Dani Katan, then another carpenter, Altarac, whose first name I don't remember, and another Jewish carpenter whose name I have forgotten. I was a carpentry apprentice at Franja's. When Altarac and the other one were taken away in a night raid and transported to Jasenovac, Master Franja proposed to the two of us that we stay the night in the workshop and we accepted. We were locked in with a padlock on the outside.

As there was a danger of us being arrested and taken to Jasenovac, Dani Katan found a man who helped him, for money of course, to get personal documents in a false name so that he could go to Mostar, which was occupied by the Italians. Dani Katan suggested that this man help me too, so I could join him in Mostar. He was to contact me as soon as he got to Mostar to tell me how the trip went. Dani arrived in Mostar in April, 1942, and I joined him just a month later. It's interesting that on that very day he got a job as a skilled tradesman with Master Carpenter Lekić, whom he had known before.

Because I also had documents for a trip to Mostar, I told my trade master that I would like to take the carpentry exam. He recommended me to an acquaintance of his, a carpenter, who was to examine me. I took the theoretical part of the exam before a committee and received a tradesman's certificate. After the exam I was issued with an employment registration booklet on the basis of which I would be able to get a job in Mostar later.

### *Mostar*

I arrived in the city during a curfew. All I had with me was a twig basket with one umbrella and a bit of bread and cheese. I also put a tarboosh in the basket because my identification was in a fake Muslim name. I took the night train because the identification was pretty bad, while the pass was a clean original. I didn't dare use the identification. I had about 500 kunas with me.

In the street I ran into Avram Altarac, a neighbour from Sarajevo (he now lives in Israel). He invited me to stay with his landlady, who had another empty bed in the room. This cost me the 500 kunas I had and after I spent the money I had to move out. Another neighbour from

Sarajevo offered me a cheaper, but less attractive room, which I accepted. I was having a very difficult time. I had no money and was hungry. I even wanted to return to Sarajevo because there the kitchen operated from 1941 to 1942, until all the Jews had been interned in camps. Back in the days of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, there was a canteen where poor schoolchildren and students ate free of charge and some apprentices paid one dinar for lunch. At the beginning of the war the canteen was turned into a kitchen from which food was sent out to Đakovo and given to Jews who were hiding in Sarajevo. My mother's youngest brother, Jahiel Montiljo, was a labourer in this kitchen. In Mostar, at first I was so hungry that I wanted to return to Sarajevo just because of this kitchen, but they talked me out of it. It was very difficult there, the situation was even worse than that which I had left behind.

I worked in several places, gradually getting better jobs. In the end I was working on assembling barracks. This job was quite well paid. And that was how it was until November, 1942, when we were deported to islands and towns in Dalmatia. I went with a group by train to Metkovići, and then on a two-master down the Neretva River. We sailed towards Hvar, to the town of Jelsa. Some were going to Stari Grad, some to Hvar. I stayed in Jelsa. We were put up in the Jadran Hotel where we received some food. There was no work for us to earn money and I remember that we sold underwear for figs or corn. At the beginning of 1943 we were in Jelsa but, in January or February, we were moved to Hvar, a town on the island of the same name. From there, at the end of spring, we were moved to a camp for civilians on Rab. The ship from Hvar stopped in the open sea outside Split. People from the Split community were standing on the shore waving to us, but the ship could not enter the port. The Italians were afraid that we would escape to Split.

### *Rab*

Searchlights at the camp entrance. The whole camp was lit really brightly. We were accommodated in wooden barracks. It was very hot. There were only young men in my barracks. In some barracks entire families lived together. There were patrols walking around the barracks at night. We had to go into the barracks quite early in the evening, despite it being so hot. We worked in the kitchens, helping to prepare the food. Our job was to bring in supplies from the storehouse. Jakica Kabiljo, a cook from Sarajevo and my neighbour from my street, was

also there. There wasn't enough food, but those who wanted to could earn a *pagnocca* by working on assembling barracks. The additional barracks were for internees from Kraljevica and northern parts of the Croatian coast. Across from us, across the road, there was a camp for Slovenes. They used to come across for work and when we met them in the camp we would ask them how they were doing and they would reply that they were alright "now". Their camp had been set up before ours and they had originally been living in tents which leaked, especially during winter. They were experiencing terrible hunger, people were dying in the tents and they weren't reporting the dead in order to keep receiving their food.

We went to the sea to swim, escorted by guards. This was only allowed occasionally, for reasons of hygiene. I remember a group who came from the north Croatian coast. They were fleeing Zagreb and were stopped in the Kraljevica camp and later sent over to us. They set up a puppet theatre, a small stage like a window frame. That was the first puppet show I had seen in my life. Later, when I had grandchildren, I used to take them to puppet shows in Zemun and Belgrade.

We became used to life in captivity, numb to everything; we were not afraid because there were so many of us. Even back in Sarajevo we had known that it was difficult in Jasenovac, that the living conditions were harsh. The Jasenovac inmates were building an embankment on the Sava River, standing in the water and being killed, so we were aware that the living conditions on Rab were much better.

In September 1943, Italy capitulated. We began to manage the camp ourselves. The kitchen was working and we took turns on duty guarding the camp, because the Italian guards had all left. Our leadership managed all the work in the camp and prepared us for joining the Partisans or going into exile. We were told that from that point on we had to manage on our own. We guarded the food storehouses and the camp. We volunteered and were trained for battle. We took small arms from the Italians, who had left everything behind when they went. Very soon we went outside the camp fence with a flag, to the town of Rab, straight down the road. There had already been a connection between the camp and the illegal resistance organisation in the town of Rab.

Because of the aircraft, we crossed from Rab to the mainland in two-masters. Kraljevica, Bakar, Novi Vindolski all the way to Senj. That was the final stop. I remember it was deep in the night. We broke into a building on which there was a sign reading "Ustaša District

Office". We spent the night in the offices and, in the morning, we were taken by truck, via Velebit, to the Supreme Headquarters of Croatia in Otočac. From there we continued on foot through Gorski Kotar, Lika and, at Generalski Stol we met with staff from the Seventh Banija Assault Division. There they assigned us to various brigades, battalions and units. In Otočac the leadership said that we shouldn't continue to exist as a Jewish unit, but that we should be deployed in the units of the Seventh Division for a number of reasons. The division had experience in combat and we were all inexperienced, we would easily be killed in battle. And also, if the enemy found out about us they could destroy the entire Jewish military unit.

From the camp on Rab, some went to Slovenia, some joined the Partisans and some went into exile, to Serbian territories and settlements.

I was in the Second Brigade of the Fourth Battalion of the Seventh Banija Division. The battalion commander was Simo Čavić and brigade commander was Rade Grmuša. The political commissioner was Slavko Borojević. I remember my shoes coming apart from such long walking and that in the end I was left barefoot. Later we would get clothing and shoes from the British. I got a big pair of shoes, new leather ones, good shoes, but I walked like Charlie Chaplin in them. I treasured them dearly.

The most difficult things for me were the long marches and the lack of sleep. If someone had asked me if I wanted to eat really well or get a good sleep, I would have opted for the sleep. Sometimes I slept while walking, especially during night marches. I was in the infantry unit. Later, after I took and passed a course for a telephone operator, I was reassigned to the signals unit with the brigade headquarters. When the need arose I was reassigned to the artillery unit to work as a clerk. I gained experience in practice. In the Partisans I felt equal with everyone else. I took part in all the battles fought by the unit in Banija, Kordun and on to the Italian border, which is where we were in 1945 when the war ended.

After the war, at a medical examination, I learned there was something wrong with my heart. The doctors told me that this had been caused by arthritis, although I had never suffered from this, but the cardiologist told me that my heart condition came from the inflammation of joints that I must have had in the Partisans when I was young.

After the war, my grandmother, two uncles and their families, women and children, emigrated to Israel with the first *aliyah* in 1948.

In Belgrade, in 1949, I found two cousins. Their mother Gizela, née Montiljo, married name Kalderon, had perished in Đakovo with her youngest, two-year-old daughter and her mother. Her husband, Jakov Kalderon, died in Jasenovac. The children, Sidica-Dina and Menahem, managed to stay alive by some miracle because a Jewish family from Osijek helped them by taking them out of the camp in Đakovo. They were in Bergen-Belsen, but stayed alive. In Belgrade they lived in the Children's Home in Visokog Stevana Street. They turned to me for help, telling me that the Home was being closed and asked what they should do. I advised them to do what most people were doing, to go to Israel. And that's what they did. Now they are both grandparents. After the closing down of the Đakovo camp, my mother Rena was transferred, with the other survivors from the camp, to the Jasenovac camp in June or July, 1942, and there they were all immediately killed by the Ustaša. In Belgrade I worked in the air force. I married in 1949 and had two children. My son and daughter moved to Israel in the summer of 1993, and I followed in November of the same year.

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*Gonda Pinto IZRAEL*

FRIENDS SAVED THEIR LIVES



*Gonda Pinto Izrael was born in Sarajevo in 1922 to father Dr Samuel Pinto, a lawyer (died in Sarajevo in 1957) and mother Pepi Pinto (died in 1939). She had a sister, Nela, born in 1927 (died with the Partisans in Slavonia in 1943).*

*After the coup of March 27, 1941, she returned to Sarajevo from Zagreb, where she began to study English at the Zagreb University Faculty of Philosophy. After the war she worked as a stenographer for "Borba"*

*Gonda Pinto Izrael lives in Haifa, Israel, where many visitors who have met her describe her as an excellent tourist guide.*

When the Germans entered Sarajevo in April, 1941, my father, who was a respected public servant – president of the Jewish Sephardic Community, member of the Sarajevo City Council and member of various organisations – knew he would be among the first to be targeted. Because of this, with the help of his brother Dr David Pinto, a doctor in the City Hospital, he went into hiding. My sister and I stayed all alone in our apartment, where the authorities moved in a family who had been expelled from Slovenia.

At the end of September, 1941, with the assistance of the Ustaša, the Germans began rounding up Jews and sending them off to camps (Kruščica, Lobargrad). This was done at night. Carrying their list they would burst into Jewish homes and force the residents out.



At the beginning of October, I was at the house of my school friend, Vera Perić, a Croat. A mutual friend of ours was also there. He brought with him a young man whom he introduced as Veljko Džiković, a student who had come from Split to visit his brother. On that occasion Veljko said to me "Lela sends you greetings and told me to take you to Split".

Lea-Lela Montiljo was a close friend of mine from school. Immediately after the war broke out she had left for Split, where she had uncles. Split was sovereign Italian territory. It was well known that the Italians were not persecuting Jews the way the Germans were. (Lela moved to Israel in 1949. She lived and worked in Israel, in the Government Presidency, until she died.)

Veljko Džiković, as I discovered later, was a member of the Communist Party and lived in Split with his mother. However his brother, Branko Džiković, was an Ustaša, and chief of the Ustaša police in Sarajevo.

How would Veljko take me to Split, I wondered, when Jews in Sarajevo were in a trap and not allowed to leave the city at all.

Veljko had come to Sarajevo with a friend of his, Nevenka Marija Barić, also from Split, a student. She had brought with her two identification documents, an identification card in the name of Nevenka Barić and a student identification in the name of Marija Barić. She made two trips to the Sarajevo police. The first time she was issued with a pass for Knin in the name of Nevenka Barić, based on her identification card. The second time she took another pass for Knin, in the name of Marija Barić, by showing her student identification. Why Knin and not Split? Because Knin was within the Independent State of Croatia, but the only way to get there was through Split. So it was necessary to take a train from Sarajevo to Metković and then continue by boat to Split. From there, passengers for Knin would take a bus. But anyone who wanted to remain in Split could do so. Of course Nevenka's photograph was on the pass.

The same day, Veljko and Nevenka took me to an apartment they had got from Veljko's brother. This apartment belonged to the family of Leon Finci (his daughter Sida Papo lives in Sarajevo). The Finci family had fled in time and the apartment had been seized by the Ustaša police.

We were sitting in the kitchen racking our brains about how to change the photograph on the pass without it showing, because we did-



n't have a stamp. I don't know why, but for some reason we opened a cupboard and, to our surprise, found several stamps for the Leon Finci Company. We used one of these to stamp my photograph which we had glued to the pass instead of Nevenka's and then smudged it so that it was impossible to tell whether it read "Leon Finci Company" or "Ustaša Police of Sarajevo".

In the meantime my father advised me to flee as soon as possible. The following day we left for Sarajevo.

In Split, a cousin of my mother's, Štefi Broner, who was married to a local, took me in. I helped out a bit around the household. I also did some work – played the piano in a ballet school and gave classes.

At the beginning of 1942, my father came to Split with my sister.

The members of the Council of the City of Sarajevo were in a ratio according to the size of the population they represented (Serbs, Croats, Muslims and Jews). My father represented a small minority – about ten per cent of the city's population was Jewish - and so he often collaborated with the Muslim representative, Uzeir-aga. When they voted together they would have a relative majority in the Council.

Uzeir-aga proved to be a true friend. He was a man of high repute and, as well, a Muslim. The Ustaša authorities were interested in winning over the Muslims. Uzeir-aga took advantage of this and arranged for my father to travel legally to Dubrovnik, as a convalescent. Dubrovnik was part of the territory of the Independent State of Croatia, but it was under Italian military occupation.

Not only did my father receive permission to travel, but they even allowed him to take his daughter with him, my sister Nela. On top of everything they even gave him a nurse to escort him – and all this at the same time as the Ustaša were sending Jews off to camps in large numbers!

When he arrived in Split, my father rented a small room and I managed the household.

At the end of 1942, the Italian authorities sent my father and my sister to Brač and then on to Rab. I escaped this fate because I was not on the same list.

Left on my own, I looked for any kind of work and found a job as a nanny with the Fišer family from Zagreb. Like me, they were refugees, but they were well-off. This is what the situation was like there: Mr and Mrs Fišer lived in the apartment with their son and daughter-in-law and their two-year-old grandson Dundek, whom I was

to take care of. In practice, I was a servant. I would get up before everyone else in the morning, bring coal up from the basement, light a fire in the stove, clean the shoes, make breakfast and do the dishes; after that I would go to the market and only then would I take Dundek for a walk. The afternoons were more or less the same scenario. I had two free afternoons a week. My monthly wage was 300 lire – the total household budget was about 15,000 lire per month – but the food was really good there, with everything purchased from the black market, and I had a roof over my head.

On September 8, 1943, Italy fell and I decided to join the Partisans.

For a while my unit moved around in the area of Biokovo, but when the Germans advanced they transferred us to the island of Brač, then to Hvar, then to Korčula and finally to Vis.

About ninety of the fighters in my company hadn't completed more than four years of primary school and a number of them were illiterate. Because of this I was put in charge of cultural work. Whenever we weren't involved in an "operation", in other words a battle, I would give lectures in various fields (history, geography etc.). I also published a bulletin-board newspaper and taught the illiterate to write. Once I even directed a play to which we invited the locals from the village in which we were stationed. An illiterate soldier played the lead role. He learnt the dialogue by heart with great enthusiasm and didn't make a single mistake.

On the island of Vis they sent me to a training course for nurses and, in this capacity, I took part in battles for the liberation of a number of islands.

In the meantime the National Liberation Army was gradually freeing Serbia. I knew that once Belgrade was liberated they would establish civilian rule and that personnel would be required. To this end various courses were organised for us on Vis. I was sent on a stenography course and then to Belgrade, about a month after the city was liberated. There they assigned me to the editorial office of "Borba".

There were bloody battles fought in the country up until May, 1945. But for me the war ended the day I arrived at "Borba".



## II

# SURVIVORS OF THE CAMPS: AUSCHWITZ, BERGEN-BELSEN, JASENOVAC



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*Dvora ACMONI*

## THE JOURNEY ON WHICH I GREW UP

*Dvora Acmoni was born in Belgrade in 1928, to mother Ela, née Nestel, and father Aleksandar Göre, from Temerin near Novi Sad. At the end of the nineteenth century many people took Hungarian surnames and her grandfather also did this. His brothers, and all other members of her father's family took the surname Komloš only her grandfather chose to take the name Göre. Her father's brother, who was two years older than her father, was named Emerih-Imre-Mirko. His son, Đuri, was born in 1925. The uncle died in 1938. Đuri was wounded on December 24, 1944, when the Soviet Army began bombing Budapest. He was admitted to hospital where he died two days later. His mother, Elizabet, née Grunberger, returned from Auschwitz, emigrated to Israel, remarried and, from there, resettled in Argentina.*

*Her father attended school in Novi Sad for eight years. When he turned fifteen, he continued his schooling in Budapest at the Commercial Academy and later studied management.*

*He married Dvora's mother, Ela Gabriela Nestel, in Budapest on May 11, 1925.*

*When her father graduated, he returned to Novi Sad and took Yugoslav citizenship. In a very short time he had a business up and running and then set off for Belgrade, together with Blazius Nestel, his best friend, partner and brother-in-law.*

*Shortly afterwards they were joined by a wealthy gentleman, Mr Simon, as a silent partner.*

*Following some difficult years, the company began to prosper and comfortably supported three families. It manufactured paints, ultramarine (for laundry whitening) and, during one period, laundry soap.*

*In the meantime Dvora (1928) and her sister (1934) were born to the Göre family, and two sons were born to the Nestel family: Pavle (Pali) in 1929 and Tom (Tomi) in 1933.*

*Dvora's father was executed by firing squad on November 16, 1941, at the age of 41.*

When the Nazis came to power in Germany, my uncle and Mr Simon, foreseeing what would happen, decided to emigrate. They quickly went into action. My father was passing through a difficult period, and there a number of reasons for his decision not to join them. These were primarily reasons connected to his constant optimism, his concern for the factory, and particularly for his mother who had lost her husband, concern for my mother's parents and for her younger sister who was not married and was taking care of her sick parents. Mr Simon emigrated to the USA in 1938 and my uncle, with his family, boarded the last passenger ship which left Europe in 1939. My father bought them out and became the sole owner of the factory.

When the war broke out we were living at 28 Vojvodanska Street (now called Zrenjaninska Street). The war began with heavy bombing in Belgrade which did not stop for six days. Most civilians were fleeing the city, taking some belongings with them. My father decided we should stay in the bomb shelter of our building. He made this decision on the basis of his impression from newsreels showing residents of Paris and other cities leaving their homes to escape from bombing by the German Army. These people didn't manage to save their lives by running away, because the Germans attacked the refugees on the roads, dropping bombs on them and machine-gunning them from low-flying aircraft.

On the first night of the bombing friends of my parents whose buildings had been destroyed by bombs, or who were fleeing the city centre, arrived at our place. Some of them arrived the following morning after an unspeakable night. So there were sixteen of us there.

Only the Ajzler family stayed behind; Mr Dezider Ajzler was born in Osijek, but had lived in Belgrade for years (I don't remember his profession). His wife was Lili Kenedi, who was born in Košice, and their twenty-year-old son Zlatko had finished the first year of architecture studies.

My father continued to work at the factory. He was arrested on a number of occasions, but released each time thanks to Bahts, a commissioner appointed to the factory by the authorities. Every factory, store and workshop was under this or some similar kind of supervision.

Father's employees would bring food staples from their villages. Even villagers from Temerin, which was under Hungarian occupation, used to cross the border illegally and bring us meat, just as they had done in earlier years. My non-Jewish school friends would queue for bread early in the morning, while we Jews were not allowed to shop before 11.00 a.m. The village women at the market, who had known my mother before the occupation, used to save the best products for her. More than once we had no need to accept these offers because we were already well-supplied.

Zlatko's friends, most of them Christian, used to come and beg him to join them and go with them into the forest, but his parents were against this. Zlatko was thin and weakly and his parents coddled him like a small child.

There was one more Jewish imperative – don't separate, stay together at all costs. Under these circumstances there was no thinking about what was the smartest thing to do.

At the end of September, the male members of the Ajzler family were arrested and interned in the camp for men in Belgrade. They were only able to take one rucksack each to Topovske Šupe.

On October 18, 1941, my father went to work. That afternoon my sister and I were sitting in a room from which we could usually see him returning home. We waited in vain. Our hearts ached from worry. Then Mita Dujanović appeared, father's clerk who had worked in the factory for years. He was an honest, kind and responsible man who was much closer to my father than just an employee. He told us that father had been arrested. I no longer remember how they arrested him, whether he turned himself in or whether they arrested him in the factory – I shall never find the answer to this. What I do know is that October 18 was the last wave of arrests.

The following morning, Sunday October 19, we were allowed to visit the camp. Mrs Ajzler came with us. She knew the way to the camp because she had visited her loved ones the week before. We packed food, medicine and clean underwear for father.

There was a long line of people standing outside the gate, mostly women and children, along with a few men, employees of the Jewish

Hospital (who were still free at the time) and Christian friends. There were guards standing around us. We already knew that the Wehrmacht was responsible for the camp, and so we were a little calmer. We didn't spot a single black SS uniform.

The gate finally opened and the crowd hurried inside. The men were standing in the middle of a square – several hundred of them. Within a few minutes everyone had found whoever they had come to see. Smaller groups were formed, depending on the number of family members. There were a great many people, but I didn't mind. The four of us were hugging one another. The Ajzler family were standing next to us. I was afraid there would be shouting, crying and pushing, but it was quite the opposite. There was silence. Quiet sobbing could be heard here and there.

After the first few moments, quiet conversations, papers rustling, parcels opening, could be heard. I couldn't say how long this visit lasted. My father's embrace separated me from the outside world. I didn't even pay attention to my mother – was she weeping? As far as I remember I didn't even look her way. My seven-and-a-half-year old sister was standing still, as usual. Her behaviour during the six days of bombing had been shocking. We sat in the hallway of the shelter – she didn't complain, didn't cry. She just sat between our parents.

I asked my father where he slept. He pointed towards something I could barely see. I was small and the people around me were tall. We heard a command saying the visit was over. We left the camp promising to see one another again the following week.

I remember the second visit, the following week, even more clearly. The same scene was repeated and the silence was less threatening. The main topic of conversation was fleeing the city as soon as possible. Father was firm, he was trying to convince us to run. He was sure that Bahts, the commissioner, would manage to free him. It would be easier for him to cross the border alone and he would feel much better knowing that we were somewhere safe. For us, Budapest was the only option: family, friends, accommodation and a familiar language. To this day I have the feeling that my father's words did not really get through to my mother. She just repeated the sentence "We won't leave you alone," over and over. Knowing how stubborn she was, my father spoke to me, in an authoritative voice which I had never heard before, saying "You take Erika, even if mother stays. I'm counting on you." He spoke in Serbian. He hugged me very tightly. A few minutes later we left for

the exit. I don't remember whether I replied or just nodded in agreement, but his posture and the strict look on his face were so unlike him that I have never been able to erase them from my memory.

Two days later two men appeared who had come to get us out. They brought with them a short letter from my aunt, Elizabet Erži, who was already in Novi Sad with her son Đuri. From there she was taking action aimed at saving us and her family. "There's nothing to wait for! You can still get across the border." The two strangers asked no question, they simply gave instructions. Our fate was in their hands. They promised to send a hackney. We were to be ready at two in the afternoon. They added that the exact destination was on the bank of the Danube. We were to be there at three in the afternoon. Although we knew they were coming, we still weren't ready. The suitcases were only partly packed. Aunt Lili was very busy, but Mother just sat on a chair in the dining room. In the meantime I asked her to help me close a suitcase. My sister wasn't at home, she was waiting in a queue for coffee outside a shop in our street. I grabbed her coat and ran down the street. She was still standing outside the shop. I pulled at her to come with me, threw her coat over her and whispered, in German: "Hurry, hurry, we're leaving." We arrived home a few minutes later, out of breath because we'd been running. Mother was still in the very same position as when I'd gone out. I immediately realised what her plan was. I had no idea how to make her stand up. First I asked, her, quietly and gently. My sister joined me. We mentioned the reasons that Father had spoken about. I begged, made promises, but she persistently repeated: "We are not going without Father." Like a broken record player repeating the same parts, the same melodies. I lost my patience and raised my voice. I began making threats, my voice almost shouting with hysteria. "I am not going. I am not going," my mother kept repeating, an ice-cold expression on her face.

I looked at the clock. The scheduled time was approaching. My hysteria mounted and my voice was shaking. I couldn't control myself. Without thinking I hurled words at her – something I could not even think of before. In a hoarse voice I was shouting: "If you want to die, you can! But we want to live!"

Mother was so lost in her own thoughts that I doubt she even heard me. My sister's eyes opened wide. She hadn't expected this. In her eyes was a feeling of fear and despair. Even if she didn't understand everything, I could see that she felt it all. She was torn between me and



Mother. And then, as though I were playing a role in a play, I walked into the bedroom, opened the small cupboard next to my mother's bed and took the pills that she used for headaches – a drug called Rofein, made in France, which the pharmacist had managed to get even during the months of the occupation. With a triumphant smile on my face, right before my mother's eyes, I shoved them into the pocket of my coat.

When I saw that she still wasn't moving, I lost control. I was running from room to room, collecting the few remaining things that were still not packed, banging the doors of rooms and cupboards. I was swearing loudly, in Serbian, using words which had never before been heard in this house. I was in the grip of uncontrollable fear and even hatred for my mother. I began to close the suitcases. Finally, I went to my room, took two large notebooks and, when I thought my mother wasn't looking, slid them in between the clothes.

We were not allowed to take anything written in Serbian with us but, a few weeks earlier, I had worked out a plan for smuggling these notebooks. One was my personal diary which I had written every day from the very beginning of the occupation. I had been writing everything down, the announcements that were posted on walls, especially those which referred to Jews. I was even cutting articles from newspapers and pasting them into the notebook. I wrote down the exact dates of events which had happened in the past six months. The second notebook was full of novellas that Pali and I had written together before they emigrated. Our souls had gone into that writing. I still remember the names of the ships which belonged to the heroes and the villains.

And finally something happened. Mother saw what I was doing, probably because she knew my body language when I wanted to hide something. We had never talked about this. Slowly she rose from the chair, took the notebooks out from among the clothes and said: "You're putting us all in danger." I was hypnotised. I couldn't utter a word. She slowly closed the suitcase and took her winter coat. We heard the sound of a horse-drawn cart approaching. I don't remember whether we locked the house.

The hackney driver helped us load the luggage. My mother, Lili and my sister were sitting under the roof with their backs against the back of the cart, almost invisible. I was sitting opposite them, on a narrow seat, between the suitcases. I could still see outside. I became lost in thought. My face was wet. Tears were running down my cheeks. I was crying silently. I didn't care about anyone, I was only thinking

about parting. Silently, to myself, I was humming a song I really loved: "My hometown, dear heaven in which I was born."

We reached the bank of the Danube. I looked for the boat we were to board but saw only an old raft with several masts over which a large sheet of canvas was thrown, its ends hanging to the floor. In a few seconds the porters took our bags and put them on the narrow wooden gangplank which connected the raft to the land. Everything was happening so fast that I couldn't tell what was going on. Someone opened a small passage and let us into a covered space. About twenty people were already crammed in there. They were sitting on trunks. When we entered it was even more crowded. People began to grumble, but someone said sternly "Be happy you're here. No one is going to die from overcrowding." I couldn't see this man's face, it was completely dark. Someone came in, perhaps it was the captain, and asked us to be quiet. Officially, he was transporting cargo. We would reach Novi Sad at night. We weren't to go on deck before dark and he would let us know when dark had fallen. There was a bucket on the deck, we were to use it only one at a time and only to empty our bladder, he emphasised, only the bladder. The engine was already running.

The man's voice and the sound of the engine had a soothing effect on us. Some of the refugees were quiet, some were whispering. Despite the cold October day, it was hard to withstand the heat and the crowding. People were wearing several layers of clothing in order to keep as many of their things as possible. Winter was coming and there were people who had nobody in Budapest whose help they could count on. Nor did they have any money. There was no bank in Hungary which would take or exchange Serbian dinars.

Despite the silence, the tension and fear could be felt. The first and most important task was crossing the border. our lives depended on this. I wanted so much to go out onto the deck, to say my farewells to the surroundings, to everything, but I was unable to. Only an hour had passed. This meant it was still light outside. I suddenly remembered the words of the captain, who spoke about his boat. I had an outburst of wild, uncontrolled laughter. I was thinking of my cousin Pali, who was already in Sydney by then; he was a faithful partner to me in uncontrolled laughter. When would I be able to write to him and tell him all about our journey? After the war?

My mother knew Pali's laughter very well – it sometimes sounded as if he was imitating the barking of dogs. She forced my head forward,

into the collar of my coat, to silence my voice. I felt tired, and a thousand different thoughts were going round in my head and that's how I fell asleep. When I awoke, I saw that people were going out, one by one, to the deck. My turn came. The bucket was full. No one in sight. The pressure in the lower part of my body was getting stronger and stronger. I didn't dare shout. I was standing on the spot, desperate. Obviously my long absence was noticed. Suddenly a crew member appeared from out of the dark. He casually lifted the bucket and emptied it. Then he disappeared just as he had appeared.

The physical relief, the stars in the clear sky and the fresh air had a healthy effect on my mood. I was still on the territory that belonged to Yugoslavia, although occupied and annexed by Croatia, but I knew that this was temporary. I returned to my place. the narrow passage was now open and a little air was coming in. It was ten in the evening. Another four hours to our destination. Lili produced a small sandwich and held it out to me.

I wondered when she had made it. Probably during my fight with my mother. She also had some hot tea in a thermos flask. I drank it greedily. Usually I hated tea, I associated it with being ill. What struggles there had been at home for me to drink just a few sips of tea! I would pour it out whenever I could. But there were times when I was lying in bed and Mother wouldn't leave my side until the glass was empty. And now I heard myself asking for more! "Not now," said Aunt Lili, "we have several more hours of travel ahead of us, you'll have it later." I didn't complain.

After a while the captain returned and gave instructions for the remainder of the voyage. Most important was not to speak Serbian. Those of us who could not speak Hungarian were either to speak German or not speak at all. The part of the river bank where we would stop was not a quay, it would not be easy to disembark. We'd need to climb up the steep bank to a hill. This stretch of bank had been chosen because the Hungarian gendarmes rarely appeared there. It wasn't very likely they would expect civilians and children to be able to climb such a hill. The captain's men were to escort us to a cabin where we would stay until the sun came up. We were also to leave the cabin gradually. When we set off to town we should take only one small piece of hand baggage, as though we were going to work. We would receive the rest of our luggage that evening or the following day. Everyone began talking at once. They were confused by the luggage arrangements. If their

luggage were to be stolen, they'd be left with no possessions. That was all they had. The same authoritative voice which had spoken earlier – I still didn't see the face – tried to allay suspicions. "If they've brought us all the way here, that means they are taking care of us. They're not going to steal our luggage." Some people accepted this, but others were still grumbling. This man's voice was nothing like my father's, but I was certain that my father would have said the same thing.

The captain person, as I called him, came through and stuck a piece of paper to each suitcase. He took out a lamp, asked each of us for our name and address and quickly wrote this down.

By the exit he stopped, turned to us and said: "Try to get some sleep. It will be a difficult night and, from now on, forget Serbian, the children too. Then he left. Silence took over. I wasn't thinking about the future or about our instructions. I focused on just one thing – forget the language, forget... I had no doubt that Father would join us soon. With him there, nothing would be difficult for us. We would survive the war together. But to forget the language – that was impossible! It was beyond my abilities. I quietly went out onto the deck. I approached the helm and stood next to the captain. I wanted to talk to him, to ask him to rescind that instruction. He looked at me, but didn't say a word. At that moment we heard the sound of an engine similar to ours. A small boat was approaching us from the opposite direction. They exchanged greetings. "What are you carrying?"

"Live cargo. What about you?"

"Same as you," said our man, and continued: "How is it over there?"

"All calm. See you later."

When he disappeared, the silence took over again. After a while the captain turned to me and said "You're lucky." He said nothing more. I was silent. I don't know how long I stood there, but I remember what I was thinking. I felt as though I was the main character in a book. The only witness to this night. "Live cargo," no one's ever heard that before. If I were to write a novel would people believe me? My cousin Pali, my best friend, would he be jealous? My fear had evaporated. I was relying on the captain, on his calmness. He was my new hero.

The boat turned towards the bank. I wanted to thank him but I felt a lump in my throat. I had lost my voice. I crawled under the big canvas. Some passengers were dozing, others were sitting, awake, ready for departure. It was nearly three in the morning. We heard the engine

stop. Two men appeared at the entrance. They put their fingers to their mouths and once more we crossed the gangplank. The climb up the hill began. It was steeper than we had expected. We were grasping at the grass with our hands. We could hear stones rolling down. Two of the crewmen were going from person to person, giving help where it was needed. We were lucky not to have our luggage with us! I clenched my teeth, I didn't want help but, obviously, I couldn't do it, so they helped me too. I don't know how long the climb lasted. Finally we reached the woods, the hut. Our smugglers waited for the last person climbing the hill to arrive. One of them gave us instructions and explained the shortest route for us to the city.

Time passed really slowly. We still weren't sure whether we would make it. Dark clouds began to gather in the sky. It was getting darker and the tension was rising. The sun was unable to break through the clouds and the night seemed endless to us. But finally, the dawn came.

The four of us were first out, perhaps because of the children. Mother combed our hair. A wet towel appeared from somewhere and she wiped our faces, then her own. At last she was behaving normally. My huge anger had begun to drain away. We left the company of the group, only saying "We'll see you!" After a short walk we came out of the woods. Mother spoke to us in a normal tone of voice, as though we were going to work or to school in the morning. We approached a small bridge. There were Hungarian soldiers there, standing guard. Mother was talking about ordinary things. The guards paid no attention to us, a group of women talking about domestic work and cooking. They didn't ask for papers – if they had we would have been lost! Only one village cart with fruits and vegetables passed us.

I was relieved when we reached Novi Sad. I was the first to find my way around. I used to spend a lot of time there with my grandmother and I loved the city. I was connected to it by many pleasant memories. My father often visited his mother and I almost always went with him. Since Grandfather had died, Grandmother lived in Futoški Road, the longest street in town. It began to drizzle. Finally we arrived. Our reunion was quiet, unlike our usual meetings. Father wasn't with us. Grandmother brought in a large white washbowl. Mother first washed my sister, head to toe. I took off all my clothes and my shoes and crawled into Grandma's big bed, where I quickly fell asleep.

I woke later, during the day. Aunt Elizabet and her son Đuri came. Overcome with joy I clung around their necks. Then the chain of events

became clear to me. There were many smugglers, but some were untrustworthy, they would take the money and vanish. In any case, there was a lot of money involved. Aunt Elizabet had still not found documents for us. She wrote to my mother's good friend Piri Buk in Budapest, asking her to get us documents, because our goal was Budapest, not Novi Sad. We were to stay at Grandma's house and not to go out into the city. There were frequent checks, mainly conducted by the police.

We had no choice. Grandmother would go every day to the market to buy groceries. The fruit and vegetable season was over, winter was coming soon. Our aunt came every day, despite relations between her and our mother having been strained before the war, mainly because Mother didn't approve of the way she was raising her child, running her household and other things of which I was not aware. But during our two weeks in Novi Sad, I could see they were becoming close. I loved Elizabet very much. Father's cousins, who lived in Novi Sad, also visited us often. Their kindness was sincere, especially towards us girls. They would bring us supplies and sweets and offer to help with everything. Most of them were comfortably off and we were the first refugees in the family. I remember during those days my mother kneeling down next to the washbowl and washing clothes every day so they wouldn't mount up. At night she'd dry the laundry next to the stove after the last guests had left.

Our suitcases arrived on the first evening. A hackney driver delivered them to the various addresses marked on them. Nothing was missing. Father's new winter coat was in one of the suitcases. Mother had been worried that he would not have time to go home to get it. At Grandmother's, she took it out to air.

I suppose that the overcrowding and the modest living conditions were difficult for the adults. Lili was also with us, she had no relatives in the town. But I enjoyed the crowd, the heavy traffic in the small apartment. Our cousins were older than us. I'd met them during my many earlier visits. From time to time we'd find a hidden corner and speak Serbian. We all shared a hatred of the Hungarians. They were three or four years older than me, a big difference at that age, but the German occupation and the flight across the border – something they had not experienced – made me more mature in their eyes.

I once asked them whether the Dornsteter patisserie still existed. This was one place we never missed when we visited with our father.

Their cream slices were famous even beyond Novi Sad. The next day my cousins brought me a plate of cream slices. My initial delight was followed by confusion – I had no money and felt embarrassed. They realised this immediately and laughed: “You’ll pay us back after the war.” This made sense. We shared everything as equals. Unfortunately, none of them survived.

Two weeks after our arrival, Piri Buk came with the documents. They were authentic – with a stamp and an obscure signature. I don’t remember how much they cost but I know that it was a fortune. The address on them was our grandmother’s – our mother’s mother – which had been our address until 1944. Lili set off to Košice. Her brother’s address was on her documents. Without these documents we would have been unable to get food stamps.

Dear Piri – no one ever repaid the enormous sum of money she spent on those papers.

The next day we set off for Budapest and Lili continued on to Košice. In 1944 she was deported to Auschwitz and never returned.

The road to Budapest was familiar. I knew every stop. There were no borders, no customs, no customs control. It was all Hungary! From the Germans they received a Yugoslav granary as a token of gratitude for their cooperation. This was the first time that I didn’t take the window seat.

I had completed the assignment my father had given me. The euphoria of pride and heroism had vanished. I wasn’t crying, but I was overcome by a sadness such as I had never known. I felt empty, my very active and vivid imagination had ceased to function. There was nothing but sadness, endless sadness. It was only many years later that I realised this had been the end of my childhood! On that journey I became an adult.

In Hungary we lived with false documents and managed to get by thanks to the help of our friends. Because I had not been admitted to high school (at that time the eight-year lyceum), I began working at the age of thirteen. My sister was attending primary school. A relatively calm period ensued. The new government’s policies were relatively soft compared to those of the previous one.

In 1944, when the bombing became more frequent, I worked clearing rubble. I was the only female member of the team. This hard work had one advantage: we were allowed to stay outdoors longer. Jews were permitted to be outside only from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., while we labourers

could leave home at 10.00 a.m. In this way we managed to buy basic foods before they were sold out.

At that time in Budapest we were obliged to report to the police and the superintendent. This made things difficult for people who didn't have a permanent place of residence and for those who were fleeing the law for various reasons. These included petty criminals, opponents of the pro-Fascist regime, refugees from neighbouring countries and so on. The doormen of apartment buildings were a threat to them because they were required to inform the police about illegal tenants. In return they would get a roof over their head and the minimum wage of a building superintendents, which secured their basic needs. Without the documents in which reporting was recorded, no one could obtain food stamps.

Three years of life as refugees with false identities destroyed everyone's nerves. Our despair grew when the Germans entered Hungary. Many refugees from Yugoslavia, from Slovakia and even from Poland were experiencing fear for the second time. There were attempts to flee to Romania or to the territory liberated by Tito's Partisans. A handful of them succeeded in this but most were captured by the Hungarians or the Ustaša.

On October 15, 1944, the Fascist Arrow Cross party came to power under its leader, Szalasi. Many people were arrested. Gangs of these Nyilas, stormed wildly through the city killing individuals and groups of people. Groups of Jews were force-marched to the banks of the Danube where they were executed by firing squads, their bodies falling into the icy water. Those who survived were sent to the ghetto.

I remember November 9, 1944. We heard a loud banging on the gate of the building in which we lived. A large Star of David used to mark buildings in which Jews lived made the job of rounding up Jews easier for the Germans. The Nyilas ordered that all Jews from 16 to 40 years of age assemble in the yard, each with enough food for three days. We assumed that they were taking us to compulsory labour. I was young, mother was 40 and my aunt was younger than her. Only the children and the elderly were left at home, among them my sister and grandmother.

We were escorted by the Nyilas and the gendarmes. The first stop was the brickyard in Old Buda. There we found Jews from other parts of the city. It was a very tense situation. There were many people in a small space, stepping on one another and arguing, while the guards were shouting. We tried to find some quieter corner in one of the large halls, but we weren't fast enough. We slept on our coats on the bare floor.



On the third day they herded us outside. They took us to the Danube where we were all loaded onto a barge. People were screaming like crazy. We were all afraid they would drown us. We passed the night lying on the bare boards of the deck. In the morning we got off the boat and began walking. The roads were full of people walking. We took main roads and side roads, passing towns and villages on our way.

We were walking through muddy areas and it was raining almost all the time, which slowed us down. The young Nyilas, boys between 15 and 18 years of age who were escorting us to the Austrian border, threatened the exhausted people, opened fire at them or simply left them by the road, depending on their mood at the time.

Food was usually distributed only in the evenings, usually bean soup and a thin slice of bread. Farmers sold food to those who still had money. Sometimes I would get an apple peel from those people. Among the farmers there were some who felt sorry for us and would throw us apples. My mother kept saying "Always be in the middle of the line." She believed this was safer. But I usually went to the end and that was how I managed to catch the food they threw us. I remember one night when we slept next to a pigsty and a pig licked me through the fence.

When people stopped walking they would shout out the names of their relatives and friends, along with their addresses. We heard someone looking for us. It was Anči First, Doctor Klara's sister.

Dr Klara First had been our family doctor from 1938 to October 1941. My parents respected her a great deal and liked her as a children's doctor and also became friends with her. Through her we met her younger sister, Ana-Anči. Anči managed to flee to Hungary in the autumn of 1941 and we ran into her in Budapest a few weeks later. This was when our friendly relations with Ančika grew stronger. She was a seamstress and was working in her trade there. She lived alone and never complained of the hardship, but often changed her place of residence. It was not until later that I learned why she changed apartments so frequently.

We were overjoyed, if that word is appropriate. Anči's friend Magda Ast, known as Magula, was with her; she was also from Yugoslavia. From this point until the liberation we remained together. We lived together in conditions of slow death from starvation. Our relationship was one of mutual moral support and assistance, the taking of bread and sharing it, taking care of the few personal belongings we had, cleaning one another of lice. It was now that Anči told us why she had

had to change her place of residence so often. She had been a communist from earlier, as had been her sister Klara, and continued her activities in connection with that in Budapest, although to a lesser extent. Thus the danger hanging over her head was twofold: being a Jew with forged documents and being a communist.

When we arrived in Győr, close to the Austrian border, we scattered around the town. We walked through the streets. Mother said we should hang our water flasks on a button of our coats to hide the Star of David. Mother still had some money left. Her plan for us was to get to the railway station and return to Budapest. However we were stopped by three gendarmes who took our water flasks and saw the signs we were trying to hide. They questioned us and eventually said we would stay one more day in Győr and continue our journey two days later, in the morning. There was a rumour going around that the group we were to be put in had been transported to Mauthausen.

We stayed there the next day, gathering our strength for the days ahead. Two more stations before Austria: Mosonmagyaróvár and Hegyeshalom. The Nyilas thugs were screaming: "Everyone over here... so you arrive clean for the Germans!" They were checking our backsides, which was terribly humiliating. I had diarrhoea and used a corn leaf. (Many years later I was rewarded by my grandson, Omar, for this dreadful march when he asked my son, Amos: "I walked thirty kilometres in the army and it was terrible. How could Grandmother walk three hundred kilometres?" His words released me from the burden I had carried from the time of that march. My grandson was thinking about me, about what I had been through – is there anything which can compare with that?)

At the Austrian border there were Austrian and German police waiting for us. They told us to get on a train which was standing there and said we would be given food. Many people felt relieved at this, thinking that from now on we would be in the hands of civilized people.

In the train we were in a third class carriage and were given adequate food, bread and cheese. The salt cheese made us thirsty. I was unable to fall asleep. I kept thinking of father's glass of water he used to put on his night table every evening, to drink during the night. The next morning we were certain we'd reached Austria; however, once we saw a sign on a shop reading "Fruit and Vegetables" in Hungarian, we realized they had sent us back to the Arrow Crosses.

We left the train in Kópháza. People were put into pens and barns in three villages. Everyone was given a number so that, after we returned in the evenings, the guards could monitor the presence of every individual. The farmers sold food for jewellery and money. There were also some who gave us food for free. We heard these rural people muttering in German about “stinking Jews who have been sent to Burgenland to dig anti-tank trenches and build fortifications.”

Every-morning we dug anti-tank trenches to stop the advance of the Red Army. The food was disgusting, we could barely eat it, it was made of stock feed. Those who had any money left bought food from the farmers. We had no money left. One day a woman went into labour at work. We called on an old doctor, another Jewish prisoner, to come. An SS guard first killed the doctor and then the woman who had given birth.

My mother and aunt fell ill with dysentery so I worked instead of them. Mother was very depressed the whole time, although we talked a lot. She was concerned about my younger sister who had stayed behind in Budapest with our grandmother. My Aunt Nora suffered from fainting spells so we would bring her sugar as long as we had any. In the winter we froze from the cold, but my aunt never complained.

Whenever they asked the women for voluntary labour for special jobs, I would volunteer, because this meant a double portion of soup. Once we were part of a group working beside a machine which was pumping out sludge. I was standing in for my mother and aunt who had diarrhoea all the time. It wasn't only the work that was hard, but also the beating and humiliation which were part and parcel of it all. The moment they noticed anything the slightest bit out of order, the Germans and the Hungarian SS guards would beat us mercilessly with whips and clubs.

I worked with a very beautiful curly-haired girl. We became close. She had a hump on her back so they noticed her. I would try to protect her as much as I could. She would usually smile and say: “My hump is protecting my back”. We didn't lose our sense of humour, even in the most difficult of times.

At night they would lock us up. We were locked up with animals. We could hear their sounds and we breathed their stench.

We spent a month in this place. We worked constantly, regardless of the weather conditions, in rain and snow. We battled strong winds and frozen soil. I worked every day. I was sixteen years of age. Anči

also worked. On December 18, we were ordered to gather up our few belongings and to move.

We walked for several kilometres and reached some cattle wagons which they packed us into and then locked us in. It was a terrible journey. They crammed sixty or more women, hungry and thirsty, into each wagon. Some were even stealing from other women's rucksacks.

We left the train the following morning near Lichtenworth station. We walked a few kilometres and came to a factory, completely empty without a single piece of machinery in it. This place was a concentration camp. There were three huge halls, with broken windows and bare floors. The fourth hall was smaller and they put people who were dying in it. They would bring out those who died during the night in wheelbarrows. The camp was once a section of the larger Mauthausen concentration camp. People were shoving one another, trying to find a spot where they could rest their head against the wall. We found a place between two pillars for the five of us. I remember the first thing I said to my mother – that it was Father's birthday, December 18, and that this was a good omen for our reunion after the war. This proved to be a false hope.

We didn't work in Lichtenworth. The camp was run by SS men and there was also one Jew among the camp management. He was given a death sentence after the war. All the kapos, male and female, were Jews. We were lucky, our kapo was not like the others. He told us that he had studied medicine and used his knowledge to help us.

There weren't many men in the camp, perhaps about ten per cent. They were dying faster than the women. Once some compulsory labourers arrived from Ukraine, but they were so exhausted that they all died within a few days.

Some men and women tried to escape through the fence. Most of them were caught and punished with a whipping. In the camp, everyone was trading. I sold all my belongings – a turquoise chain with a locket and a fountain pen – for two portions of bread. I was sorry about the pen, which had been very precious to me.

In the mornings we would be given some awful liquid which was not coffee; at noon there was a disgusting soup made from leftovers and, in the evenings, bread. The five of us shared everything, divided everything equally. We tried to save some bread and would sleep on it so it would not be stolen.

My weight went down to 26 kilograms. Mother was even thinner. When we ran out of sugar we began to worry about my aunt who need-

ed sugar to survive. However, at this very point she recovered. She couldn't sit still, she encouraged the women and would talk to them about the sufferings of Jesus. I didn't understand how I, weak as I was, could debate with her about Jesus. Anči, who was a communist, was shocked. However my aunt kept her calm; she would walk around the people who were dying, those who were sick, mainly from typhoid, and give them the little bread she used to get.

In the camp we would help one another. For example, we cleaned the lice from one another three times a day. In the mornings we would wash ourselves under a tap over a trough. We would wet a piece of cloth to clean our bodies as much as possible. Soap was a rare commodity and people would kill for a piece of soap. I remember feeling cold all the time. The fact that we used a latrine – a series of holes – was conducive to the spread of diseases, especially typhoid.

In February, 1945, they called for fifteen volunteers for work outside the camp. I volunteered. We walked eight kilometres in the almost spring weather to the village of Felixdorf, where we were to clear the rubble of a large building. On our way we met a group of plump Jewish women with children. We were shocked. They turned out to be from Szeged, Bácska and Debrecen. Under the agreement with Eichmann, they had not been deported to Auschwitz, but worked for Austrian farmers. The women emptied their pockets to give us all they had.

When we were told the kind of work that awaited us, I spoke about my experience in Budapest and said that I had been sent to do the same kind of work there. However this time it was much more difficult because I was very weak and thin. For three or four days we worked from dawn to dusk. In the morning we would be given some awful drink and, at noon, carrot soup. When the work was more or less finished, a train arrived with men who were half dead, compulsory labourers from Ukraine. Within a few days, hundreds of these died. Their bodies were driven off to Lichtenworth. Those who survived were inside the building. We ate the food allocated for the dead men. My mother's words are imprinted on my memory: "We are alive thanks to the dead." At the end of March I heard the first Katyusha rockets. They didn't allow us to go out. We all had typhoid, despite the extra food from the dead men. The Russians liberated us on April 22.

The camp gates were opened and the starving mob ran out with no supervision. Some of the people who were freed attacked nearby village houses, others, who still had some strength, set off towards the east

and south-east, towards their homes. My mother, Aunt Nora and I didn't go, because we were in very poor health. I was in the worst condition because I had had typhoid only a week earlier. Because of this we stayed in the village. Anči and Magula said their goodbyes to us with the following words: "Until we meet again in Belgrade."

About ten days later we were picked up by the army. They took us to a hospital where we were cared for with incredible dedication by nuns. Mother and Aunt Nora succumbed, their lives taken by typhoid and hunger.

At about the end of May I returned to Budapest. There I found my younger sister. I began to search for Anči, but with no success. I established contact with the Joint Commission in Belgrade, but they knew nothing about her. All trace of her had been lost. Nor did I find Magula. Years later I ran into her when she was visiting Israel. She told me that she and Anči had parted somewhere along the way.

In 1946 I was on a refugee ship on my way to Palestine. The British stopped us, took us to Cyprus and put us in a camp. Next to us was a group of young people from Hashomer Hatzair who later formed the Shomrat Kibbutz in Western Galilee. They spoke Hungarian and Czech so we socialized with them. When the weather became cold and the rain began, one girl from this group began wearing a winter coat, rather modern for that time, black wool with a fur collar. From the very first time I saw this coat I was mesmerized by it. Something about it was familiar, although there were many similar coats. At night I scoured my memory in an attempt to find something, but in vain. A few days later I spoke to the girl, whose name I don't remember, and asked her where the coat had come from. She responded immediately, telling me that, like hundreds of refugees, she had walked the roads and pathways of north-western Hungary. Along the way she fell ill. Fortunately for her she was taken to a hospital in the town of Sombateli. In the bed next to hers there was a woman of about thirty. She was from Yugoslavia and her name was Anči. She had been raped mercilessly and savagely by a group of Soviet soldiers. She weighed about thirty kilos and, like most of the sick people, she was very weak. However the physical collapse and the mental shock killed her. The coat had belonged to her.

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Vera BRUNER

## THERESIENSTADT, CELL 33



Vera Bruner was born on June 4, 1925, in Bač in Vojvodina, to mother Alis, née Herlinger, and father Aleksandar-Šami Vais. She completed her primary education with nuns in Bač and began attending secondary school there before completing the fourth year of lower secondary school in Osijek. Her father had a brickyard.

After the war she began studying economics, but did not complete this. She married Mirko Bruner, a lawyer who worked in Yugoslav diplomatic posts abroad as a legal advisor. She has two children and two grandchildren.

Up to the beginning of the war I lived with my parents in the village of Bač, in the north-eastern part of the former Kingdom of Yugoslavia known as Dunavska Banovina.

The discriminatory laws against Jews began to be implemented immediately after Hungary occupied Yugoslavia in April 1941. One of the effects of these was that my father was banned from continuing his business. At the beginning of April, 1944, following occupation by the Third Reich, even more stringent racial laws against Jews were introduced. All Bačka Jews were deported, with the wholehearted assistance of the Hungarian authorities, to camps in Europe, mostly to Auschwitz.

I was arrested in April, 1944, in my family home. My parents and I were taken to a collection camp in Bačka Topola, near Subotica, close to the pre-war border with Hungary. I was 18 at the time. From Bačka Topola we were sent via Subotica, in overcrowded cattle wagons, to the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. The journey took several days, with no food, water or toilets.

We arrived in Auschwitz on May 2. As soon as we arrived we were divided according to gender, and then again into two groups: those capable of hard physical labour and those who were sent to the gas chambers.

Our heads were immediately shaved and we were tattooed. The number 81258 was tattooed on my mother, I was number 81259. I remember that we were in Block A and that the name of the *Blockälteste*, the head of the barracks, was Fani. After a week, or perhaps ten days, there was a new selection process and I was sent, along with a number of other young girls, to the Gleiwitz camp.

The Deutsche Gasrusswerke factory made synthetic soot for the manufacture of artificial rubber. Everything around us was covered in coal and the air was grey. After a tiring day we too would be covered in coal dust. One of the directors, perhaps he was the main director, was called Dr Schenck. He supervised the facility in which we worked.

Our kapo's name was Sonja. I was selected to work in a half-built bunker. The work was hard, the conditions unbearable. Anyone who was incapable of working, or who was ill, would be sent back to Auschwitz and killed. We spent about nine months in this factory, until January 1945, when the Germans suddenly began to evacuate us to Germany, via Czechoslovakia.

The evacuation began in heavy snow. It was a harsh winter and we had only our light clothes from the camp. On our feet we wore wooden clogs which we would cover with paper. We heard that the column was moving towards the city of Breslau, or Wroclaw in Polish. I fainted so my friends dragged me through the snow. In the morning the Germans ordered us to walk to the railway station where we had to climb up into open freight wagons.

We were carried by train for several days with no food or water. The wagons were packed. We had no water and the guards around the wagons refused to even give us a little snow. Several of us, half-crazed and desperate, decided to jump from the train.



When the train left Kosztalanetz station we jumped. The guards opened fire. I wasn't hit but when I fell I broke my left shoulder. My friend Hadasa Dagon (known at the time as Ivka Kostolić) and I set off to the nearby village of Litovice and there we knocked on the door of the first rural house we saw. There were already posters in the village ordering the locals to report any fugitives, and this is exactly what they did.

Two gendarmes arrived. They took Ivka to the police station for questioning and left me in the house because of my injury. Ivka and I had agreed earlier that, if we were caught, we would claim to be Serbs to lessen our chance being killed. Ivka said that we were sisters, daughters of a Yugoslav officer who was an Orthodox Serb.



*Vera Bruner among her loved ones: grandson David, daughter Vanda and son-in-law Ettore Columbini*

That evening the Gestapo threw us into prison, where we saw several girls from the transport. From the prison in Litovice we were sent to another in Olomouc. After two days in Olomouc they sent us to the prison in Brno. At this time I began to suffer pain in my shoulder. After a lot of begging, the prison doctor sent me to a clinic where they put a cast on my shoulder. We stayed in the prison in Brno for more than ten days and were then sent to the Gestapo prison in Prague (Pankrác). After being interrogated there we were sent to the Small Fortress in Theresienstadt (Terezin), which was also a Gestapo prison for political prisoners. After the roll call we were locked in the starvation cell (*Hungerzelle 33*), or death cell.

There were many other prisoners from Gleiwitz in the cell. Among the people I met there was Ruža Presburger, a student of medicine. She had jumped off the train after five days of travelling without food. She was my acquaintance and my friend.

A few days later, Ivka and I were moved to a different cell which was supervised by two SS women and two prisoners from the women's camp, Maruška Polak and Dr Daša Tidlitatov. Daša was the infirmary doctor who later removed my cast. If I remember rightly, my cast was removed in February, 1945.

I recall the cell very clearly. It had three auxiliary sections. In one there was a man in a coma who died soon after our arrival. In the second part there was an elderly woman who was mentally deranged and I heard that she was later killed. Ivka and I were in the third part, together with a woman who had a three-year-old child with her. The woman's name was Erna Haas and the child was Tomiček-Frita, known as Tomi. He was the son of her closest friend, a famous painter who had been killed in the ghetto in Theresienstadt. (After the war a film was made in Germany about Tomi's life, about Theresienstadt and Israel. In the film, Ivka speaks about Theresienstadt and also mentions me.)

I spent more than three terrifying months in this cell, on the concrete floor covered with straw. The food, mainly some watery soup, was pushed through the door for us and left on the floor. We were constantly hungry. We had only one, small, barred window, through which we could see only a glimpse of the sky. I was unable to sleep because of the itching of insect bites and the infection spreading under my cast. Every morning we would hear the sounds of killing and we spent our days in fear that we would be next.

On May 8, the guards left the door open. It was the end of the war. I still hadn't turned twenty. My parents were already dead.

The Red Cross took us in trucks to a ghetto where we were examined by a doctor. We were given discharge documents in our real names. The Red Cross Ambulance drove us to Prague and, at the beginning of June 1945, we crossed the Yugoslav border at Subotica.

### *Confined in Cell 33 in the Small Fortress In Theresienstadt, Czechoslovakia*

I heard the following story from Ruža Presburger one of the survivors, who now lives in Israel. She was a student of medicine at the time. Presburger was her maiden name in Yugoslavia, and her nickname

was Baba. When she married in Yugoslavia after the war, her name was Ruža Beck. She moved to Israel in 1948 and is known as Rachel Beck. She is married with a daughter and has three grandsons, one of whom is serving in the Israeli Army as a social worker. She now lives in Hod Yerushalaim, at 3 Guatemala Street.

Ruža Presburger (now Rachel Beck) was a diligent worker in Gleiwitz, close to Auschwitz, between May 1944 and January 1945. In mid-January, 1945, when the Russians were getting closer and closer, the internees were evacuated from the camp and marched through the snow to the railway station where they were crammed into open cattle wagons (about 150 people per wagon) in trains which were travelling through Czechoslovakia towards Germany. After five days she jumped from the train and, without food, drinking only water from snow she melted in her hands, she staggered to a village.

She headed towards a rural house, in the dark, in the eastern part of the former Czechoslovakia, and there she fainted. She was still wearing her striped suit and because of this was denounced to the Czechoslovakian police. They took her to Prague, to the Pankrác prison. There she met another sixty or so Jewish women who had also jumped from trains. Soon after this they were moved and locked up in the Small Fortress in Theresienstadt, two kilometres away from the “showcase” Theresienstadt camp. All sixty of these prisoners were crammed into a small room with only one window, which was almost completely boarded up. Very little fresh air reached the room. This Cell 33, the Death Cell, had probably been allocated by the Nazis for human experiments. The women were given very little food, once or twice a week, probably in an attempt by the Nazis to see how long it would take them to die from starvation. Perhaps it was a perverted study of human behaviour. One of the experiments was to keep people for a long period of time in a dark room. They did not manage to get out of there until the time of liberation. Afterwards they had to protect their eyes from sunlight for a very long time. In another cell they would put people on narrow wooden boards over water. If they lost their balance, they would drown.

The women realised they would all die if they fought among themselves when the food was distributed. They elected one woman to distribute the food and no one argued with the way she did that. If one woman was sicker than the others, her friends would give her an extra portion. When the Nazis put a Czech prostitute who was dying from

syphilis into their cell, hoping that she would infect the others, the prisoners held a meeting and agreed to kill her. However none of the women was prepared to carry out this execution with their own hands. Instead, and in spite of the hunger, they fed her and shared their scanty meals with her until she died.

In order to pass the time, and in an attempt to preserve their sanity, the women set up a school. Sitting on the cold concrete floor, without any books or other equipment, each of them took her turn teaching the others whatever she knew, be it European history, the Hebrew language, art or photography. One wrote poetry, another recipes on toilet paper. The only disturbance happened when the poet “stole” a scrap of paper which had been given to the woman they called the cook. They also knitted, pulling a broom apart and using the twigs from it as makeshift knitting needles. The wool came from unravelling their own things and making new ones from them. There was a serious discussion about whether the new sleeves should be plain or should have some Swedish pattern like the front of the garment.

All of this was an effort by the inmates to retain their sanity and support one another in these inhuman conditions. One woman from Poland managed to keep her thirteen-year-old daughter with her by bribing a German with a handful of jewellery. They were visited frequently by two Germans in black uniforms who were surprised and displeased to find them still alive. They survived solely thanks to the fact that two inmates managed to persuade the camp authorities that they were Christians, Yugoslav women, sisters who had come to visit their father, a prisoner of war. Their assumed names were Ivanka and Vera Jovanović, and they were in a nearby cell. Seventeen-year-old Vera never left her cell. She had broken her shoulder when jumping from a train. She was taking care of a five-year-old boy named Tomi, an orphan brought from Theresienstadt. Twice a week, at the risk of her own life, Ivanka would receive a basket with fifteen loaves of bread from a Czech guard who got this bread in some mysterious way from the male section of the camp. There was probably also medicine provided, although memory of this is unclear. The guard covered all this up for Ivanka and taught her to pull the bread through a small ventilation hole in the toilet of Cell 33 which overlooked the interior yard.

As the capitulation approached and the Russian Katyusha rockets could be clearly heard, the German authorities began taking the inmates out, cell by cell, and killing them, in order not to leave live witnesses

behind. When the women from Cell 33 heard about this, they decided to stay inside, hoping they'd be forgotten, as they had been in the previous few weeks. One day, at the beginning of May, 1945, a Czech supervisor asked them to vacate the cell and told them that the Czech Red Cross was there. They were to line up outside their doors, several hundred metres from Cell 33, because they were now free. The women, now very weak from malnutrition, headed for the door. Many of them were still wearing the striped uniforms of Auschwitz. Freedom was just a few metres away. At that moment the German camp commandant noticed them and jumped angrily towards them, swinging a wooden baton. He was chasing them back towards Cell 33, planning to kill them. Jews in camps were not to be permitted to survive the war. This cruel turn of fate was about to overtake them on the threshold of liberation. However the Czech guard managed to raise the alarm with members of the Czechoslovakian Red Cross who were nearby. They hurried to Cell 33 and sat on the floor among the women, thus preventing the Germans from killing them at this moment when the Allies were so close.

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*Edita Armut KAŠIKOVIĆ*

## EVERYONE CARRIES THEIR OWN FATE WITH THEM



*Edita Armut Kašiković was born in November, 1922, in Budapest, to father Oto, a trader and mother Olga, née Lichtenstein. In her early childhood, the family moved to Zagreb, where Edita lived until the second world war broke out.*

*Until 1944 she lived in Bakarac, taking an active part in assisting the liberation movement and saving Jews by sending them to Italy or finding accommodation for them in Dalmatian coastal towns governed by the Italian occupation authorities. In February, 1944, the Germans arrested her on the island of Rab. She was then deported to Auschwitz II – Birkenau – the notorious death camp, whose atrocities she managed to survive.*

*Her father, her younger sister and many members of her immediate family, particularly on her father's side, perished in the war.*

*After the liberation she worked in the Information Office of the Croatian Government Presidency, in Radio Zagreb and in other Zagreb institutions and companies. For health reasons, she lived a good part of her life in coastal towns. When the war broke out in Bosnia she was offered the position of president of the Jewish Community in Banjaluka, a position she filled successfully until her death on April 9, 1995.*

*She recorded this testimony at the request of Mr Sade, a representative of Sohnut, the Jewish Agency for Israel.*

My father had not yet turned 21 when I was born. My mother also bore twins, six months before my parents divorced. The court awarded custody of me to my father. I was not quite two and a half years old. At the time my whole family on my father's side was moving to Zagreb, except for one of his sisters. My father left me in her care. She was in charge of my upbringing until I turned nine. At that time my father remarried in Zagreb and so I was sent there. Not knowing the language, I lost a year of schooling and enrolled in the third grade of primary school again the following year. I attended the Jewish school in Palmotićeveva Street. I was not brought up with strict religious customs, but I did grow up in a typical Jewish family which celebrated the religious festivals. I would go with my grandmother and the women in the family to the synagogue regularly and I attended religious classes until the fourth year of secondary school. I also regularly went to the Maccabi gymnastic association, to all performances at the Jewish Community and so on. In this period, Nazism had already raised its head and there were already many German Jews in Zagreb. As with many other Jewish families up to 1941, we had a family who had just arrived from Berlin regularly eating at our place. This is when the Zionists from Zagreb would assemble high school children. In my class, in the secondary school, ten of the forty students were Jewish girls. We listened to lectures and learnt various crafts, all as a kind of preparation for emigrating to Palestine. I enrolled in a course for hair stylists because I always liked arranging the hair of my friends.

After I had completed primary school, my father decided that I should continue my education at the commercial academy, saying that if I completed grammar school I would be left without a trade and, because war could break out, he didn't want to live with a guilty conscience thinking that he hadn't equipped me with a way to put bread on my table. My resistance to this was in vain. These new surroundings, my new friends (I was the only Jewish girl in the class there) weakened my earlier friendships. In this new environment, I found myself in a leftist, communist-aligned society. In this new circle of friends there were a lot of activities which were attractive to young people who already had a progressive way of thinking, progressive for that time at least. I continued to attend Maccabi and lived and worked as before.

Then came April, 1941. My father, his younger brother and several uncles were rounded up at about the end of May and taken to what was then the Zagreb fairground. They were held there for almost three

weeks. I would take my father lunch every day and he would tell me over and over again that we must take urgent action to organise getting me out of Zagreb. This wasn't easy, especially because we females were alone in the family. There were also two small children, the daughter of my father's younger brother, who had been born in December, 1939, and my little sister Vlatka, born in October, 1940. Our house had been sealed by the Ustaša so we all moved to my grandmother's apartment. Thanks to the father of a friend of mine I managed to get a genuine pass for Sušak without paying a single dinar. I remember it was a Saturday. I took lunch to my father and told him that I would be leaving the following morning. Tears welled up in his eyes, tears of joy. This was our last meeting. He told me that it looked as though they, too, would soon be leaving in some transport, but that he didn't know where they would be taken. My father was everything to me, both my father and my best friend. I managed to work up the courage and the will to survive everything I lived through only with the hope that we would meet again when the war was over.

As so many times later in my life, fate also took a hand at this point, toying with me. That Sunday morning when I set off to Sušak, a cargo train was waiting on the second track. My father was in it. We set off at the same time: he to death and I in an attempt to survive. I stayed in Sušak for two months until there was a decree ordering all Jews to leave. My uncle (my father's eldest brother who had managed to flee Zagreb before my family was arrested) was in Rijeka. But when we had to leave Sušak, he didn't even mention the possibility that I could emigrate to Italy with him. So, feeling abandoned by him, inexperienced as I was, I went to Bakarac with a handful of other Jews who had previously lived in Zagreb. At that time Bakarac was a place in the border area between Italy and Pavelić's Independent State of Croatia, with a special status and predominantly under Italian rule. However, because I was already active in the illegal movement, I didn't register under my real name and my friends did not denounce me. From there I was active in the Hreljin and Bakarac area. My family in Zagreb would send me money to live on through a young friend of mine, also a member of SKOJ who came to Bakarac occasionally (he wasn't a Jew). However, at the end of 1942, all Jews in the Croatian coastal region were rounded up and taken to the Kraljevica camp and I ended up there as well. From there we were taken to the camp on Rab. There I continued to be constantly involved in the illegal organization. When Italy fell and the camp was disbanded, I



stayed behind on Rab and worked in the District Propaganda Section. As far as possible I helped with the transfer of Jews who wanted to go to Italy. All of this, of course, was expensive. But the pressure was so great that sometimes it wasn't enough to have the money, good connections were also needed to get a place on a boat. Part of my family was on Rab (my grandfather's brother, his wife and his daughter-in-law, with a young daughter who was six at the time). They wouldn't leave although I kept begging them to do so, mostly for the sake of their daughter-in-law and little Iva. My aunt claimed that they didn't have money for it. I knew that this was not true but there was nothing I could do about it. I don't know what they believed lay ahead.

In February, 1944, Germans landed on the island of Pag. We knew that they would come to Rab very soon. It was now too late for all of us who had stayed behind. Unfortunately there were terrible storms at that time. We were unable to cross over to Jablanac, on the mainland, so a group of us who worked in the committee hid in a nearby village, waiting for the sea to calm down so that we could leave. However somebody denounced us and, on the second night, the Germans, who had landed on Rab that morning, arrested us. We were taken for questioning. With the Germans there was a man from Rab who knew me and he pointed at me and said I was Jewish. He was an undercover Ustaša, but we hadn't known this earlier. I was separated from my group of friends and moved to a group of Jews who had stayed behind on Rab. From there, via Rijeka, they took us to the notorious Gestapo prison in Trieste known as Risiera. This was a huge rice warehouse and we were put in the attic. They brought me out for questioning every day.

One day, just before they were due to take me out for questioning, my aunt removed her corset and from it took a handful of diamonds which she asked me to throw in the toilet. I thought I would kill her on the spot. She could have saved all of them, especially her daughter-in-law and her granddaughter. But she had chosen not to. It was about ten days, perhaps even longer, before they had gathered enough people, mainly women and children, to make up a transport. There were somewhere between 250 and 300 of us. We set off in freight wagons. The journey lasted six days and five nights. Not once in all this time did we leave the wagon. We were so crammed in that we could only either stand or squat. We all relieved ourselves on the spot. Once each day the train would stop, they would open the doors and women wearing Red Cross armbands would pass out dishes of food without any spoons, so

that you ate whatever you could take in your hand. They also passed around containers of water with no drinking vessels.

When we arrived at the Auschwitz station there were five dead and several who had gone out of their minds in our wagon alone. Of course we had no idea where we were or what Auschwitz was. At that time the railway line had not yet been built between the women's camps and the men's camp in Birkenau, at the end of which lay the crematoriums. They took us there in trucks.

When we climbed out of the trucks we saw in front of us beautifully maintained lawns. We entered a nicely decorated entrance hall, very spacious, with tables and chairs. We were greeted by people in striped uniforms, clean, tidy and smiling. Later we learnt that these were members of the *Sonderkommando*, or the "command of the living dead", as they called them. These carried out special tasks: the destruction of men, women, children under fourteen, the elderly and the sick. Apart from a group of Soviet prisoners of war and the Gypsy camp – about 4,500 of them – all the prisoners were Jews. This was a group of 860 selected men, Jewish inmates. Every four months new ones were brought in and the previous group killed by the new. In this way the secrecy of the crimes was maintained. They brought us tea, even sweets for the children. There were no Germans in sight. A girlfriend of mine and I (she is now in Israel) were bored and began to wander around. At the end of the entrance hall we saw several heavy doors which had small windows in them through which you could peep. I still remember standing on tiptoe to see through the window. One of those men came up and told me to step away. At that moment two Italian women, who had three children with them, began to shout, saying that they didn't belong with us, that they were not Jewish, only their husbands were. Because they wouldn't stop, one of the men who were there when we arrive went out and called the SS men. Suddenly a group of them walked in, led by Dr Mengele. He introduced himself to us. He told us to line up. I speak German and heard him saying to a man standing next to him "well there are young ones among them, too." I was standing next to my aunt's daughter-in-law, and she put her little daughter in front of her. One of those clean and tidy inmates passed by us and, speaking under his breath, told Enika (my aunt's daughter-in-law) to distance herself from the child and hand her to the elderly lady standing next to her (my aunt). Enika just shook her head. I was confused so I didn't try to persuade her. Mengele and another two men began walk-

ing past us, indicating with their fingers which women should step out of the line. They pulled about twenty of us out. He told us to go immediately to the labour camp, while the others and the children would spend two weeks in quarantine before joining us. What happened to them from that point on is now common knowledge.

We were again put into the truck and taken to Birkenau, into the barracks where all the admission procedures were carried out: recording of personal information, tattooing, shaving, baths, distributing smelly dresses without underwear. We became numbers. Mine was 76481. If you were to wake me in the middle of the night I would tell you that number immediately. All of these procedures were carried out by the Slovakian Jewish women, about 2,000 of them, who had come on the first transport, when Birkenau had just been set up. About ten of them had survived, they were no longer people but beasts, in the service of the SS men. One of them, whom I asked to tell me where we actually were, smiled ironically, slapped me in the face and kicked me in the stomach with her boot so hard that I fell down. Sobbing, I stood up and asked her why she had done that. I can never forget the words with which she replied: "You're in the place where everyone dies and the kick was your punishment for being free until now."

Soon I was approached in the camp by two young girls, a Russian (who was my contact until the very end) and a Pole. It's difficult to know just how, but in that place it would become known in no time who someone was, where they were from and all the other important information needed about someone. They told me that Marjuša (that was the name of the Russian girl) would be my contact and that when something needed to be done she'd be sure to find me. At first I worked in what they called the exterior commands, as well as in the interior ones (removing faeces from our big septic tanks and, while doing this, we would be in faeces up to our waists). Outside the camp we did hard physical labour which was, of course, pointless, such as loading stones and other material onto a pushcart and then unloading them over and over again. At that time there was a selection almost every week, at the morning roll call. Someone only needed to have a pimple, or a little wound on their body (we had to be naked), to be immediately separated.

We'd been in the camp for perhaps a month or so when, one morning as we were preparing for roll call, my friend looked at me and screamed. I asked her what the matter was and she told me:

“You’re grey!” Our hair had grown a little and it seems that I had turned grey overnight.

And then the summer came, and the day of the assassination attempt on Hitler. Of course we didn’t know about this. That evening, as we were returning to the camp from work, several hundred of us (the whole command was divided into groups of about a hundred) were taken to the entrance door of the crematorium instead of to our barracks. They lined us up and told us that we were there in retaliation for the attempted assassination of Hitler. We didn’t react at all, we were completely indifferent, because we were already aware of the fact that only a stroke of luck could save us from death. However no one opened the crematorium doors, we were just standing there, while in our minds we felt we were already dead anyway. Sometime in the middle of the night a message was passed from line to line that, when we started to go in, each of us should have a stone in our hand, because there were stones everywhere, and that we should throw these stones at the SS men. Just for the sake of doing it, to show them that we were not cattle. However the dawn began to break and suddenly there was a command: “Left turn!”. None of us moved, we were simply frozen. But then they set the dogs on us and we began to return to our barracks.

One day Marjuška came and told me that I was to be transferred to the Canada Command (the barracks which received all the clothes and footwear from people who had gone to the gas chambers). My assignment was that, when we searched these belongings, I should put as much as possible of any medicine I found in the hem of my dress, and that she would come to me every evening to collect it. This was a very dangerous task because the SS men were constantly walking among us and I had to hide whatever I put in the hem of my dress until evening. When we returned to the camp at night the SS men almost always carried out spot checks and searched us. One evening, when we reached the gate, we were ordered to jump up and down. That day I had quite a few injection ampoules in the hem of my dress. The ampoules rattled and an SS man who was passing by heard this. He began to beat me and then he took me to the room of an SS woman named Dreschler. She was the top SS officer of the women’s camp. After the beating, and the questioning about who I was to have given the ampoules too (of course I said that I had not had any special reason to take them) she sentenced me to two months in the *Strafkommando* (punishment command). I was separated into a special barracks with

quite a few others, we slept in solitary cells and, during the day, they took us to the Vistula where we used shovels to load sludge from the river onto boats. After this I was sent back to my old barracks. Of course I had contracted a really bad inflammation of the ovaries and was in terrible pain. A Czech woman, a doctor, who worked in the *revir* (what passed for a "hospital" barracks) would come every evening to give me injections. She was sent to me, which meant that, like me, she must have been part of our illegal organization, although neither she nor I ever spoke about this.

There were transports with Jews from Hungary arriving at the time so, because of the great number of trains which came, they built a special railway line to shorten the process preceding the liquidations. At first, when they came there was no selection at all; the transports were taken directly to the crematoriums. I don't know exactly but I think that this lasted for more than two months. The crematoriums worked night and day, flames blazed from the chimneys and the air was so saturated with the smell of burnt flesh that we could hardly breathe. It seems that they weren't using sufficient Zyklon so the bodies, when they were being thrown into the ovens, would be revived and then sometimes, at night, when everything was silent, cries could be heard. My barracks was near the end of the camp, relatively close to the crematorium.

At that time something really horrifying happened, something I dreamt about for years. One morning after roll call they lined us up, girls from two barracks, in front of a huge hole in the ground, not very deep. Suddenly two trucks arrived, full of children, very small, six years old at the most. Some of them were holding dolls. The SS women were hugging the children and taking them to the hole. A second truck arrived full of barrels of petrol. They quickly unloaded it, opened the barrels, poured them over the children and set them alight! This sight, this crying can really never be forgotten and I don't need to explain what we who had to watch this lived through. They then brought in quicklime, threw it over the heap of children and ordered us to get to work. That evening three of my friends threw themselves on the electric fence. They didn't have the strength to go on living with this sight in their memories.

One morning during those days, guided I suppose by some sixth sense, I told my friends that we could try to hide after the roll call, not go to work and wait to see the transport arrive. I knew that my step-

mother had managed to flee with my little sister to Hungary at the end of 1942, and that she had gone to her family in Dombóvár. When the transports began arriving from Hungary, I always thought somewhere in the back of my mind that they would be picked up too, although I always hoped that they would somehow manage to hide. So the two of us succeeded in staying behind. We walked towards the wire fence. A transport arrived, the doors of the wagon were opened and I saw my stepmother coming out of it with my little sister, who had not yet turned four at the time. At first I froze, then began mechanically running towards the fence. I wanted to shout. My friend realized that something was happening to me, she ran after me and put her hand over my mouth. She scolded me, still with her hand over my mouth. I told her what I had seen. She was calming me down, telling me that I could have been killed on the spot if the SS man had seen me, and that it would have been no good to them because my stepmother would never have recognised me in the state I was in and there was nothing I could do to help her anyway. I realised that she was right. The only thing we did was to keep moving around that area. People were going quickly to the crematoriums. We went to the end of the camp where we waited for her to also go in with my sister.

That summer I had also suffered from typhoid fever and recovered from it. Here too, it could be said that I was lucky, if such a word can be used. The room I was in at the time was guarded by two SS men, *Volksdeutschen* from Vojvodina. There were several of us Yugoslav girls there. They were very kind to us, speaking our language and sometimes giving us a piece of bread. When I fell ill and had a high temperature, the Czech doctor said that she didn't dare move me to the infirmary because from there every day they sent those with typhoid to the crematorium to prevent the spread of the disease. She gave me medicine and injections every day. My friends would hold me up between them so that I wouldn't collapse. In this way I managed to get through the roll calls and then, when we set off for work, they would press themselves hard against me to hold me up and I just took steps like an automaton. As soon as we arrived at our workplace, the two *Volksdeutschen* let me lie down (they would give me their blankets) and there I would stay until it was time to return to camp.

Sometime in the autumn, my Marjuška came and told me that I would be moved to the *Schreibstube*, the clerical office, which was located in the small camp in Auschwitz (Auschwitz I). We called this

camp the *Musterlager* because it was the only one that the International Red Cross knew about. The commissions which came to inspect were always taken there because these were solid buildings, rooms with bunk beds, everything was tidy and, I could even say, pleasant.

This was the period in which the camp had gradually begun to be emptied out. Groups were being taken to Germany, mostly political prisoners and we had heard that they were being taken somewhere in Germany to be killed. I was told that I would be given a list of numbers each day. When I copied the lists with the numbers which were to be sent the following day, I was to substitute those from the list they had given me. I never found out who these others were and I wasn't able to ask. Just as in the Canada Command, this was a dangerous assignment because I had to keep the paper hidden and constantly check the numbers on it while an SS man walked up and down the room. The day before I was reassigned to this job I received a nice, clean dress, underwear, shoes and stockings. I worked there for about a month.

I think it was sometime in November that a new command was formed which worked on dismantling the crematoriums. Bricks were removed one by one and a special unit would mark each brick with some sign and number, with the assistance of the SS men. At this time there were no longer any selections and the number of inmates in the camp was falling constantly. What they called Camp A was now completely empty. This had been newly built outside the women's camp, some distance away, and had been used to accommodate Jews from Hungary, because they had subsequently decided to separate out some younger people after all. We worked on this dismantling until the beginning of January, 1945. We heard that they would set these crematoriums up again in Gross Rosen (Czechoslovakia). At about the beginning of the second half of January, the Red Army began a major offensive. At night we could hear the thundering of artillery. We knew that the end was closer and closer and we would also get information from the Polish Partisans with whom the illegal organization was in touch. We were well informed about all events on the fronts.

One day they assembled all of us women who were still in Birkenau. They told us that the final liquidation of the camp was beginning and that it had to be completed within two days, that we shouldn't attempt to escape because we wouldn't get anywhere, that the camp was mined and we shouldn't attempt to hide. The evacuation was done according to plan, and with German style discipline. An hour or two

before leaving the camp, each group was given access to the warehouses which were full of clothing and bread, sugar and margarine. I set off with the Polish group at about midnight. This was a treachery which we didn't realise until the morning, when the day broke. Each of us had dressed in several layers of underwear, two or three dresses and boots and packed our bags with as much bread, sugar and margarine as possible. The Germans had actually used us to empty the warehouses. Only those who couldn't stand on their feet stayed behind in the camp.

We didn't know then that they would be saved in just a few days, while ahead of us lay almost three months of terrible suffering which not even half of us would manage to survive. We walked all night in heavy snow and extreme cold. At dawn we saw corpses along both sides of the road and bread and food scattered around. Any woman who lagged behind was shot on the spot by the Germans. There was a special group of SS men at the end of each column which was responsible for this. Exhausted women were shedding pieces of clothing one by one and throwing away food as they walked because they didn't have the strength to carry it. So there were fewer and fewer of us. On this journey they would sometimes put us into open wagons in which we spent days without moving more than a few kilometres, then they would let us out and again we would walk. At one point along this journey to Calvary we spent about ten days in the Malhof camp where we recuperated a little. This was actually a munitions factory, but in those days we didn't work. We were put up in a sturdy building (separate from the female inmates who were there permanently) and given relatively decent food.

We set off again and eventually arrived at Ravensbrück, dying of thirst. When we reached the camp gate, the Germans said we would be given water. There were several great water barrels just inside the gate, each the height of a person. When we began running towards the barrels we were stepping over one another just to get to the water. Some fell into the barrels trying to climb up on them, but none of us tasted any water. Lying behind us, as though on a battlefield after a battle, were dead and deformed bodies. We spent about three weeks in this camp. Then we were back on the road. We were already deep into German territory, sandwiched between the Russian and American fronts. The thunder of weapons came from all sides and we would pass columns of refugees. The Germans were no longer paying such close attention. They, too, were in panic. Aircraft would fly over our heads



and, because they couldn't tell whether we were refugees or prisoners, they would fly low and machine-gun us. Many were killed this way. We passed Dresden, all in ruins. As we left the city a group of us decided to try to escape. We were no longer receiving food, instead we ate the spring grass. We were at the end of our strength, we could barely lift our feet. So even if we tried and didn't make it, we had nothing to lose because we could no longer go on like that. We agreed that when we reached the first crossroads, if there were no SS men at the end of the column, we would simply turn off the main road (by now there were rarely SS men at the end of the column because they were looking after themselves). And that's how it went. We came to a crossroads. Thirteen of us turned right, in rows of four. We knew that this was the way people going to villages to work would move. We hadn't got very far when we spotted a German heading towards us on a motorcycle. We were petrified. He stopped and asked us where we were going. There was a village in sight and we said that we were going there to work. He didn't even ask us why there was no one escorting us. He looked at us, reached into his bag, carefully took out a big, snow-white piece of bread, gave it to one of the women, wished us luck and set off. Probably everything had been clear to him. He wasn't an SS man but a soldier from the Wehrmacht.

We came close to the village. On the opposite side of the road there was a small forest and we hid there. And that is where we were when the Red Army soldiers arrived. At night we would sneak out into the village from the other side of the road and dig up potatoes. I don't know how, but one of the women had a small knife which we used to peel them. Of course the raw potatoes gave us all a fever, but we survived. Of the thirteen of us, I was the only Yugoslav. The others were Poles, Russians and French, and there was one Belgian woman. On April 10, the Russians arrived in the village, which was called Kirche. We went into the village and asked the first soldier we came across to take us to his commandant. This was a young officer. We told him everything. He started hugging us. Other soldiers came, we were all crying, but we were happy. They took the thirteen of us by truck to a nearby village which belonged to a former aviation colonel. Doctors came there to examine us every day. We were given a special cook because we needed a special diet. There were guards standing outside the house day and night so that no one would disturb us. After about ten days there I went out in front of the house one day and saw a group of men in old

Yugoslav uniforms and English khakis with a horse-drawn cart. A few of them were on bicycles and there was a Yugoslav flag on the cart. I stood in front of them, told them who I was and asked if they were going home. They said they were and I asked them to take me with them, because I was in a great hurry, my father was probably already waiting for me in Zagreb. They hesitated at first, but when they saw how important this was to me they agreed to give me a khaki uniform and a Red Cross armband so that I looked like a nurse. The Russians had allowed them to go home on their own, without having to wait for organized transport.



*Visiting Auschwitz in the 1970s*

I arrived in Subotica at the end of May, and went to a refugee shelter. Three days later I was issued with a document certifying that I had been cleared. I set off to Zagreb. As all the trains were full, I arrived home after sitting on the roof of a wagon most of the three-day journey. I went straight to the house of my childhood friend (whose father had got me a pass for Sušak in 1941). When I rang the bell and her mother opened the door, she just stared at me blankly, not recognizing me, and I burst into tears. My friend then also came out, she was looking at me but not until I spoke did she recognize me. I shall never forget those moments of my return. She told me that she thought I had been killed

because those kind of rumours had been going round. Before I arrived she had been in touch with a cousin of mine who told her that my whole family had been killed in Jasenovac. He was a freemason and the Masonic organization had got him out of Jasenovac at the end of 1941. He had hidden in Zagreb until the end of the war. I went to see him and he confirmed what I already knew. I was wondering whether it had all been worth surviving, because the one for whom I had wanted to stay alive was no longer among us. Nevertheless, I was happy to be alive.

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*Alegra Gita Simha KALDERON*

TO THIS DAY I ASK GOD AND MYSELF: WHY?



*G*ita Kalderon was born on November 26, 1926, in Bitola, to father Moše Ben Šabtaj Šami and mother Sara, née Levi, whose father's name was Abraham and mother, Estera.

*Her parents and three brothers perished in the Holocaust. With her husband, Šmuel-Sima she has three children and ten grandchildren. She lives in Israel in Kfar Sirkin.*

A great misery befell the Jews in Bitola on March 11, 1943 – a death sentence for Macedonian Jews. Many had not seen the danger coming and had not wanted to believe the satanic propaganda, but they soon had the chance to feel for themselves the misery which threatened them.

At that time Bitola was a small, pleasant town. My whole family was born in the town, with the exception of my father who was born in Thessalonica. We were a large and happy family: my parents, my three brothers and myself. However, when the town was occupied in 1941, the atmosphere deteriorated. No one knew what to do. We were in despair. Soon we were dealt a blow by the anti-Jewish laws which limited what little freedom we had at the time. When we walked the streets we were required to wear the Star of David – we were sad and humiliated. Many friends advised us to flee, and our dear parents would tell me and my elder brother to run and save ourselves. In 1943, the Jewish

population of Bitola was taken to Treblinka and perished in the gas chambers. No one returned.

My brother and I managed to escape this, but in the end my beloved brother did not survive.

### *My family home*

I have never been as happy as I was in my childhood. And then the war broke out. I still tremble at the shock of what happened to my family and to the Jewish community. My family home, with its garden, flowers and trees – this now all seems like a dream full of pain and longing. I see my beautiful mother Sara, my father and my wonderful brothers. For me my mother was a real beauty, with smooth hair, full, red lips, fresh, gentle and sweet. But most clearly of all I remember her eyes, eyes like no others in the world – black eyes, deep, dreamy and full of love.



*Gita Kalderon with her family*

We were a family who observed the Jewish traditions: every Saturday and on all festivals, Father went to the synagogue. Our father was a young and handsome man, always bright and with a smile on his face. When he was at home, laughter echoed all around and we were all happy. He was from a good family, refined and humane, and for this

reason he had everyone's respect. My mother was very devoted to our father and to us children. She was intelligent, noble and decent. They led a pleasant, traditional life. We had a large house and it was always full of people who respected and appreciated one another.

I was born on an important day for Jewish people, on Hannukah, the festival of lights and miracles, November 26, 1926. We children were greatly loved by our parents, but my mother's favourite was my little brother Albert, because he was the only one who took after her family.

After I finished primary school, I passed a few examinations in high school. Along with all my school commitments, I found the time to join the Zionist youth organization in which we were taught in the spirit of love for Eretz Israel. This is why we studied the history of the Jewish people, the basics of Zionism, and prepared for migration to Eretz.

When the war broke out we were cut off from day-to-day life. I sometimes try to remember that life and find an explanation for everything that happened to us, but I don't seem to be able to. I try to put down on paper the whole course of my life and the lives of those dearest to me: that dreadful catastrophe, that devastation of the Jewish people, those camps, and everything that hurts so much. We were young and we wanted to conquer the world. I was only sixteen, but I was mature enough to love the world.

On March 10, 1943, one day before the Jews were deported from Macedonia, I crossed the border from Bitola into Greece among a group of young people, seven men and two girls. The Italians there behaved very nicely towards the Jews.

Before my elder brother and I set off to Greece, we said our good-byes to our parents. To this day I hear our mother's words: "Take care of yourselves!" I never saw my parents again, but I see them often in my dreams. They died in a faraway country, far from their home. They lie in some mass grave, no one knows exactly where, and no one shed a tear for them.

### *Departure to the concentration camp*

After wandering through Greece for six months, looking for a place to hide, we arrived in Kastoria. There we found shelter with our father's sister Ernesta, her husband Meir and their daughters Lidija and Viktorija. They provided me and my brother Šabtaj with a home full of

care and love. Although there was already a shortage of food, we always had something to eat and were decently dressed because they took care of us. It was a year since we'd left home, not knowing anything about our parents.

However on April 3, 1941, all the Jews in Kastoria, including us, were taken to Auschwitz. Šabtaj-Šarlo was in our group from Bitola, as was Šmuel Kalderon, who is now my husband. He was also in Kastoria but, once he learnt what awaited us, he fled with the Italians, the evening before the deportation, went to the Partisans and so saved himself from going to the camp. After a week of difficult and agonising travel, on April 11, 1944, we were met in Auschwitz by German soldiers in SS uniforms with German shepherd dogs. I got off the train with Aunt Ernesta and her daughters. Aunt Ernesta told me to go to the right column, close to my brother Šabtaj. I managed to glance at them quickly. They were then taken away and I never saw them again. That was the end of my good and kind-natured Aunt Ernesta and her daughters.

I was approaching Mengele, who was deciding, with a single gesture, life and death. If he pointed to the right, this meant – temporarily – life. To the left was the road to death – into the gas chamber. I was ordered to go to the right and was taken, along with the other girls, along the electric fence around the camp. I felt hunger, pain and humiliation. The number 76914 was tattooed on my left arm.

I was naïve and did not realize what was going on. And then I heard that there was a crematorium from which heavy black smoke poured 24 hours day.

The food in the camp was bad and inadequate. We soon began to feel hungry. Within the first few days many girls suffered mental collapse because of the separation from their dear ones. But I wanted to live because of mine, although I had know idea what was happening to them. I knew that I had to eat, to adapt to the new situation. It was very important for me, in the camp, not to be alone. My friend from Kastoria, Rahel, and I were inseparable. We never parted company, we shared the same fate. I worked hard and felt that I would soon break down and that I wouldn't be able to withstand everything. And that was when I fell ill. I was put in a room, on the floor, with other sick girls. We received no medicine or tea. I had a high fever for several days and was unconscious from time to time. I slept and I dreamed. In my dreams I would see my parents and my mother saying to me: "Take care of yourself! Freedom is coming soon!"

“It’s hard work here in Birkenau. If you don’t work hard, the alternative is selections and the crematorium,” the old hands would tell us. I soon saw for myself just how true this was. Getting up at 4.30 a.m. Roll call every morning, counting to see whether anyone was missing. We would be given bitter tea and a scrap of bread. We marched to work in rows of five, escorted by kapos and SS men with dogs. The climate was awful, harsh winters and hot summers. The SS

*Dvadeset vozova sa Balkana u martu 1943.*



*The route of trains which in March 1943 took Macedonian Jews from Bitola to the Treblinka camp*



men laughed to see us so sad and frail. I was distressed, hungry and lonely, but strong on the inside. Each day Rahela and I shared a portion of bread. My morale was strong and that helped me stay alive.

The front was getting closer. The Germans began fleeing and destroying the traces of their crimes. The end was near. The SS men were running around in all directions, and telling us that there were hard times ahead of us. In the freezing winter, on January 18, we were ready to leave Birkenau.

We lined up in rows of five, one SS guard with a dog for every four rows. They opened fire and killed anyone who got out of the row. We had no warm footwear for the snow and it was difficult to move. Suddenly we heard: "halt, halt!" There were wagons standing nearby waiting for us.

With my last atoms of strength I climbed onto the train. There were a few of us prisoners who were left with no food, water or air. In spite of everything, I made the effort to survive. Friendship and mutual support kept us alive and gave us a reason to live under these horrendous circumstances. Also in the same wagon was my aunt, Matilda Eljas, with her daughter Sarina (Vajsberg) who, fortunately, survived.

By now we were at the end of our strength. The Germans needed labourers. We arrived at the Bergen-Belsen camp. This is where the next phase of my torture began.

The camp was divided into three sections: in the first there were whole families, the second was for inmates who worked and the third was for inmates who didn't work, those who had been sentenced to death and were not receiving any food. They put us in a large tent, lying on the concrete floor, one blanket for five of us. It was very cold, January 1945. We didn't go to work, they didn't even give us any bread. I thought that the end had come. And then I heard they were looking for labourers for what they called the *Holz Kommando* which carried firewood into the kitchen.

Four weeks later, in February 1945, a group was formed of a few women to be sent to labour in another camp. Rahel and I were in that group. The camp to which we were sent was called Venusberg<sup>1</sup>, and

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<sup>1</sup> Venusberg: A camp near Dresden in the period from January to April, 1945. Of the ten thousand Jewish women interned, about a hundred died. They were buried in a common grave dug near the camp.

was near a place called Gelsenau. There was a factory there, deep underground, which made aircraft engines. People worked there eleven hours a day. The commandant was cruel. One day, because I was hungry, I lifted the lid of a food bucket in an attempt to take a little soup. The commandant caught me and beat me ruthlessly.

A typhoid epidemic broke out and I also fell ill. They put me with other sick people in a separate barracks. We were lying on the floor with no medicine, with nothing, not even a little tea. For two or three days I hovered between life and death with a temperature of 40 degrees. In my dreams I saw my mother telling me to hold out just a little bit longer, that the end was near. I awoke when my temperature dropped. There was great excitement in the camp. As weak as we were, we were pushed outside. Gathering the last drops of my strength I managed to reach the wagon which was waiting for us.

### *Days before the liberation – the death march*

After travelling in closed wagons for fifteen days with no food or water, we arrived in Austria. We continued on foot, starving and ever weaker. The killers didn't push us or line us up, but we did have to walk. Those who happened to fall behind were killed.

They continued to drive us like animals. We bore no resemblance to human beings – either in our physical appearance or our emotions. Everyone just watched the people in front of them, the people beside them, never themselves. We reached the Mauthausen camp.

Suddenly American aircraft appeared and rifle fire was heard nearby. Not far away we spotted a group of German soldiers with a white flag. I thought I was dreaming.

I had the feeling that I should live, although physically I was more dead than alive. The only thing I wanted was to see the Germans defeated, to see the killers on the run.

We were liberated in Mauthausen on May 2, 1945, by the American Army. Every year I celebrate this day as my other birthday. There are very few of us who managed to live to see this day after the two-week death march. My happiness at my freedom was clouded by worry for my family.

My friend Dora Nahmijas told me that she had seen my brother Šabtaj in the Bergen-Belsen camp. He had held up until the liberation but was very weak. Unfortunately he was one of those who took too

much food for a weakened body to digest. He died a few days after the liberation.

### *Return home – disappointment*

I was very weak, but excited. I couldn't believe that I was a free person. I couldn't stop thinking about my parents and their terrible fate. Gradually, bit by bit, I began to eat, and this saved my life because, after the liberation, food could be one's worst enemy.

I wanted to go home as soon as possible to see my family. I signed up with the first group. The day came, July 1, 1945. We left in trucks which were taking us towards the border. It was then that I decided never to see Germany again. We arrived in Czechoslovakia, where the Czechs greeted us warmly. They gave us food and drink, saw us to the train, put us in normal passenger wagons and gave us food for the trip.

On the journey I looked through the window as a free person. I couldn't believe that I had managed to survive everything I had been through. The closer we came to Bitola, the more I was concerned about who I would find at home and who I wouldn't.

On July 16, 1945, as I arrived in the town in which I had been born and had grown up, and in which I was so happy, it was a dead town for me. I didn't encounter a single familiar person. I didn't know what to do or where to go. Someone in the street explained to me that all the Jews who had survived were accommodated in the Jewish Home. I went there and was received warmly and hospitably. I was afraid to enquire about my family because the things I heard only filled me with fear and sadness. They kept trying to convince me that I should not lose hope, because every day another Jew would return home. One day I decided to go and see our big, beautiful house, from which my parents had been evicted. It was derelict, with no flowers in the once-beautiful garden, with no clothes hanging on the dilapidated washing line. It was a sad sight. In my mind I saw my happy family all together and deep in my heart I was calling them all. But there was no answer. I sat down and asked both God and myself: "Why?"

In Bitola I learnt that my whole family, like all Jews from Macedonia, had been destroyed in the Treblinka camp. No one had returned! My mother, Sara Levi, 38 years old, my father Moše Šami, 42 years old, my brothers Sabitaj and Albert Avram, and the youngest, Pepo Josif, six years old. Apart from my eldest brother Sabitaj, who died in Bergen-Belsen a day after the liberation, all the others were

taken to Treblinka, via Monopol in Skopje.

It was difficult for me to get used to Bitola without Jews. The streets whose every stone I once knew had become strangers to me. Many former Fascists managed to retain their positions in power and this made me bitter. Among the few Jews who returned were Dr Jelena Hidvegi and her husband Leon Išah. Dr Jelena wanted to return to Belgrade and talked me into coming with her. I agreed and lived with her in Belgrade. She enrolled me in school. She was like a second mother to me and, to this day, she has a very special place in my heart. However, on May 1, 1946, I decided to return to Bitola and live there. Žamila Kolonomos, who had saved herself by joining the Partisans, helped me a great deal in this. In the summer of 1946 I married Sima-Šmuel Kalderon. It was a modest wedding, with just a few friends who had survived. For us, after everything we'd been through, our life together was like a new birth.

### *Departure to Israel (aliyah)*

The proclamation of the state of Israel brought endless joy to all Jews. When we learnt that we could move there, we immediately signed up for departure. For me, that day meant the end of roaming. We were happy beyond measure. In Trieste, we boarded a packed ship with our five-month-old daughter Sarale. It was very crowded but that was no longer a problem for me. I knew that we'd made the right decision and that we were now going to our home, to Israel, to the homeland I had longed for since my childhood. We set off with the hope that we would be happy and that our future would be brighter.

There was no limit to our joy when we spotted the coast of the country we had been longing for. We settled in and began working. It wasn't easy. For years we worked hard and believed that things would be better for our children.

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Irena FIŠER

## SAD CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH\*



Irena Fišer was born on May 9, 1924, in Srpski Miletić, in the Odžaci district near Sombor, to father Lajoš Ungar and mother Karolina, née Breder. Srpski Miletić was a village almost solely populated by Germans, that is *Volskdeutscher*. There her parents had a manufacturing business. Her father died in 1930. She was left with her mother, who remarried four years later, to the village doctor, Dr Bela Haim who, according to her account, treated her better than many real fathers would. Her mother died in 1937. She continued to live with her

stepfather, at his request, and with her maternal grandmother. After primary school she went to school in Osijek and then to a private boarding school. After completing the fourth year, she returned to Miletić where she took on the running of her parents' shop.

From her marriage to Dr Đorđe Fišer she has a son, who finished medicine, and a daughter-in-law and grandchildren Dejan and Maja. They live in Australia.

Life and all routines changed radically when the war broke out in 1941. We were in a purely *Volskdeutsche* village but, because I had been born there, everyone knew me and up to then had seen me as their

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\* Irena Fišer submitted this testimony to the Editorial Board in December 2003, before her death. She died on October 18, 2004.

child, so I thought I was safe. It was tragicomic to watch the whole village prepare to welcome the enemy with German flags on flagpoles and on the Municipal Council building and the huge disappointment when the Hungarian Army marched into the village instead of the Germans.

They began to manipulate us in minor ways. My stepfather, who up to then had been their favourite doctor, felt that he should leave the village so he went to Budapest for specialist training in one branch of medicine.

We were forced to sell our shop. Because I was an orphan, and the shop was in my name, my assets were taken care of by a Welfare organization. We wanted to buy an apartment in Novi Sad but that was not permitted because, at the time, Novi Sad was a border town. The court ruled that the money from the sale of the shop should be invested on Hungarian territory, well away from the border. A house was purchased in Pecuj and put in my name but after the war, as a foreign citizen, I didn't have the right to own this house and to this day I haven't succeeded in getting it back.

As for life in the village, our status had now significantly changed. One night they broke all the windows on our house. A few days later they came with an order to search and this search lasted the whole day. It was carried out by people who, shortly before this, had seen me as their own child, just like all the others! During the search they even opened some boxes for injections in my stepfather's office. This culminated in them calling me into the Municipal Council one day. All these people were my acquaintances. In a very official tone of voice they informed me that I must leave the village urgently, within 24 hours. I was taken by surprise. After appealing I managed to have my departure postponed for three or four days so that I could organize leaving the house in which I had been born and lived my entire life up to then. My stepfather was in Budapest at the time, where he had had surgery for a hernia, so my grandmother, who bore her age very well, and I packed our things and, at midnight on April 2, 1943, right on Easter, we arrived in Novi Sad. There my stepfather's brother found us an apartment at 63 Militićeva St.

A new life began, among new people. My stepfather put a sign reading "Doctor" on the building, but with little success. There wasn't enough work. We lived like this until March 19, 1944, when the Germans occupied Hungary. Immediately repression began, wearing the yellow star, various kinds of restrictions and a lot of harassment.

On April 26 we were taken from the apartment with just one rucksack on our backs. They assembled us in the synagogue and, from there, took us to Subotica where we spent two or three weeks. The locals brought us food. One day we were moved to Baja and two or three days after that we were packed into cattle wagons and shipped straight to Auschwitz! Almost all of us caught infections because of the water in Baja, so many travelled with stomach problems and even fever.

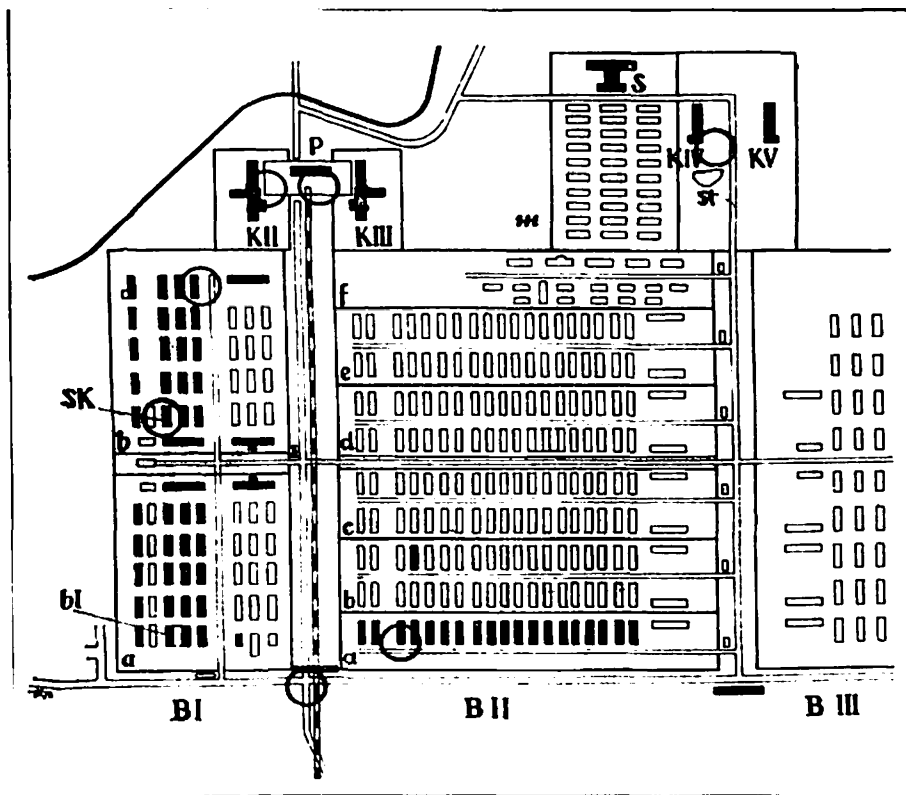
We arrived in Auschwitz on May 29, 1944. Chaos, shouting, loud noise, dogs, people in striped uniforms. In no time it was women on one side, men on the other. We came face to face with Dr Mengele, who selected those capable of working and separated the others, along with the children of course, to the other side. In the midst of this commotion, tiredness and fever, it wasn't until the evening I realised – “Where is my grandmother?”!

To the left, the crematorium, but for us, shaving our heads so that we no longer recognised one another, and then showers. We were allowed to keep the soap and shoes (I took them home!). Dresses: one an evening dress, the other so small that it couldn't be worn.

After this procedure we were put in the C Lager, Barracks no. 7. Days would begin with getting up early in the morning, lining up for the *appell*, often kneeling, minimal food, if it could be called food at all. Sleeping on triple bunk beds, thirteen people, so when one person turned over all the others had to turn as well. We also used to fall out of the beds often. After the roll call they would seize those of us who worked and send us off to one-off jobs. I usually managed to escape, but on two occasions I did not. So once I was pounding clay in the hottest sun. It's much easier to be hungry than to be thirsty! My second time out was during the *Blocksperr*e, the lockdown of the barracks. Eva Berković and I were given the job of pouring chlorine on the path for disinfection. We wore very visible Red Cross signs. While we were “doing our job professionally”, we heard weeping and cries for help. We approached, as far as we could, and saw a horrifying sight. There were Roma there, imprisoned in the *Zigeuner Lager* (camp for gypsies), whole families. When they were first arriving, there were no selections. Now, when they needed people to send to Germany for labour, there were selections. The unfit and the children were thrown into trucks like sacks, while those capable of work would stay behind. I don't know who were weeping and crying more, those thrown in the truck, or those

who were left behind. The ones at the bottom of the truck were probably already dead because the others were piled on top of them.

There was a road running right through our *Lagerstrasse* (camp street), which was used by groups going to work in the area. So my cousin, my aunt's daughter, Vera Rip, whose married name is now Obradović, also passed down this road. It's lucky she recognized me, seeing me with my head shaved. The next time she passed she threw me a scarf, a toothbrush and a piece of bread, which was rather a risky thing to do. We didn't see each other again there. Vera told me after the war that whenever she passed we were kneeling down.



*Plan of the Auschwitz II-Birkenau camp. KII, KIII, KIV and KV mark the gas chambers and crematoriums*

One day in August, all 1,050 *Häftlinge* (prisoners) from C Barracks, Block 7 were lined up. Mengele was selecting, and he separated two hundred of us girls for transport to labour in Germany. We went to Camp B where they accommodated us for one night. I thought of Vera and, crawling, trying to avoid the floodlights, I got to her bar-



racks. There I learnt that Vera was in the *Revir* (hospital) and that she had typhoid. Later, when I returned home, I told everyone that Vera had died of typhoid. (Thank God she returned through Sweden and, in September 1945 she reached Sombor. She was the only person close to me who returned). We travelled with guards. Open wagons, fresh air – what a pleasure – and we arrived in Silesia, in Wistegirsdorf. We were put up in barracks. Here I realised how little it takes for a person to feel happy. I had my own bed, we sat on chairs, we had our own plates and spoons – what a pleasure! We worked about 2.5 kilometres from the camp in the Krupp factory which made hand grenades. We would get up early, *Zelle Appell*, then walk to the factory, twelve and a half hours of work with a lunch break. One shift was extremely difficult, the one on which the basic parts for hand grenades were made. Work was done in two shifts, day and night. It wasn't easy, there was a lot of deprivation, hunger and exhausting work. That was how things were until April, 1945.



*Irena Fišer's son, daughter-in-law and grandchildren*

In October, 1944, returning from work in the factory, I saw coming along the road in the opposite direction a convoy of farmers' carts, laden with people and goods. Suddenly I heard, in a German dialect that was very familiar, "Hey, it's Irena!" It was then that I realised that my compatriots were in the convoy, *Volksdeutschen* from Srpski Miletić. They had set out from Bačka and arrived in Silesia. I don't know where

they ended up. There were whole families in the carts with their belongings, women and children, only the young men were missing, still at war or in captivity. Who knows, perhaps they were guards in concentration camps. I made no sign to show that I recognized them because we were being escorted by guards with German shepherds and I would have been punished on the spot.

One day, in April 1945, they lined us up for roll call. We were afraid that we would be shot by a firing squad. The front was getting closer and by now it was clear that the Germans had lost the war so there was reason enough for killing the remaining inmates. As we stood there, in rows of five, a German woman in uniform arrived. We had often seen her at the *Kommando Führer* (the chief's office). She had a long talk with the leader of the work party. Finally, to our joy, she told us *Los* (at ease!). And so, she saved us! We later learnt that this woman was operating illegally, that she had her own radio station in her factory. There were Italians, Russians and certain number of French people working for her. Her name was Ella Schmidt. After we returned to Belgrade she stayed with us as our guest for a few days. We felt she deserved this much for saving two hundred of us.

Life continued as usual. Berlin fell on May 7, and our night shift was again working on May 8. That's when our guards deserted us, the SS men were taking out the ones with their tattoos, but they left us behind. On May 9, a group of Russian soldiers walked in. What happiness, what joy, it was unbelievable that our Calvary had come to an end! The Russians took us to a German restaurant for lunch, to German houses, where they would open the cupboards and tell us to take whatever we needed. Surprisingly enough, none of us took anything. The men suggested that we at least supply ourselves with sugar cubes from the German storehouses. And we did. These came in handy on our long journey as we headed on foot towards our homes. From that day I value sugar cubes very highly and I'm sure to never be without them.

The same day some men arrived and suggested that we head for home the very next day, May 10, because an epidemic of typhoid had broken out so, having already lived through so much horror we should leave while we still could.

Twenty-eight of us girls and two men set off on foot. A German engineer advised us not to go further because the world was not yet aware that the war was over and they were still shooting in the woods. But there was nothing that could stop us.

As we crossed Czech territory we were received very warmly. Did we need medical assistance, were we hungry, did we want to rest for a while, and so on. The same could not be said for the attitude of the Slovaks to us – there it wasn't even easy to get a piece of bread. Walking like this we headed for Budapest, sometimes a little way by train or some other kind of transportation. In Budapest we learned that we could go no further without documents. We were already at the end of our strength, exhausted, so we reported to the authorities for transport to Yugoslavia. There we received our first document, a "Russian passport". Finally some kind of personal identification! However we discovered that there was a long wait for transport, that the repatriation was badly organized, so we set off on our own. We went to the station and slept the night on the floor – we were already quite used to that – and, in the morning, we joined a group of prisoners who were returning to their homes. In this way we managed to get on a train. After three days of quarantine in Subotica, I reached Novi Sad on June 2, 1945.

Where? For what? To whom? How? It was the hardest day of my life! Had there been any point in surviving? What now? People there were already leading normal lives, the war had ended on October 23, 1944. I was there alone, with no money, with no one. It was very difficult.

I found accommodation with a colleague of mine and her mother, they were really kind to me. A little later, on September 1, 1945, I began working in a private dispatch company. I paid for room and board. I found some of the jewellery that we had handed over with people I knew. I sold that and began a new life.

My grandmother perished in Auschwitz, my stepfather died in some camp in Bavaria, everyone in my family disappeared except my cousin Vera, who returned from Sweden and now lives in Belgrade.

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Žuža MARINKOVIĆ

THE MOST HARROWING JOURNEY INTO  
UNCERTAINTY



*Žuža Marinković was born in Subotica on November 15, 1921, to father Đeno Bek and mother Jelisaveta Bek, née Berger. She had one sister, Lili, who died in Novi Sad in 2001. Her mother died in Subotica in 1948, and her father died in Subotica in 1973. They were buried in the Jewish cemetery in Subotica. More than twenty members of her family perished in the Holocaust.*

*After the end of the second world war she worked in Subotica and Novi Sad.*

*Since 1954 she has lived in Belgrade. She is the widow of engineer Miloš Marinković. She has two daughters, Nada and Rajka.*

On April 12, 1941, the *Honvédség*, the Hungarian armed forces, marched into Subotica. Apart from a few shots which the Chetniks fired to greet them, there was no battle. At that time we lived at 21 Laze Mamužića Street. We were the only Jewish household in the street – most of our neighbours were Bunjevci with whom we got on very well, apart from one Hungarian household who raised the Hungarian flag on the very first day after the “liberation” and welcomed the *Honvédség* with great pomp and cordiality. The first thing they did was to denounce our household as “suspicious” because there were Jews living there and

perhaps also some Chetniks hiding. The soldiers scoured the house from basement to attic, with bayonets drawn, forcing me, as the most suspicious individual, to show them every nook and cranny. My father was arrested as a hostage, but was quickly released. He was then taken ill with tuberculosis. He was lying in bed at home with an open cavity because the military authorities refused him permission to travel to Budaker in Hungary, which was the only place medical treatment was possible, as we were by then cut off from Slovenia and Serbia. The Hungarians introduced a law on Jews which limited our movement for the duration of their military administration, but we still lived in our apartments. That was the way things were until April 5, 1944, when we received orders to vacate our apartment within 24 hours, taking only essentials with us, and to move to a ghetto which had been set up in advance. At the time my father was already away on compulsory labour, as the last generation required for this (he was born in 1896). My sister Lili had been deported to the Kistárca camp near Budapest.

In September 1941, my sister Lili, who had not yet turned sixteen at the time, was arrested and subjected to terrible torture in what they called the Yellow House. She was then tried before a Hungarian court martial on the same day, November 18, 1941, as fifteen progressive people, nine of them Jews, including Dr Adolf Singer, were sentenced to death by hanging.

As a minor, Lili was sentenced, in March 1942, to fourteen months' imprisonment. I was also harassed and questioned as an accomplice in the sabotage of setting fire to corn.

In the spring of 1944, when the German Army occupied Hungary, a ghetto was set up in Subotica. In spite of his poor health, my father was taken to compulsory labour. Lili was again arrested and taken to a camp in a place called Kistárca. Mother and I had to leave our home; with just our bare necessities we were moved to a ghetto located in the houses next to the railway station. The residents of these houses were moved out temporarily to accommodate us. Mother and I had one small room. The Bek family also had a room in the same house: mother, father and three daughters. Ani (now a widow, her surname is Kožar and she lives in Ljubljana), her sister Klara (now in Jerusalem) and the youngest (who at twelve years of age was suffocated with her mother in the gas chambers in Birkenau). The Vig family was in the third room. My old German language teacher and her daughter were also in our close neighbourhood in a laundry measuring two metres square.

I still remember how she put a wooden board over a laundry boiler and on it put her books, the only valuables she took with her to the ghetto: classics by Goethe, Lessing, Heine and Shakespeare translated into German.

The ghetto was under Hungarian guard. We had limited freedom of movement. We younger people went out to work wearing yellow stars: we spent ten hours a day sewing army uniforms. We were allowed to go shopping for groceries only after the market closed when, basically, we couldn't find anything. All of us had friends who would manage to smuggle a little food and give it to us. There was no running water, so we used to go to the well to get water and it was there our Christian friends would leave food for us.

Our life in the ghetto didn't last long. At dawn on May 25, German police appeared and ordered us to prepare to leave in an hour, taking only what we could carry. At the Subotica shunting yard, after we were searched to ensure we had not concealed any valuables, they pushed us into cattle wagons.



*Žuža (L) with  
her sister Lili,  
Subotica, 1943*

Soon after this we were deported to the assembly camp in Bácsalmás. In this camp I remember my friend Lili Šrajer having a six-month-old child. When we were being deported from the ghetto, she left her little child with a Hungarian family in order to save him. However someone denounced the family and said they were harbouring a Jewish child, so the child was "arrested" and taken to his mother at the camp. It was the Hungarian gendarmes who did this. Both mother and child perished in the Auschwitz gas chamber.

The SS men took charge of us. In the worst heat without any water – although we did have some food – elderly women, elderly men, women, children, the sick, all crushed against one another without even a place to sit, they took us on a journey of uncertainty. This journey was the most harrowing thing and can't even be imagined. My mother kept losing consciousness and I couldn't even let her down to lie on the floor or give her a drop of water.

After six days of travel we arrived at the Auschwitz railway station. There the sign "*Arbeit macht frei*" awaited us. The wagon doors opened, we had to leave behind the few belongings we had, and the first selection began. Men to one side, elderly women and children to another, and we to a third. The SS men hurried us along with their dogs, shouting: "*Los, los!*"

We arrived in Birkenau. We saw women in rags, with their heads shaved, wire and more wire. We were lined up and pushed into the ante-room, a huge bath house. We were stripped naked, they took all our things, they shaved us, both the upper and lower parts of our bodies and then put us under the showers. The water was turned on. We received one "dress" each – a rag, and a red rag for our backs. They didn't tattoo us because they didn't have time. There were trains coming in carrying hundreds of thousands of Jews from Hungary. The gas, the chambers, the crematoriums all worked day and night.

They herded us into wooden barracks. There wasn't even room to lie on the floor. We sat, crammed up one against each other, and the roof leaked. My mother had another of her attacks and I was unable to put her on the floor to lie down because there was no space. Each morning and evening we stood for *zelle appell*. They would count us. I would hide my mother when she was falling down because whenever they noticed that someone wasn't standing still they would pull them out and send them into the unknown. We would never see that person again. After a few weeks (we had no sense of time, it was only by sunrise and sunset that we knew another day had passed), Dr Mengele appeared one evening. He was selecting girls for labour. We were standing in rows of five. I was the first he selected; I was still fairly strong. My mother stood in front of him: "I want to go too!" He turned her around and looked her over, we were completely naked, he waved his hand and so we stayed together. Seeing this, a girl standing next to me with her mother tried to do the same but without success. She went back into her line; unfortunately we never saw them again.

We were taken to the bath house. It was not gas that came from the taps, but water. We were given canvas dresses with a star on both front and back and shoes made of some kind of fabric with wooden soles, then, thus equipped, we waited until the morning when we set off from the Auschwitz railway station, in normal carriages, on our journey. In the town of Breslau (now called Wroclaw), we changed stations. As we passed through the town they spat at us, shouting “*Jude, Jude!*”

We reached our destination: Parschnitz, in the Sudetes, not far from the town of Trutnov. The camp was under the command of the Gross Rosen concentration camp. I was given the prisoner number 28911.



*Žuža Marinković, Bled, 1946*

The SS woman (*Lagerfuhrerin*, the camp commander) selected me for work in the kitchen. As menial staff we carried coal, bags of potatoes and beets, scoured cauldrons and so on. The cooks were Polish women, and they also distributed the food. Every day at dawn we were the first to get up, we would light the fire in the cauldrons and make “coffee” for our friends who came in to work in the textile factory (*Weberei*). There they sat next to the machines weaving fabrics of artificial fibre and old rags. In the afternoons we would wait for them with dinner. Mother also went to work. My great advantage was that my mother could also take my food ration at the counter while I could eat an extra potato or two or some stolen beet from the kitchen.

The SS woman (*Aufseherin*, female supervisor) in the kitchen was a beast of a woman. She abused us in every way possible. One day, in the early spring of 1945, she chose me to go with her to collect the meat delivery. We used to receive horse meat once a month. There I had the opportunity of meeting some inmates. In a short conversation with one of them I learnt that the end



of the war was drawing near. The SS woman noticed this, slapped me several times and punished me by sending me to dig pits instead of working in the kitchen. I managed to put my mother in the *revir*, thanks to a French doctor who was a wonderful woman.

Until the very last day, March 7, 1945, I dug trenches every day, despite the fact that the Soviet units were coming closer and that shooting could already be heard. The Germans were fleeing westward so that they wouldn't fall into the hands of the Russians. When we awoke on May 8, the gate was open, the guards had left the camp and we were there alone, in anticipation. In the afternoon tanks appeared and, with them, Red Army fighters, tired, covered in dust, straight from battle. We carried the first Soviet officer into the camp ourselves. When we put him down on a table, in a tired and husky voice he told us: "The war is over, you are free." We kissed his dusty boots, our joy and happiness knew no bounds.

However my mother, who had held up really well to that point and even encouraged us younger ones, was completely lost. She was unaware of anything. Again, the doctor saved us. She poured her a handful of bromide and put her in a bed in the hospital. I curled up at her feet and so also saved myself from potential rape, which was something that was happening.

With no organisation, without giving it a moment's thought, I set off with my mother in the direction of home. Sometimes we got a lift in army trucks, sometimes we managed to get on a train, we climbed into open wagons, and we experienced many different things along the way. But we wanted to get home at any cost, because we had learnt that our Subotica had been liberated back in 1944, on October 20. So after a terrible journey of perhaps a week, we arrived in Budapest, where a shelter had already been organised for repatriates.

After disinfection and something to eat we were supposed to get some documents, but we heard that my father and sister had already been in Subotica for some time. So without waiting, we got on the first train transporting prisoners of war and reached Subotica. We were one of the few families who returned – all four of us. When Mother and I returned to Subotica in May 1945, our neighbours told us that on the very day they shipped us out trucks had come into the ghetto and taken away all our belongings. We found an empty house.

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*Albert RUBEN*

## WHEN THE LIVING ROBBED THE DEAD



*Albert Ruben was born on January 1, 1930, in Priština, to father Immanuel Ruben and mother Gracija, née Montiljo. He has two sisters who survived the Holocaust. He attended primary school in Priština and, in Belgrade after the war, he completed plumbing trade school by attending evening classes.*

*During the war he was in Bergen-Belsen with his mother and sisters. His father was expelled from the country to Albania, to Berat, at the very beginning of the war.*

*Following the liberation he returned to Priština, then moved to Belgrade. He fled to Italy, via Zagreb, and then to Nahariya in Israel. He now lives in Milan in Italy. He has one son and four grandchildren.*

We were one of the Sephardic families in Priština where, before the war, there were about six hundred Jews, but only about a hundred and eighty of them returned from the camps after the war.

All the Jewish festivals were commemorated in our house. We honoured the traditions. I remember my father's mother, although I rarely went to her place. I must have been naughty because she would spank me from time to time, so I didn't visit her very often. She died two months before we were interned in the camp. The Priština rabbi, Zaharije Levi, shared the same fate, he died a few months before my grandmother, in 1943.

In 1941 I was in Belgrade. I was going to school and living with Father's niece, Sofija Ruben, in Sarajevska Street. She had a mixed goods shop. Before the bombing of Belgrade, at about the end of March, 1941, I fled to Priština. At the beginning of the war, the Albanians sided with the Germans. A large number of Albanians flooded into the city from all directions. They immediately began harassing Serbs and Jews. We lived in a back house. In front of us there was a house owned by an Albanian, a good man, so they didn't burgle our house and they didn't come to harass us. Before the war, Priština had a population of about eighteen thousand and we all knew one another. There were a lot of Turks there, and very few Albanians.

None of the Jews wore the yellow sign, so nor did anyone from my family, including me. At the end of 1941, my father was taken to internment in Berat in Albania. The Italians were there, and it was easier.<sup>3</sup> In Berat, the internees had to report to the *Questura* every week, but even this was not so strict.

Mother, my elder sister Matilda, my younger sister Flora and I were left in Priština. It wasn't difficult for us to obtain food. There was food, but there was no freedom. There was fear. I was afraid of the Albanians and Turks and of being beaten by them. They caught me once, there were three or four of them against me. They beat me seriously, causing internal bleeding. After that, I decided to spend less time on the streets. They didn't bully women so much but, on the other hand, they went out less often.

The Germans were the first to come to Priština. Six or eight months later they surrendered power to the Italians, who were easier to deal with. We were in the town until the end of 1943. When the Germans returned, following the capitulation of Italy, many Albanians put on SS uniforms and became members of the SS army. Some Jews who had fled to Albania earlier now returned to Priština.

At the end of 1943, it was already winter, maybe November or December, the SS men came to all Jewish homes to round us up. They got us out of our beds and took us straight to the barracks near the foot-

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<sup>3</sup> Italy proclaimed Albanian, along with Kosovo, as annexed territory and let the Albanians take over the local administration. Albanians in Kosovo saw this as the dream of Greater Albanian coming true. This "triumphant" attitude of the local Albanian authorities was a greater problem for the non-Albanian population than anything else. Because of this Albert Ruben has a very clear memory of the difference between the authorities in Kosovo and those in Albania (Ed. Board)

ball field. There were a lot of us, more than four hundred people. We stayed there for two days. Everyone brought some food with them. We didn't have a toilet, so we dug a hole and put some wooden boards over it. They were threatening us, telling us to hand over our gold and other valuables, and we were throwing them into the toilet. What we had not given to the poor earlier we were now throwing into the toilet.



*A rare photograph of Albert Ruben from his childhood days*

Before long they put us into cattle wagons and drove us to the Belgrade camp for Jews at the Sajmište. The Ustaša and the Germans were there. There were political prisoners there when we arrived and also many men and women. I knew one Serb who managed to escape from the Sajmište camp at night. He swam across the Sava river and reached the other bank, in Belgrade. We spent seventeen days in Sajmište. Males aged over seventeen were beaten day and night. We ate locust-tree leaves and there was also grass. The food they gave us was mostly potato peel and pea husks. Instead of soup they would give us some black water, so for me the leaves were like baklava<sup>4</sup>.

In Sajmište they loaded us into wagons. They gave each of us a piece of lard because we had "dry intestines". They gave us this deliberately in order for us to get diarrhoea so that our conditions would be unbearable. There were about fifty of us in each wagon, people barely had room to sit and it was certainly not possible to lie down and sleep. There were many elderly people with us. Josif Levi, the son of Zaharije Levi and himself a rabbi, was with me in the same wagon, as were his mother and sister. Josif was undertaking rabbinical studies in Sarajevo. They killed his sister Gizela while we were in Sajmište. They shot her on the bridge. There were three people shot dead on this occasion. The first was an elderly Jewish man, 106 years old, his surname was

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<sup>4</sup> An oriental sweetmeat.

Mandil. I know his son's name was Rahamim and his grandson was called David. David was killed by a firing squad in Albania. He was in the Partisans and was caught and shot in 1943. The second was Gizela Levi, the rabbi's sister, whose nerves were shattered. The third was Dženka Koen. She was about twenty and was an invalid because she had drunk caustic soda in 1943, in an attempt to kill herself, but they had saved her. The three of them were shot dead on the bridge. This happened in December, 1943.

While we were in Sajmište, the British bombed the camp. This is when my neighbour from Priština, Into Judić, was killed. His wife and two children remained with us. I don't think the British knew they were bombing us.



*The Children's Home in Belgrade, in which Albert Ruben stayed (sitting, first row, second from R), was a real home for many Jewish children who were left without parents (photograph by Raka Ruben, well-known photo-journalist of daily Politika)*

In the cattle wagons we had no water or food, only the lard. We reached Dresden. Once we were there, people from the Red Cross gave us some soup and parcels containing a little sugar and some biscuits. From there we travelled to Bergen-Belsen. The journey lasted about

eight days because the Allies kept bombing the railway line and it always took a long time for them to fix it.

We got off at the station and all headed on foot to the camp. First we were put into part of the camp which was for quarantine. These were barracks with triple bunk beds. In those first days they gave us better food and told us that conditions would be far better in the labour camp. However things were far worse for us. Everyone born before 1930 started working. I didn't have to work, I just dragged cauldrons full of food in the mornings, at noon and in the evenings. There were three of us who did this job. I was in the middle because I was the strongest and the two weaker ones were on the sides. Every day we had mangel-wurzels and chamomile tea without sugar in the morning and evening.

All the inmates in Bergen-Belsen were living corpses, zombies, the living dead. They could barely walk. Each morning at six we had to go outside for them to count us and a list of those unable to attend the roll call had to be given to them. It was very cold and we were all lightly dressed. The living would grab from the dead any clothing and shoes that were any good. Each day two of us would take the dead by their hands and arms and throw them into carts, then – straight to the crematorium. The crematorium operated day and night, we could always see flames and smoke coming from the chimney.

We were in the *familien lager*. Next to us were Jews from Holland and from Greece. At the end of 1944 Jews from Hungary were also brought in. Anne Frank was in this very camp, in the Dutch barracks, but I knew nothing about her at the time. It was only after the war, when I saw her picture, that I recognised her and realised who she was.

My older sister Matilda worked in the sewing workshop. They used to unpick and remake army uniforms. Mother also worked there. My younger sister was only six. I remember her crying from hunger.

Two or three months before the liberation of the camp we received packages from the Red Cross. Towards the end of the war the Red Cross toured all the places they were allowed to visit.

People were dying every day. I also fell ill from typhus. I think that everyone had typhus. We lay in the barracks without any medicine. Somehow I recovered. My mother and sisters too, all of us had typhus and recovered from it. There were so many lice, but they didn't bother me so much. They used to tell me that they didn't like my blood.

In April, 1945, they again crammed us into wagons, those of us who had stayed alive, and they dragged us hither and thither. The

British and the Americans were bombing us from all directions. The Russians were shooting at us with their artillery. Many people died on the journey. At one station, during heavy bombing, they opened the wagons. One Jewish woman had a big piece of white cloth. She began waving it and the bombing stopped. At this station we found some food, green cheese in wooden boxes. It was good, it saved us.



*Memorial plaque in Bergen-Belsen*

The Germans were planning to blow up a bridge and the whole train, so they began laying mines. They didn't succeed. The Russians had opened fire from canons and katyushas and were getting closer, so the SS men fled before they had finished mining the bridge. They took the locomotive and made off in it.

We were in the wagons in the middle of some forest when the Russians arrived. They told us that we were free and that we could go wherever we liked. I still had a little strength left so I went into the village to look for some food. The village was called Tröbitz. I was accompanied by Moša Koen and Aron Avramović, who was at the time called Bahar (he changed his surname in Israel). After the war I gave the daughter of his brother, Jakov Bahar, her name – Ermoza.

After the liberation we stayed in Tröbitz for another five months, until October. There we recuperated on three meals of potatoes a day. We returned to the country from the town of Forst, on the Polish border.

This time we were travelling in passenger wagons, about twelve days to Subotica through Czechoslovakia and Hungary. In Subotica we again had to go into quarantine. But there we had everything, both food and money. After that we travelled to Priština, via Skopje. We arrived in Skopje late in the afternoon. It was Erev Yom Kippur. We all pushed our way into the synagogue, where we also spent the night. Unfortunately there were no Skopje Jews. We ate, washed ourselves and the fast began. The following day, at about eleven in the morning, I told my mother that I was hungry. She replied by saying that it was Yom Kippur when everyone fasts and that, if I wanted to, I could take food myself but that she would not give me any because she did not want to sin. She told me: "Son, hold out if you can, not because of religion, but so that you remember everything we have been through." I still do this, even today, every Kippur.

I went to Italy in 1946 and, on March 6, 1948, before the proclamation of the Israeli state on May 15, I went to Israel, straight to the front. I was married in 1979 and had a son, Immanuel, and four grandchildren.



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*Irena VUKOV*

## IN HUNGARIAN AND GERMAN CAMPS



*Irena Vukov was born on September 1, 1930, in Šid to mother Margita, née Epštajn, and father Vilim Wollberger. She has a brother, Janika.*

*Of her immediate family, her father and her father's brother perished in the Holocaust.*

*After returning from the camps she went to Israel, to the Shaar Haamakim kibbutz where she completed training as a motor mechanic. With her new family she moved to Hungary where she was employed as a motor mechanic in an ironworks. She then worked for the International Department of Ironworks until 1987. She is a member of the Committee for Autonomy of the Serbian Minority in the local government in Dunaujváros. She speaks four Slavic languages as well as German, English and Hebrew. She has a daughter, Vera.*

My name is Irena Vukov, née Wollberger. I was born on September 1, 1930, in Šid, in the house of my grandfather Geršon and grandmother Katica Epštajn, née Fišer. My father worked as a dentist in his home town and from there he was transferred to Čantavir. This is where, on February 8, 1933, my brother was born. He now lives in Israel, in Beersheba, Omer. He has the academic title of doctor and is a professor of biology at Ben-Gurion University.

My parents separated when I was five and my brother two and a half years old. I returned to Šid, where I attended the first year of pri-

mary school. My mother found employment as a seamstress in Vinkovci. It was there that I finished second, third and fourth grade of primary school. At the beginning of 1941 my mother remarried in Čantavir. Her new husband was Izrael Neumann. On April 12, the Hungarians occupied Bačka, after which the harassment and killing of Jews and Serbs began. In September 1941 I was enrolled in the first year at the Subotica Girls Secondary School. Two months later, on the basis of the *Numerus Clausus* decree, all Jews from the first grade were expelled from school. In September, 1942, they admitted us into the civilian high school, again in the first year. A month later we were again expelled. In September the following year, 1943, the Jewish Community organised a Jewish secondary school in a building in the synagogue courtyard. For the third time I was in the first year. At the time there were about 5,500 Jews living in Subotica. On March 19, 1944 ("Black Sunday") the Germans occupied Hungary. In April, they took my father and stepfather to what they called the Jewish Labour Battalion. My father and his brother were killed at the front in Ukraine,



Facsimile of a card sent in September 1944 to Germany from a labour camp in Ostmark (the German name for Austria after its annexation to the German Reich). The seal reads: The Fuhrer knows only battle, work and care. We want to take over part of that, that part we are able to take over.

where they were forced to walk through a minefield. My mother, my brother and I were taken by force to the ghetto and then to the assembly camp at Bácsalmás.

Three or four weeks later they put 84 of us into wagons. We were in the last wagon, the last to be forced in. The last three wagons were uncoupled somewhere in Hungary. We stood there the whole day, hungry and thirsty. They then hauled us to the Strasshof camp. After a week of “disinfection”, they took us to Lundenburg (now Břeclav) in the Czech Republic where the SS men met us with dogs and “selected” those of us who would be agricultural workers for the Sudetes region. We were again put into new wagons. We 28 Jews arrived in a village then called Unterthemenau, now Poštorná, to an estate of the Jewish Lichtenberg family, which had been granted to the district Gestapo man, Franz Stangl, by the German Government. We took up residence in the cattle barn.



*Irena in Subotica in 1946 after the end of all the atrocities that she had experienced*

At the end of October, 1944, they loaded us into wagons, after the estate was bombed. In the middle of the night of November 12, we came to a place four and a half kilometres from the Bergen-Belsen camp. From there they made us walk to the camp. We saw thousands of dead people lying on both sides of the road.

At the beginning of April, 1945, a day or two before the liberation of Bergen-Belsen, they forced us, about two thousand Jews including mothers with children, into wagons. Over the following two weeks we were driven to

Theresienstadt, where the Soviet Army freed us on May 8, 1945, at seven o'clock in the evening.

It took us twelve or thirteen days to reach Subotica and Čantavir in a variety of cars and vehicles and on foot.

In the summer of 1946 we decided to join an Aliyah to what was then Palestine. About 4,500 of us, young Jewish people, boarded the Knesset Yisrael on the Adriatic at Bakar Quay. Just off the Israeli

coast we were surrounded by the British, who took us on their ships to Cyprus. Not for another fifteen months did we arrive in Israel, where we spent two weeks in quarantine. They fed us, carried out a medical examination, and we received Israeli identification papers. I was in the Shaar Haamakin kibbutz until June 1, 1948, and then in the army until June 5, 1950. While in the army I learnt the motor mechanic trade. In August, 1952, I passed the entry examination for the University of Haifa. The exam was a success, but that year I married a Hungarian Jew and, on October 23, 1955, our daughter Verica was born in Haifa. My husband's entire family, apart from his brother, were killed in Auschwitz. He decided that we should return to Hungary. We separated in 1959.

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Ljubica PERUŠKO

REMINISCENCES OPEN NEW WOUNDS



**L**jubica Peruško was born on May 10, 1925, in Sombor, to father Anton Ernst and mother Aranka, née Singer. She was raised in a family of five, with her two brothers, Josip, the elder, and the younger, Oskar. Of her immediate family, her mother and younger brother Oskar perished: they were killed immediately after their transport arrived at Auschwitz. Her grandmother Frederika, known as Frida, and her grandfather Solomon Singer, her mother's parents were also killed, as well as her two sisters and two brothers with their families.

A number of her father's close relatives from the Kadelburg family also perished in the camps. After the collapse of Germany she returned home, as did her father Anton and her older brother Josip who had been in the labour battalion, mainly in Hungary. Josip emigrated to Israel, married and had two sons. He later died there and his sons remain in Israel.

After her return from the camp, on July 21, 1945, Ljubica lived with her father Anton and brother Josip in Sombor, at 13 Jevrejska Street, at the home of relatives named Šenbrun who, unfortunately, did not return. Until her marriage in 1949, she worked as a cutter for a shoemaker from whom she learnt the trade and as a junior agricultural associate of the Sombor and Apatin railway stations. When she married, she and her Istrian husband moved to Pula in his home region.

*She has two daughters, Sonja and Alida, both of whom are now married with families. In 1999, she moved to Canada where she now lives with her younger daughter, Alida.*

Until the unhappy day of April 27, 1944, when we were deported, I lived a carefree life with my family. I was learning my trade, visiting my grandmother and grandfather and our many close relatives, because my parents both came from large families, with whom we socialised. Then, suddenly, everything changed, and we could not have imagined the real hell on earth which awaited us. Together with our closest relatives, crammed into cattle wagons, about a hundred people in each, they took us first to Baja, then soon afterwards deported us to Birkenau, in other words Auschwitz II, part of the Auschwitz camp complex. There they immediately separated the men from the women, and also mothers with children and the weak, whom they took straight to the gas chamber. Adults, people capable of labour, were on the other side. I was among them. They immediately undressed us and took us to the bath houses. From there, half naked, wearing only small dresses with short sleeves and with bare feet in clogs, we were taken through the snow to the blocks in which they accommodated us. These were what they called *koja*, incredibly small rooms. I don't think they were more than a metre long and wide, and the same height. In these they would put ten people so that we slept pushed up against one another in a cramped position. First they made five or six of us pull carts full of garbage out of the camp. After a while they reassigned us to digging pits around the camp. All this happened in Birkenau. After that, we would go to Auschwitz, accompanied by music at the camp exit gate. In Auschwitz we worked at the Union hand grenade factory. I made the inner threads on hand grenades. All the time they were feeding us really poorly. We were given 100 grams of army bread per day, some swill with bran and potato peelings for lunch. We were so starved that some people used to rummage through the garbage to find potato peels. If they were caught doing this they would get a beating.

But I will never forget something that happened to me while I was working in the hand grenade factory. The machine I was working on broke down, so I went to the German repairman and asked him to come and fix the machine. Because we were alone, he asked me if I was

hungry. I said I wasn't, but he just looked at me and took out a piece of bread from somewhere and put it in my hand. He just told me to make sure no one saw me eating it because he would probably be in trouble as well. This was the one bright moment in the otherwise gloomy and tough life we were living and experiencing.



*Ljubica Peruško with her cousin Teodora Milosavljević, also an Auschwitz inmate, Belgrade, September 2004*

All this time I knew nothing about my family or my close relatives. On one occasion they made us write home and say that we were alright. The return address was Waldsee, to mislead the recipient, because Waldsee sounded like a summer resort – a summer lake! I've forgotten the minor details and I don't like to recall those terrible times. With me was Pirika Fišer, her married name is Dunderov, who lives in Novi Sad with her family. I was with her all the time. Also my cousin, Teodora Zam, the daughter of my aunt, whose married name is Milosavljević, was also with me for a short time. She now lives in Aleksinac. While we were together, she was working on parcels which were being confiscated from the Jews who arrived. She sometimes managed to bring some food she had found in the parcels,

which was very brave of her because if she had been caught she would have been taken to the gas chamber.

In January, 1945, along with the other inmates, we were taken to Ravensbrück, again in cattle wagons. We travelled for three days and three nights, because the Germans were retreating ahead of the Russian advance. The Germans left us lying in the snow all night. The snow was thawing from the warmth of our bodies, so we were completely wet. I don't understand how we didn't all get pneumonia. Somebody must have been watching over us.

We stayed in Ravensbrück for a couple of months, I don't remember exactly how long, and then, because the Russians were advancing, they moved us again, to Neustadt-Glewe, which is where we were liberated.

In Auschwitz, after working in the factory, we always had showers. However, in Ravensbrück and Neustadt-Glewe, where we did no work whatsoever, the hygiene was awful. We all got lice and spent all day every day trying to get rid of them.

I was in Neustadt-Glewe at the time of the liberation. First the Americans passed by, then came the Russians. The journey back to Yugoslavia took a long time. I no longer remember the details except that, in Prague, we were able to freely go for a walk. I don't remember who was with me, but I remember that we went to taverns. The Czechs were very kind. They would give us food and, when they heard that we were from Yugoslavia, they told us to say hello to Tito from them.



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## SUPPLEMENT TO THE AUSCHWITZ ORGANISATION DIAGRAM

AUSCHWITZ WAS SIGNIFICANTLY DIFFERENT FROM THE OTHER CONCENTRATION CAMPS. IN AUSCHWITZ, THE NAZIS DEVIOUSLY COMBINED THE EXTERMINATION OF SEVERAL MILLION PEOPLE WITH THE ESTABLISHMENT OF GIGANTIC INDUSTRIAL PLANTS, FOR WHICH THEY USED THE SLAVE LABOUR OF INMATES CAPABLE OF WORK.

OF THE TERRITORY OF FORTY SQUARE KILOMETRES, ONLY TWO KILOMETRES WAS RESERVED FOR THE MASS LIQUIDATION OF PEOPLE, AND THAT WAS IN BIRKENAU!

THE DIAGRAM REPRESENTS THE ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF AUSCHWITZ, WHICH INCLUDED:

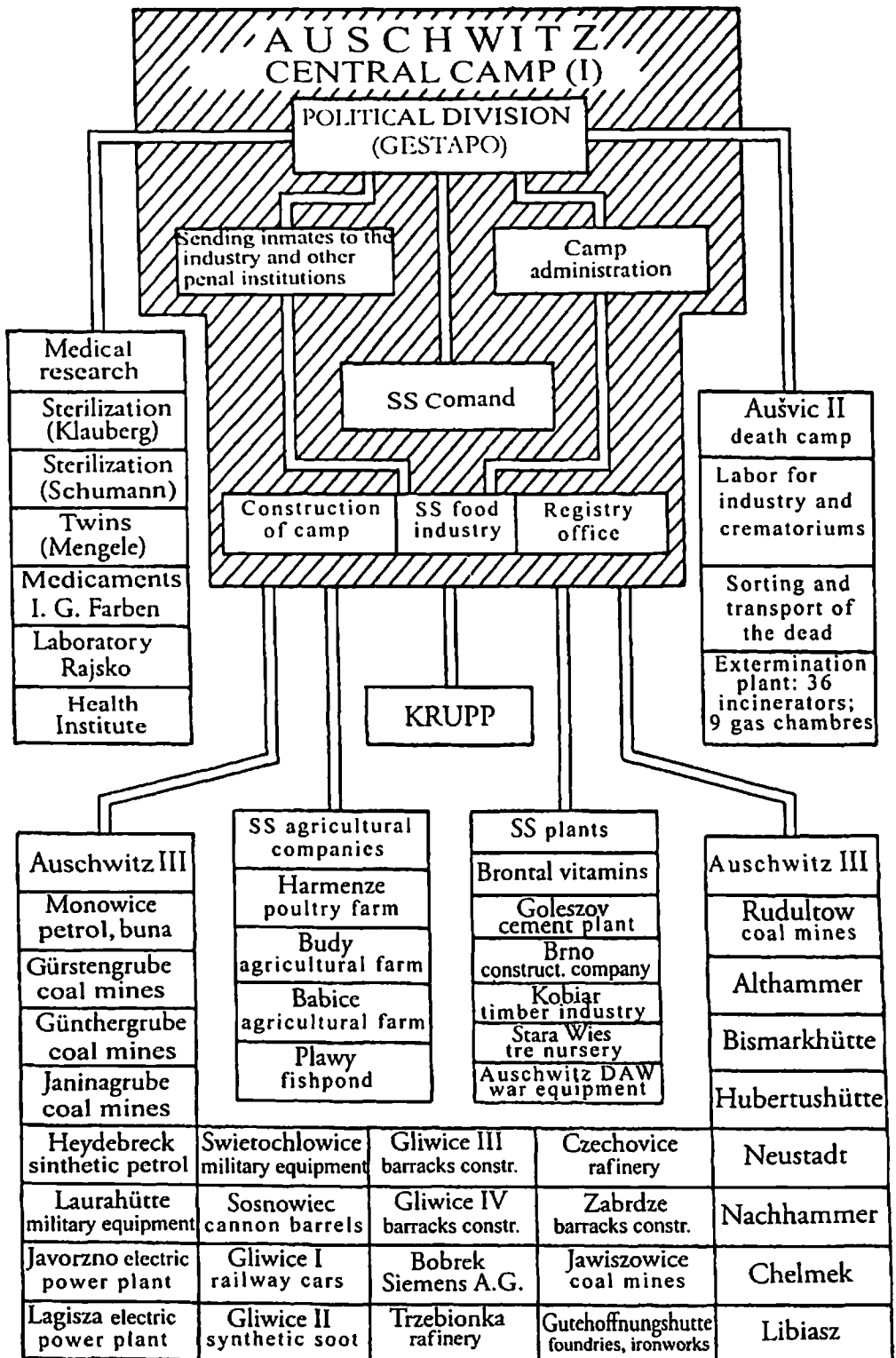
AUSCHWITZ I – THE CENTRAL CAMP

AUSCHWITZ II-BIRKENAU – THE DEATH CAMP

AUSCHWITZ III – THE INDUSTRIAL DIVISION.

AUSCHWITZ III INCLUDED 39 “AUXILIARY” CAMPS (*NEBENLAGER*), WHICH ARE LISTED IN THE DIAGRAM. WE NOTE THAT, IN THE MEMOIRS PUBLISHED IN THE FIRST THREE VOLUMES OF *WE SURVIVED*, MOST TESTIMONIES FROM AUSCHWITZ REFER TO AUSCHWITZ II, THAT IS TO BIRKENAU. THERE ARE ALSO SOME TESTIMONIES FROM LABOUR CAMPS TO WHICH INMATES WERE SENT ON THEIR ARRIVAL IN AUSCHWITZ II, SOME OF THE 39 CAMPS PHYSICALLY DISTANT FROM, BUT ADMINISTRATIVELY PART OF, THE CENTRAL CAMP. THUS, FOR EXAMPLE, VERA BRUNER, WAS SENT TO THE CHEMICAL INDUSTRY GLIVICE II AND WORKED THERE FROM MAY, 1944, UNTIL HER EVACUATION IN JANUARY, 1945.

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*Cadik-Braco DANON*

“SON, JUST KEEP GOING FORWARD”



*Cadik-Braco Danon was born on August 1, 1923, in Sarajevo, to father Isidor Danon and mother Dona, née Danon. Although they shared the same surname, his father's and mother's families were not related in any way. He had two sisters – Sara and Simha. Of his immediate family, his father Isidor did not survive the pogrom in the second world war, but perished in Jasenovac. Another forty-five members of his extended family died in camps in the Independent State of Croatia, mostly in Jasenovac and Stara Gradiška, and in the Treblinka and Dachau camps. His education, which he had begun in Belgrade before the war, was continued in the same city after the war ended, and he graduated from the Belgrade University Faculty of Architecture. He worked as an architect until his retirement. He is the author of a book entitled “The Severed Trunk of the Danons – Memories of Jasenovac” which, in 1999, won first prize in a competition run by the Federation of Jewish Communities for memoirs with Jewish themes.*

*He lives in Belgrade with his wife Olga.*

My paternal grandfather Avram Danon lived in Bijeljina and had thirteen children. My maternal grandfather, Cadik, lived in Gračanica, near Tuzla, and had nine children.

Father had a factory, named Elegant, which made caps and fur hats, and my mother was a housewife. I was my parents' third child: my

two sisters Sara-Ina and Simha-Sida were born before me. My family belonged to the Sephardim. We were not orthodox, but we were traditionalists who tried to preserve the characteristics of Judaism. Temple visits were made only for major festivals, while we celebrated the Sabbath solemnly at home.

The destructive impact of the world economic crisis also reached Yugoslavia and resulted in my father going bankrupt. To prevent everything being confiscated, he put all his assets in my mother's name.

In 1934 we moved from Sarajevo to Belgrade, where my father opened a manufacturing shop at the Jovanova market. The business went well and we had no problems until 1941. When we came to Belgrade I enrolled in the First Boys' Secondary School, where I finished four years and I then enrolled in the technical school, in the architecture department.

We survived the horrendous German bombing of Belgrade on April 6, 1941, and then fled south, hoping to reach Thessalonica and avoid the occupation. We hadn't even reached Mladenovac when the Yugoslav Army surrendered. When we returned to Belgrade the Germans had already occupied the city and imposed various kinds of repression, particularly against Jews. They immediately took a census and then sent them to compulsory labour – clearing the rubble of the ruins of Belgrade. They immediately confiscated Father's shop and plundered it. Seeing this, my father decided we should flee Belgrade for his native land, Bosnia, and go to his brother Moše in Tuzla. We crossed the pontoon bridge over the Sava into Zemun and soon reached Tuzla. There, at least at the beginning, there were no special measures against Jews, except for the obligation to wear yellow armbands. My sister Sida and I immediately joined the anti-Fascist movement because we were members of SKOJ. Following the uprising of the people in Bosnia, more stringent measures were introduced, especially against the rebel Serb villages. Villages were set on fire and villagers were killed. When they also began forcing us Jews into compulsory hard labour, my sister Sida and I asked our organisation to let us join the Partisans, to go to Majevisa where a Partisan unit was fighting battles.

It was not until December that we were allowed to set off to join the Partisans. We hid in an illegal apartment, but the courier did not arrive to get us because the Chetniks had killed him. This was precisely the beginning of the rift between the Chetniks and the Partisans, which then became an open conflict. After our return home, at the end

of December, all adult Jewish men were arrested. Father and I were sent to prison in Krek, near Tuzla. We were there about a month before being sent to the Jasenovac camp by train. There were 130 of us and I was the only one to survive the camp.



*Of about 130 adult Jewish men arrested by the Ustasha in Tuzla in December 1941 and sent to Jasenovac concentration camp, only Cadik Danon, who was eighteen at the time, survived*

On my very first day in the camp I saw horrifying things. They lined us up outside the brickyard and ordered us to spread blankets in front of us and empty our bags out. Among the many items on the blankets were a lot of pieces of bread. Suddenly I noticed that there were starving young men – inmates – running towards these piles, grabbing bread in their hands and running off. The Ustaša immediately drew their guns and began shooting at the young men. But despite the shooting, the raid on the bread continued, and the young men were falling down, either dead or wounded. When the rush stopped, the Ustaša came up to the wounded and killed them by firing bullets into their heads. When they had finished this, they shouted “Gravediggers, gravediggers!” People carrying

stretchers immediately appeared and began carrying the dead towards the camp gate.

I realised that the camp was in the grip of terrible hunger. For lunch we would be given a ladle of warm water, with no salt or fat, with a few cubes of mangel-wurzel which really stank. When we were given our lunch, we were approached by an exhausted inmate who we barely recognised as Father’s youngest brother, Gedalja. He ate his own, Father’s and my rations and was still hungry. A few days later we found him dead outside the barracks.

The friends we found in the camp when we arrived advised us how to behave in order to avoid danger, if that was at all possible. They told father to shave his beard because they would kill the elderly immediately.

Every morning we had to line up outside the barracks and then the Ustaša would come to take a certain number of people to various kinds of labour. One Ustaša picked about twenty of us younger and stronger inmates and told us to go to a neighbouring village to bale hay. We crossed the frozen Sava where we found a group of Ustaša huddled around a fire trying to keep warm. One of the men from this group came up to me and asked me to give him my almost-new ski boots. I asked him what I would wear on my feet. He told me to search through the village houses and find myself some shoes. I went to the nearest house, opened the door and saw a huge pile of shoes and clothes. I recognised the clothes of Jews from my group, people from Tuzla, and realised this must be a huge execution site. I went on from house to house and saw the same sight each time. I looked for shoes, but without success. It wasn't until I reached a house at the far end of the village that I found a pair of army boots which fitted me. When I left the house I put the boots on and noticed a huge pit nearby with steam coming from it. I saw there were no Ustaša around so I walked towards the pit, to the very edge. The bodies of slaughtered Serbian peasants – women, children and men – had been thrown into it. It was obvious that this had happened only recently. I stepped back quickly, looking to see if there were any Ustaša watching me – I could easily end up sharing the same fate. When I returned, I showed the Ustaša my shoes and immediately joined the group baling hay. That evening, in the barracks, I told them where I had been and what I had seen, and the chief of the barracks, Father's friend, told me that I had been in Gradina, a Serbian village which had been destroyed and from which, up to that point, no one had returned.

One day as I was stacking bricks beside the brickyard, I noticed coming towards me a red-haired Ustaša with a big moustache rolled to a fine point. I immediately recognised the bloody cut-throat Žuća and remembered the warnings of the old inmates to keep out of his way. In his path was a man wearing a black coat; he was so weak that he was moving with great difficulty. When Žuća came up to him he asked him who he was. Hearing that he was Jew, a lawyer from Zagreb, he tied his hands behind his back with wire and, when the man began to walk again, he took out a knife and stabbed him in the neck. He then took out

a tobacco case, rolled a cigarette, lit it and slowly smoked it, swearing all the time at Jews and lawyers. He then stubbed the cigarette out on the poor man's forehead then, in one swift move, took his knife and cut his throat. The man fell and Žuća, with relish, licked the blood from both sides of the knife, saying "Oh, how sweet this Jewish blood tastes!" Then he shouted loudly "Gravediggers, gravediggers!" and moved on. I was watching all this in secret, hidden behind the bricks I had stacked. It was lucky that he didn't notice me.



*Jasenovac victims on the bank of the Sava*

Spring of 1942 was approaching and the snow had thawed. We were standing lined up outside the barracks, waiting. When the Ustaša came they picked about twenty of us younger and stronger inmates, gave us spades and shovels and led us out of the camp to a large field. They gave us the measurements for a pit we were to dig – two metres deep. When we finished, they told us to leave. They then brought over a group of Serbian and Jewish children between the ages of two and six. I would say there were more than two hundred of them. They took the

children one by one to the pit, then killed each child with a blow to the back of the head from a carpenter's hammer. We could hear the last cry of each child and the dull thud as they landed on the bottom of the pit.

Our group of inmates was paralysed; with huge tears rolling down our cheeks. After the job was done the Ustaša ordered us to fill in the pit. On our way back to the camp, one inmate said to me: "We're lucky they didn't kill us too; they don't like live witnesses."

I have described only a few of the horrible events I experienced in the camp, but each and every day I was a witness to similar and perhaps even worse evils. The Ustaša committed these crimes with great pleasure and satisfaction, sadistically doing their best to ensure that each victim's journey to death be as slow and painful as possible.

Because of the great spring floods which burst the dam around the camp, we were moved from Jasenovac to Stara Gradiška.

There we found a situation similar to that in Jasenovac. There was an epidemic of typhoid in the camp. Mass murders and death were daily occurrences. The camp was in an old mediaeval fortress with high walls, so my hope of flight was almost dashed. One afternoon they forced us out into the yard next to the castle itself which was our prison. I overheard that people would be selected for agricultural work. They picked about thirty of us younger inmates who were still holding up. They told us to be at the gate of the fortress the following morning. My parting from my father was extremely difficult and shattering. He told me: "Son, just keep going forward, don't turn back!" I have only him to thank for surviving Jasenovac and Stara Gradiška.

In both Jasenovac and Stara Gradiška, Father cooked food for the inmates, so he would manage to stash away a potato or two which he'd roast in the live coals underneath the cauldron. In the evenings, in the barracks, he would secretly give me some to eat and to put in my pocket so that I would also have food during the day. Without this I would, no doubt, have grown exhausted, and they immediately separated and killed people in that condition.

They then moved us to the village of Ferićanci, where the Orthodox Church had an agricultural estate called Čitluk. The Ustaša had killed the priests and they brought us to work on the land. Later a few other groups of inmates also came to this estate. A large herd of cattle was gathered in the camp, the animals had been taken from nearby Serb villages. I was lucky to be put in the group which took care of the cows. Because of the drought, there was no pasture, so we were trans-



ferred to a more distant Serbian village called Obradovci. The farmers there secretly established a connection with us and supplied us with food. The cattle were divided into two herds, but I had ten dairy cows which I grazed very close to the camp. There were always two Ustaša with each of the two herds, but I was left without any supervision, there would only be an Ustaša coming by now and then. There were thirty of us and the same number of Ustaša.

The idea of fleeing to the Partisans was getting stronger and stronger, all the more so because they were in the vicinity, in the nearby Slavonija mountains. While I was herding the cows, a farmer who was cutting wood in an oak forest whistled to me to call me over. He said he had connections in the Partisans and that he would organise for them to attack the camp. This would be a chance for us to all break free. However the Partisans hadn't come and the grazing was almost over. We decided that our group of seven inmates, who all trusted one another, should organise the escape. We took advantage of the five or ten minutes when the Ustaša weren't watching us, jumped over the wire fence of the pen and, following directions given to us by a farmer from Obradovci, set off towards Krndija. By morning we were with the Partisans, who welcomed us warmly.

We were assigned to various duties. I demanded to go to the front line. I had always been in favour of an active fight against Fascism. The happiest day of my life was when, unarmed and barehanded, I took part in a battle and seized a rifle. Having lived through all kinds of atrocities, our main idea was to be killed with rifles in our hands. And that is exactly how three people from our group died. All the inmates who stayed behind in the Obradovci camp, twenty-three of them, were killed. I was a fighter of the Twelfth Slavonija Proletariat Assault Brigade until the attack on Virovitica in February, 1943, when I was badly wounded as company commissar. I survived a difficult operation. The Fourth Offensive came by while I was in the hospital, so they put the most critical patients in dugouts. There I survived three weeks, lying in the dark, with just a bite of food now and then. Typhoid was raging and, of the twenty of us, only ten survived. After I recovered I was sent to the area command, where I did various kinds of work. Towards the end of the war I returned to my brigade, where I performed the duties of officer-in-charge of the propaganda section. The end of the war came for me in the pursuit of the enemy all the way to Bleiburg in Austria, where we captured thousands of Ustaša.

Because I had heard nothing about my family, I was convinced that I had lost them all. In January, 1943, I wrote to my aunt in Kašteli who was married to an Italian, because I hoped that members of Mother's family, who lived in Sarajevo, had managed to escape to the Italian zone. As the letter went by regular mail, it arrived in Kašteli where, among others, were my mother and my sister Sida. They had saved themselves thanks to the Muslims who gave them burqas to wear and identification papers. Mother had suffered a great deal because she had no news of me and when she received my letter she felt as though she had been reborn.

After the capitulation of Italy, all members of the family joined the Partisans. Somewhere near the end of 1943, I received a letter, with no envelope, folded so that the two pages were tucked into each other. It was my cousin writing to me and among other things she described how she managed to get my address. She was in a Partisan canteen and noticed that one of the senior officers was constantly staring at her. Finally he stood up, approached her and asked her "What is Braco Danon to you?" She screamed, expecting the worst, but the officer said: "He's alive, he's alive, and he's in Slavonija." This was Dušan Brkić. This happened only because my cousin and I strongly resemble each other. In the letter she wrote to me about who of my nearest and dearest was where and, from that point on, I was constantly in touch with my family.

My mother, Dona, was in the Yugoslav Combat Aviation Command and my Uncle Moric was the supply officer for the same command. My uncle was captured by the Germans in an offensive on Livno, and all trace of him was lost from this point. My sister Sida was in the brigade surgical team because she was a medical student. Later, as my mother grew older, she was reassigned to Bari, Italy, where she worked in the Partisan command. My older sister Ina (Sara) went to Serbia with her husband in 1941 to help organise the uprising. It wasn't until 1945 that I learnt she was alive: I was listening to a report on Radio Belgrade about the AFŽ (the Women's Anti-Fascist Front) Congress and her name was mentioned in a list of people who had been decorated.

Immediately after Bleiburg I came to Belgrade and soon met up with my mother and my sisters. Unfortunately Father had not survived the camp.

After the war I continued my education and graduated from the Belgrade University Faculty of Architecture. I spent my working life as an architect and am now retired.

The dreadful events I experienced in the camp left a deep mark on my memories. At night I would dream about my flight from the camp, always with Ustaša behind me, catching me by the legs. My own screams would wake me; I was always wet from the clammy sweat. Once I sat up and wrote down the names of all the members of my family who had perished in the war. There were forty-five people on the list. Most of them perished in the Independent State of Croatia, then in the Treblinka and Dahau camps. It was in this period that I first began wanting to write a book about everything I had been through. I attempted this several times, but did not have the strength to relive everything as I wrote. Finally, after almost sixty years, I had the opportunity, calmly and with the great and wholehearted assistance of my wife Olga, to write a book which I called *The Severed Trunk of the Danons: Memories of Jasenovac*.

*In 1999, Cadik Danon's manuscript about the suffering in Jasenovac won the first prize in the memoir section of a Federation of Jewish Communities competition for works with a Jewish theme. It was published in full in November 2000 by Slobodan Mašić as part of the Nova 165 Library.*

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*Dr Edo NEUFELD*

## PERSECUTION OF JEWISH LAWYERS IN THE INDEPENDENT STATE OF CROATIA



*Dr Edo Neufeld was born on August 3, 1899, in Rzeszów, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, now in Poland. For some time his father worked as a judge in Tuzla. Edo Neufeld first attended school in Tuzla, and then in Sarajevo, where he matriculated. He began law studies in Vienna and continued in Zagreb, where he obtained a doctorate. In the meantime, his father had moved to Zagreb and opened a law office in which his son also worked. In the 1930s, Edo Neufeld opened his own office in Bauerova Street*

*in Zagreb. In 1924 he married Albina Spiller, with whom he had two daughters, Lea and Vera.*

*At the beginning of the war he was arrested by the Ustaša and this was the beginning of difficult and insecure times for him and his family. After a great many difficulties they reached Switzerland, where they remained until August, 1945, when they returned to Zagreb. Because they had neither employment nor accommodation in Zagreb, the family moved to Belgrade, where Edo Neufeld worked in his brother's bookshop. He died in Belgrade in 1947 at the age of 48.*

WHAT FOLLOWS IS THE TEXT OF A LECTURE GIVEN BY DR EDO NEUFELD AT THE  
GATTIKON REFUGEE CAMP IN SWITZERLAND IN DECEMBER, 1943.

Sunday, April 6, 1941. We were awoken by the wailing of the air-raid sirens in Zagreb. We didn't know what was happening, whether this was an exercise in air raid defence, so we turned on our radios. There was little news. All we heard, every fifteen minutes, were the following words: "We are at war, move to air-raid shelters," and nothing else. At the same time the capital of Yugoslavia, Belgrade, was experiencing the worst tragedy in its history. At five o'clock in the morning, as dawn broke, with no declaration of war, the German Stukas swarmed over the city, pelting the sleeping population with their deadly bombs. People were fleeing their apartments in their night dress, barefoot, with no idea where to go. Nor did the German bombers restrict themselves to bombing ministries or war-critical targets, they opened fire from their machine guns on the fleeing population. According to subsequent reports, somewhere between 25,000 and 30,000 citizens, elderly people, women and children, were killed that day.

When it sank in that we were at war, I met my first obligation, to place myself at the disposal of the Yugoslav Army for the fight against the enemy. We were all certain that Zagreb would be taken over by the Germans in the shortest possible time, but as Zagreb and Belgrade had been proclaimed open cities, we were also certain that nothing particularly bad would happen to members of our families who stayed behind there. At this point we knew next to nothing about the inhumane deportations and killing of women and children, so even in our wildest dreams we could not imagine that these things would happen in Croatia which always prided itself on its thousand-year-old culture.

In fact I had my assigned place and was obliged, in the event of mobilisation, to go to Mostar. However the general mobilisation was never proclaimed for those of us who lived in Croatia, in the light of Maček's vacillation which meant that the Croats would meet their obligations to their homeland only to a limited extent. Thus a proclamation of this kind would have caused more harm than good. Meanwhile, general mobilisation had begun on the territories of Serbia and Slovenia.

Hundreds of my fellow believers, Serbs and Slovenes residing in Zagreb, and I among them, stood in long lines in front of the army command. The fifth column also operated in the same place. Most of us were told to report a few days later, despite the Germans being barely a hundred kilometres away.

Everywhere was the worst chaos and the most inconceivable helplessness. The Germans had aimed well on that historic morning, April

6, when they very precisely hit the supreme headquarters at the Labour Ministry in Belgrade, the nerve centre of the Yugoslav war machinery. From that point on every army unit operated without leadership, taking responsibility for itself, and the fifth column – ably led from Berlin – created problems and sabotage at every step. The Croatian regiments were already hesitating to board the army trains. I personally saw a situation in which a battalion of the local Zagreb regiment, the 35<sup>th</sup>, was sent on foot, with no weapons on a hundred-kilometre march towards an enemy which was well known for being well-armed and motorised.

I became aware of all this two days after the war began when I realised that there could be no talk of a well-organised defence of Yugoslavia. What seemed to be the only possible salvation was flight to the south, towards the British Army, which was fighting together with the Greeks.

I was preparing for this plan together with my brother and two friends, a physician, Dr Vurdelja, and a regular officer, Captain Tomić, and Tuesday was chosen as the day of our departure. Our necessities were quickly packed, after which we took painful farewell of our families, well aware that we would not see one another for a year or two (that's how we saw things then) or perhaps even never again.

At the time agreed I was standing beside my car, already prepared for the trip. Only the regular captain was missing, and he kept sending us messages that he could not leave the post to which he was committed by oath without an order to do so. After we had waited for three hours it became clear to us that he was not going to leave his post and we realised that there was nothing we could do but return to our homes, because it was he who was actually organising our travel. So, after a few hours, I returned to my very puzzled but pleasantly surprised family, who already thought that I had at least reached the heart of Bosnia. When I turned on the radio that evening and heard the news that Skopje, one of the most southern Yugoslav cities, had been taken by the Germans and that, after breaking through the Yugoslav lines, the Germans were advancing westward and thus disabling all contact with Allied troops, we were very happy that our adventure had not taken place.

Thanks to their superior tactics, and the disorganisation of the others, the Germans were successful on all front lines. We men were conscious that we needed to flee, yet we took no action, only wasted valuable time with useless thinking, calculation and discussion.

This was the kind of state I was in on Thursday, April 10, 1941, at about four o'clock in the afternoon, when I heard a grinding sound coming from the street.

The first four German tanks had entered the city without firing a single shot. Croatian and German flags were tentatively appearing on some houses, but in less than an hour the whole city became a sea of flags. An endless crowd in Croatian city militia uniforms came out to welcome the German Army with festive greetings and flowers. Zagreb was gripped in an enthusiasm the like of which had never been seen. Girls and women were kissing the soldiers and those who were arriving by car. This was the same mob of people who, in 1920, had passed through the city under red communist flags, who had assembled in 1925 when Radić, the greatest Croatian peasant leader had spoken against the Serbs, the same who had raised a storm of applause just a month later when Radić made up with the Serbs and publicly kissed the representatives of the most radical Serbian party, then wept bitterly and mourned pathetically in 1934 at the arrival in Zagreb of the train carrying the body of King Aleksandar, murdered by the Croats in Marseille. The sympathies of this mob belonged to the victor, or the unfortunate.

On this April 10, 1941, at the same time as the Germans entered Zagreb, the "independent" state of Croatia was proclaimed. At its helm was the Zagreb lawyer Pavelić, the head of the Ustaša and thus the assassin of the king in Marseille. Decrees followed one after another and, at the beginning, no matter how we interpreted them, they did have the characteristics of state authority and legality. As though public order was firmly in the hands of the executive branch. Although there were mobs marching through the city, demonstrating against Jews and Serbs, they restricted themselves to singing mocking songs and shouting, without doing anything to endanger personal safety or property, as had now and then been the case in Zagreb when the windows of Jewish ships were being broken.

Some men – Ustaša – took it on their own initiative to search Jewish apartments, threatening force and confiscating whatever they liked for their own use. One was a specialist in money and valuables, another in radio sets and a third, an 18-year-old boy, was satisfied with gold fountain pens, which he went from house to house collecting. The state police publicly urged the population to report such cases of unauthorised confiscation, even threatening grave prison sentences, but in very few cases were these incidents reported. This was because those affected were mostly intimidated and, in fear of retaliation, decided not

to report them. In addition the authorities had a very passive attitude to such reports and, in some cases, even threatened the accusers with charges of slander.

Thousands of citizens of Zagreb, Jews and Christians, who were members of opposition parties, ministers and employees, university professors, civil servants, judges, lawyers, doctors and other intellectuals, both men and women, were being taken to overcrowded police prisons. At the same time, the social scum, thieves, frauds, prostitutes and riff-raff were being released from prisons in order to "make room for the gentlemen" and would then be appointed to various state posts. The intellectuals were all at home, packing their bags for prison. So neither I nor my family were particularly surprised when a Secret Police agent appeared at our door on the evening of April 28 and arrested me. After saying my goodbyes to my family, I took my rucksack, which was already prepared, and set off on a journey to various prisons, concentration camps and adventures.

Although I was not afraid of anything in particular, I didn't feel comfortable because, at that time, arrests were already being made for the Gestapo and there was talk about people being deported to Germany. I felt a little better when, waiting in a political officer's vestibule, I met some colleagues of mine and more continued to arrive while we were there. Once we had given them all our vital data they took us – and for most of us this was the first time in our lives – to a police prison. By ten that evening every Jewish lawyer in Zagreb was there, a total of seventy-nine of us, prominent and unknown, rich and poor, young and dignified elderly men. Soon we were behind lock and bars.

The formalities such as body searches, confiscation of assets, photographing and fingerprinting lasted until two in the morning and we all endured this more or less calmly and even in a good mood. We were divided into two groups of forty and each group assigned one cell of six or seven square metres at the most. We barely had room to sit, let alone lie down or sleep. So all of us who, until that day, had slept in our nice apartments and fine beds now spent the night sitting upright, wondering what lay ahead.

When they came to get us out of our cells at six in the morning and returned our belongings, it was obvious to us that we were to be transported somewhere. Pale with anguish and lack of sleep, we tensely awaited the orders that would follow. The prison guards, who many of my colleagues already knew from professional contacts in the past, were very



kind and even went so far as to explain that they would rather be in our shoes than see us as prisoners, because they were unhappy about the current regime. All these people were old Yugoslav police employees who were forced to continue performing their duties although they had nothing in common with the regime. Because of this I believe to this day that they were sincere in these feelings they shared with us.

These same people also revealed to us the secret plan to transport us to a place twenty kilometres from Zagreb, to Kerestinec Castle, the property of Count Mihalović, who was also in a police prison. This was because there was no room in the police prison. The same evening we were arrested, there were forty people from the theatre also rounded up, opera managers, comedians, prima ballerinas and stagehands. They had all been put in the basement and were waiting for our departure so they could be moved to our cells. There was even one malicious person who, in an attempt to frighten us, told us that we were at the disposal of the Gestapo and that they would transfer us to Graz at nine o'clock. This had the effect of driving three of our elderly colleagues into convulsive sobs and then unconsciousness.



*Dr Edo with his wife Albina Neufeld in Crikvenica, summer 1940*

The news of the arrest of all Jewish lawyers spread very rapidly throughout Zagreb, particularly among the Jewish population. By that evening our wives were running up and down the stairs of our Aryan colleagues, new political leaders and friends to seek salvation and assistance for us. These people felt sorry for them and reassured them that

this was just a provisional measure which would be annulled very quickly once certain laws restricting the assets of Jews came into force. Meanwhile, in the prison yard, we were put into three open police cars. We were not a little surprised when we drove out onto the road and saw a crowd of people, among them our wives and family members, who had already been informed about everything and were waving to us and optimistically bidding us farewell.

The concentration camp in Kerestinec was already packed, so they put us younger ones in the basement rooms and the older people in a large wooden garage in the yard. Four of my colleagues and I were put into a dark basement, 3.5 or four square metres at the most, with walls covered in a metre-thick layer of dirt and cobwebs, with the damp dripping through all this and with one feeble light bulb which was on all day. There I spent forty days.

Our wives were working feverishly, running from pillar to post, and managed to be given the right to pay us one-hour visits each day and to bring us food. The food given to prisoners by the state was one litre of vegetable soup, usually beans, and 200 grams of bread. We were under the supervision of the old police guards who were on our side and who, despite their duties, found ways to be kind to us and give us a helping hand.

In the meantime, the terror in Zagreb was being stepped up. Many Ustaša soldiers who had suddenly returned from emigration and foreign parts began seizing Jewish apartments so, overnight, entire families were thrown out of the apartments they had furnished over decades with their love, hard work and savings. Whether those thus evicted would be permitted to take with them a chest or two of their most important clothing, or nothing at all, depended on the whether those who occupied the apartments were considerate or not.

A contribution of a minimum of 1,000 kilograms of gold was levied on the Jewish population of Zagreb. Those who, in the opinion of the authorities, did not give enough were arrested. After arrest they would be spoken to in their cell and, if they relented to the demands, would be released. I must say that a great deal was handed over, that some people voluntarily submitted in the hope that after this there would be an end to the arrests and that they would be released. They were greatly mistaken because, once the established quota was reached, the amount was again raised and the arrests would also begin again.

The most disgusting Jewish identification tags in Europe were forced on the Jews in Zagreb. Two yellow bands, each ten centimetres long, with the Star of David and the letter Ž (short for Žuden, Jew), once across the heart and the other over the left shoulder, which each person had to wear, with no exceptions. However, once babies in carriages began to wear them, along with Catholic priests and nuns who wore them in the streets, the measure produced quite the opposite effect of that intended. Instead of inciting hatred and mockery, people found it unpleasant and gave priority to people wearing the symbols. Because of this, the authorities very soon withdraw the order to wear the signs.

Then began mass movements of people on a scale never before seen in Zagreb. By decree of the authorities, Jews and Serbs were banned from residing in the northern parts of the city and were given 24 hours to vacate their apartments. Many were glad to withdraw from the centre of the city, hoping for a more peaceful life in the suburbs.

Although there were mass arrests in Zagreb every day, things were a little easier among our ranks as first our elderly colleagues then those who had friends or connections in high places were being set free. However what also sometimes happened was that a German car carrying a Gestapo officer would arrive at the concentration camp after which some of our colleagues would first be interrogated then taken away. We remained behind, pale and frightened. In these situations we would hold hands tightly, hug and speak encouraging words, but there were also some tears.

The difficult life in the camp and the even more difficult news from Zagreb was causing the greatest possible tension when, on June 10, after about forty days, two police cars came to drive us to the police administration, from where we were to be released. We were accompanied by so many of our friends and so many policemen that, on the way, the police cars stopped at a tavern so that we lawyers, formally still prisoners, could drink a glass of wine or beer with the policemen and wish one another a brighter and happier future. After our police officer had bid us the warmest farewell, he discharged us with a firm handshake and the promise that he would not lock us up again if we loyally carried out our civic duties. And so we went on to our freedom, although this was to be very short-lived.

On June 18, after barely eight days of freedom during which I had realised that all I could do was to settle my affairs as soon as possible

and flee, a police agent came looking for me at my home and left a message that I was to report to the police administration immediately.

To buy time in which to make some kind of decision, I hid in my sister's apartment for a couple of hours. The family held consultations. My wife and I were in favour of immediate flight, but my father's advice was to respond to the call because he feared that punitive measures would be taken against the family. I accepted my father's advice, returned home, took the rucksack I had previously packed and, without any escort, headed straight to the police prison. Many of my colleagues had gone voluntarily to prison the same way, not knowing that by so doing they were going to certain death. And that is what would have awaited me too, had I not been saved by extraordinary circumstances.

As long as I live I shall not forget the sight of my parents, my wife and my children on the balcony of our apartment, bitterly sobbing and waving as they stood and watched their son, husband and father walk away in the direction of the prison.



*Daughters Lea and Vera Neufeld,  
1937*

This time there were twenty-eight of us, because our older colleagues, those over 55, had not been arrested, and many of the younger ones had already fled to Italy. Following formalities at the police administration, they transported us the following morning to the familiar Kerestinec. Only members of the Communist Party, mostly from the prisons still under Yugoslav control, were moved to the castle. We lawyers were put in a garage in the courtyard. Among us was Croatian Peasant Party MP Stjepan Kovačević, and it was thanks to him at one moment that we remained alive.

I was living far more comfortably. Just the fact that we did not have to live in a damp and dark basement was a relief. We were free to walk around the yard for four hours every day. We passed the time walking around, taking showers, playing handball and doing the various camp jobs they dragged us to.

For several days I worked in a group together with my university professor who had conducted civil litigation examinations. We worked on clearing a garbage dump, the work was satisfying and we were in a cheerful mood. It seemed as though this situation would continue until the end of the war.

Large numbers of our fellow-citizens who were still at liberty were preparing for flight. On June 22, 1941, war broke out between Germany and the USSR and the Ustaša pressure increased. The head of state in the new authorities was not ashamed to publish a proclamation in all newspapers for Jews and Serbs threatening that, regardless of age or gender, they would all be interned in open-air concentration camps in the mountains if they did not show loyalty to the new state. There is no doubt that this proclamation is one of the most shameful documents in the history of war in 20<sup>th</sup> century civilisation.

Without waiting for a response to the proclamation, they then began a hunt for men, women and children in Zagreb. These were then dragged off to enormous concentration camps in Gospić and Jadovno (an abandoned, uninhabited hilltop) and on the island of Pag.

The looting raids of the new Ustaša authorities continued, multiplying daily. Once during visiting hours my wife arrived in tears to tell me that these people had come and emptied the two rooms of my office. Records and documents had been hurled to the floor in the worst possible chaos. My office, which had been built up over years with love and a great deal of work, was completely destroyed so that the new ministries could be equipped with these items.

Each time my wife visited I tried to talk her into fleeing Croatia for Italy with the children. But at that time women whose husbands were prisoners of war or in concentration camps were spared deportation so she felt safe and did not want to abandon me.

On July 7, 1941, a police car arrived at our camp to collect ten prominent leaders of the Communist Party. We all immediately sensed that this boded ill. Sharing the same fate, we had formed warm friendships with most of these and I was particularly sad because my school friend, Professor Ognjen Prica, was among them. He had already served seven years in prison for his communist allegiance. It was also sad for me that those taken included our Zagreb colleague Dr Ivo Kun. All of these people were highly educated and good friends. Our parting was particularly difficult. We hugged and kissed and my colleague, Dr Kun, sensing what would happen simply said: "Tell my wife about this

tomorrow, gently, spare her feelings.” Although we had ways and means of getting news from the outside, we remained completely without information on the whereabouts and fate of our colleagues. Two days later, on July 9, another police car appeared, at about two in the afternoon, returning Krndelj, a school friend of the head of state, who had previously been taken away. Instead of him they now took a young man by the name of Kraus. I still remember we were playing handball at the time and Kraus was preparing to pass the ball at exactly the moment when they called him to drive him away. He blanched and headed towards his ill fate. Within two hours, the death sentence on all these people had been carried out.

The news of the execution was published on huge posters and we learnt about it from newspapers. The reason for the execution was given as follows: “Because the body of a police agent has been found in a swamp and those responsible could not be found, these ten people (and here their names were listed) have been taken before the court as intellectual instigators and been sentenced to death, and this sentence has been executed.” The fact that these people could not have had anything to do with this death is already clear from the juridically impossible explanation and more particularly from the fact that they had been in prison for months. The wives of these unfortunate men were running up and down the stairs of all possible institutions in an attempt to learn something about the fate of their husbands. It was their own fate to find out about this in the street, straight from the posters, among a crowd of curious onlookers.

July 13, 1941, was a beautiful, hot summer day and we sat out in the courtyard outside the garage until eleven in the evening, trying to cool off before going, unsuspectingly, to bed. We had barely fallen asleep when we were woken by gunfire and leapt to our feet at once. There were shots coming from all directions and the deafening noise was not abating. Our first thought was that we were being attacked from outside and that, in our helplessness, all we could do was lock the door on the inside and throw ourselves to the floor. We heard shouting: “We have seized power. A communist government has been established in Zagreb. Give yourselves up! Don’t fire! Don’t shed blood for no reason!” When all this died down, we climbed on chairs to peer through the small windows and see what was happening. In the pale light we saw a group of about twenty police officers being escorted from the first floor to the courtyard. Just as this finished, someone began to bang on

our door urging us, in the name of the new Soviet government in Zagreb, to open the door. We responded to this and a colleague of ours who had until recently also been a prisoner, a well-known newspaper editor, appeared at the door with a rifle on his shoulder, a hand grenade in one hand and his other hand clenched in a communist salute. With him were two other prisoners who were also militarily equipped. He told us briefly and energetically that a Soviet government had been established in Zagreb. He ordered us to stay calm behind the closed door and wait for a badly wounded person to be brought to our cell for us to help him. Outside, things had calmed down and it was only by the crackling of the gravel in the courtyard that we knew that the men who had been our fellow prisoners until yesterday were now leaving the camp.

A few moments later there was another knock on the door. When we opened it they brought one of the camp commanders into our room unconscious, a police supervisor who was bleeding heavily from the temples. They left, again asking us to help him. And so here we were in our prison with a seriously wounded and unconscious commandant on the floor. We didn't know what had happened and stood there completely helpless. Then we quickly took our towels and washed and bandaged him as well as possible under the circumstances. Although we expected him to die any minute, he regained consciousness and, in a voice which could barely be heard, complained that he needed help and to be taken to his room. A few minutes later a Croatian captain appeared in our room with a gun in his hand. He lived close to the castle and, having been woken by the gunfire, had hurried over to see what had happened. He asked us to obey the wishes of the wounded officer and take him to his room, so four of us did so. While carrying him we crossed the deathly silent courtyard to the guard accommodation where we put the wounded man down on a bed. In the guard dormitory we saw four police officers sitting on beds, with deadly pale and bloodied faces, with towels around their heads and their hands tied. It took a little time for the confused officers, who were now scared of us as well, to tell us that, while sleeping, they had suddenly been attacked with blows to the head from rifle butts. Then, before they fled, just to be on the safe side, the communists had tied them up and put them in shackles. We untied them, freshened up their bandages and, on the orders of the captain, set out to look for the police officers who had been taken out. We found them locked in the basement of the old castle tower. As the rebels had taken the keys to

the tower, all we could do was look for axes, hammers and iron bars. Once we found these we managed to pry open the heavy iron door. Slowly and nervously, these men who had been our guards yesterday and would again be our guards tomorrow came out of their cell with their hands tied. They could scarcely believe that liberation had found them in less than an hour. So before my very eyes unfolded the rare sight of prisoners untying their guards and setting them free. When we finished the job we went back to our room, where another three young men from the communist division unexpectedly appeared. They had been hiding in the dark side of the courtyard. They told us that they had not taken part in the mutiny because they were not communists. They asked us for protection, which naturally we were unable to give them.

In retrospect, the history of this mutiny may be reconstructed as follows: the imprisoned communists were aware that sooner or later they would share the fate of their ten colleagues who had been shot, because the camp was a kind of holding area from which people were taken for execution whenever the need arose. Because of this they believed it was better to run and fight for their lives. From that moment the new leaders feverishly decided to mutiny. However they did not want to harm the guards who, as I have already noted, behaved humanely towards us. The cars were to be ready at about midnight but this did not happen, so they left on foot, taking with them as hostages another two police officers, who were later released healthy and unharmed. It seems that only some of the men were involved in the preparations, along with a few leaders, because they were afraid of being betrayed by police agents, who could be found in every prison. This could also explain the sudden noise which woke their other colleagues and forced them to flee immediately. The next morning there were a lot of clothes and shoes found in the prison because people had fled in the middle of the night in shirts and bare feet. This was later confirmed by the two police officers. Apparently most of the shots fired were intended to frighten their own colleagues. The police sentry outside the castle was the only one to fire from the watchtower, and he fired into the air, in the direction of the first floor. The guards were overcome as follows: the police officer standing duty outside the prison was called inside on the pretext that an inmate had been taken sick. As soon as he put his foot on the stairs he was attacked and disarmed. Then the armed rebels (whether or not they had had other arms at their disposal could not be established) headed for the watch tower where they



attacked the guards, who were half asleep, and disarmed them. They took the machine gun they found there, along with ammunition and hand grenades which had been prepared. As soon as the news spread outside the castle among the police officers standing guard, a hunt began for the runaways (of whom there were about eighty), and so we heard machine gun fire not far away. Our castle had become the main headquarters for oppression operations. For the rest of the night, whole units of Ustaša, police officers, soldiers and gendarmes were coming and going, in cars and on motorcycles. Every now and then they would bring in a securely tied prisoner.

By five in the morning, the supreme Ustaša police chief, Kvaternik (the Croatian Himmler) began conducting an investigation. We were in an unenviable position. He informed us that our last hour was to have come that morning. It was our luck – or perhaps only mine, because this would have been an easier end for my colleagues than their eventual death after several months of inhuman suffering – that Kovačević, the farmer delegated by the Croats mentioned earlier, was among us and had declared all of us equals, thus ensuring we were spared this time round.

News of the mutiny and the earlier execution of Jewish lawyers had already spread to Zagreb. Thinking ahead about this we had sent information to our families that we were healthy, thus sparing them concern and suffering.

Even harsher conditions were now applied. All contacts with the outside world were banned, although we still learnt through secret channels that we and the Serbs interned in the farm buildings would be moved the next day, July 15, first to Zagreb and then to Gospić. And this was precisely what happened.

When we arrived outside the police prison we knew that our wives had already been informed about everything. They were standing laden with luggage, clothes and food, waiting for us to arrive. We spent the whole afternoon in the yard of the police prison. After great effort, our wives managed to give us the things they had brought for us. But even though they tried in every possible way, we were not allowed to say goodbye to one another or spend even a few minutes talking. It was sad watching them walk through the police hallways all afternoon, trying at least to wave to us through the windows, while they were being chased away the whole time. Nevertheless they continued trying to reach the forbidden places. In one lucky moment, thanks to a kind-hearted police guard who left the door ajar for a few moments, we managed to quickly

squeeze each other's hand through the open door and give each other a passing kiss goodbye. For my co-prisoners, this was their last meeting with their wives and parents.

At about midnight we were again put into police vehicles and driven through the silent city into the most horrifying night of my life. After driving a few minutes, the vehicles changed direction, heading away from the railway station. They drove us to a large courtyard in the Zagreb Fairground. When we 28 Jewish lawyers and 40 Serb intellectuals reached the large exhibition hall, the police guards left us and the Ustaša took command, sixty young men, all with fixed bayonets. Immediately a command rang out for us to sit on the floor in two rows, if we did not do so they would open fire. The Ustaša kept cocking their guns deliberately using the sound to make us fearful. Then an Ustaša commander approached us with brisk steps. I recognised him as a former waiter from the Corso tavern, where he had often served me. He was walking along our rows, looking at us without even blinking, then called one of us, Dr Branko Peleš, the son of a Yugoslav minister, to approach him. We were ordered to observe carefully, anyone not carefully watching would be shot, without exception. And then a disgusting performance began before our very eyes. The poor man was immediately given the order "Down!". He remained standing stiffly, staring at the man who had given him the order. He was a captain in the reserve and for him such an order was quite incomprehensible. After several blows from the rifle butts of Ustaša who were standing all over the place, he immediately understood the order. First the orders "Down!" and "Up!" came slowly, but the more he became exhausted from them the faster they came, so that as he was throwing himself on the floor he was already being ordered up, until he began stumbling and losing strength. When he was no longer able to keep it up, he said he would rather be shot. As soon as he said this the Ustaša and the captain-waiter began kicking him and hitting him with rifle butts. Gathering the last remnants of his strength, he managed to obey the orders a few more times. It was clear he would lose consciousness within a few seconds but, before this happened, the captain struck him with his fist in the jaw, so that blood poured from his mouth and then the unconscious man hit the concrete floor with his head. They moved him to the side by kicking him and then applied the same methods to two more Serbs, the commissioner of the Zagreb traffic police, Milo Sadžak, and the senior doctor from the health insurance, Dr Mrvoš, achieving the same results with them. Then it was

the turn of the bishop of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Sarajevo, Petar Zimonjić. He was an elderly man of 82. He was tall and dignified, wearing a clerical robe with a mitre on his head and a long white beard. He stood before us as a martyr. His appearance triggered diabolical howling from the Ustaša. As he could hardly bend over, the Ustaša contented themselves with just pulling at his beard and spitting on his mitre.

At about three in the morning, in the dead of a dark night, they loaded us onto a freight train in groups. As we climbed onto the train we noticed that we were not alone and that there were other people in there, women and children, whom we woke up. They turned on torches and we saw our new fellow-sufferers were Jews from Varaždin who had been torn out of their beds the night before and who were now to set off on the journey to Gospić with us. In one corner of the wagon was a woman dressed in black, sitting on the floor and weeping bitterly. When we shone our torches on her we recognised her as the doctor wife of our colleague Dr Ivo Kun who had been killed five days earlier. The unexpected arrival of her husband's colleagues who, until recently, had shared the same fate as him, the fact that we were all hale and hearty while he was in his grave, exacerbated the pain of this unfortunate woman. Seeing this, we all wept with her.

Once we were locked into the wagons from the outside, the train began its eight-hour journey. We hung on the barred windows and thus bade farewell to Zagreb and our remaining family members. Because the Italians had guaranteed the possibility of asylum to Jews, we were filled with hope when, about forty kilometres from Zagreb, we saw Italian soldiers standing guard. This hope faded along the way, however, because when we called on them to intervene, to have the wagons opened at least for a short while, they were unable to do anything. Physical needs had to be satisfied and, as shouting, banging and crying were no use, we had to do this in any way we could, while attempting to spare the others the embarrassment.

And so, at about noon, we arrived in Gospić, a new execution site for Serbs. Under the searing noonday sun, a sad convoy of six hundred men, women and children, led by the dignified bishop, walked down a three kilometre road to the city. Two women, a mother and daughter from Varaždin, dragged out of their house despite suffering severe angina pectoris, were part of this on stretchers all the way. The Italian soldiers and their officers watched and photographed everything. The civilian population was watching us from their windows, with disap-

proving faces. Here and there and old woman could be seen wiping tears from her eyes.

In the big yard of the prison within the Gospić District Court, we saw about two thousands Serbs, camped on the floor. We could see Ustaša with rifles aimed at us in all the first and second floor windows. At both of the entrances, beside the staff, there was also a machine gun aimed at the people. One Ustaša, some driver who was now a new commander, amused himself by forcing the bishop who had been harassed the night before to carry a large, heavy barrel of water past the women and children and sprinkle the yard with water.

A few hours later they transported us Jews to a cinema where we spent about fourteen days, in a large hall. There was no possibility of food for these six hundred people. We ate what we had brought with us and the better-off among us, those who had managed to stash away some money, were taken to taverns under guard. There were screenings in the cinema on Sunday evenings when all of us, even the small children, had to vacate the hall with all our belongings and remain in the yard until midnight. All this camp life took place in a rather small courtyard, about four metres wide. Because I had already been cooking for us lawyers in Kerestinec, and as those who ate this food were satisfied, I was chosen, with the advocacy of my colleagues, to be the cook of the newly established kitchen. In this capacity I celebrated there, on August 3, my 42<sup>nd</sup> birthday. The president of the Varaždin Jewish cultural community delivered a celebratory speech for me, the men's choir from Varaždin performed a song written specially for me and as a birthday present I was given a diploma signed by all the participants. I sent this diploma, as a memento, to my wife in Zagreb. Afterwards I learnt that it had appeared a year later as an exhibit at an anti-Jewish exhibition in Zagreb. The management gave us no food. We introduced compulsory taxation and management. As I was also in charge of obtaining supplies for the camp I had to go frequently into the city. There I had the opportunity to see many things.

There were new transports of Serbs and Jewish families arriving every day from all over Croatia. On the other hand, many Serbs would leave the prison yard every day, heading through the city to the mountains. It was sad to watch them. There was a long chain in the middle, with fifty people tied on each side of it, on the right and left. Old and young, urbane city people and simple peasants, post office and railway employees in uniforms, all were taken out of the city on the same chain,

to be killed there and thrown into some mass grave. I saw many such people. I could not say the exact number, but allegedly somewhere between 35,000 and 50,000 Serbs suffered this fate in one month. At that time the Italian occupation army in Gospić comprised at least 7,000 soldiers, while the executive power of the Ustaša was barely five hundred people.

The Italians, even higher-ranking commanding officers, would go for walks and watch all this without intervening in any way to save these people from certain death. The behaviour of the Italian Army at the time was quite incomprehensible. The Ustaša behaved extremely insultingly towards them. If an Italian officer dared to take a local girl out walking, the Ustaša would immediately arrest her and take her to their main headquarters where, as punishment, they would shave her head and then throw her out into the street. All this time the press in both countries was proclaiming their mutual friendship.

One group of internees, about 2,200 Serbs and three or four hundred young Jewish men, mostly between the ages of 17 and 22 were encamped in the open air on top of a hill called Jadovno on the Velebit Heights. They included my cousin Norbert and the sons of parents who had fled to the area. They had very inadequate food and were forced to perform the most difficult road building labour. Conditions were very strict. For example, the use of the toilet was allowed only until nine in the evening. One young Jew, eighteen years old, named Atias dared to exceed this time by five minutes and because of this was shot dead during roll-call the following morning. I was told about this by a Zagreb lawyer and several young men who were released from this camp by accident. The fate of this camp is shrouded in great secrecy. There were always new stories going round, that they had fled and joined the Partisans, that they had been saved by Italian soldiers, that they were interned in camps in Italy, and so on. Upon investigation all these stories proved to be pure invention. In Gospić itself there were horrifying rumours spreading about the disappearance of the camp. The fact is that there were no signs of life of any of these people from the beginning of 1941. At that time the Ustaša brought us several cauldrons and a quantity of kitchenware, claiming that they were from Jadovno, because the camp had been abandoned.

At the beginning of August were moved to a newly-established camp about two kilometres from Gospić in buildings, barns in fact, belonging to the stock-breeding school. Women, children and the elderly

were put in a barn which had formerly housed sheep while we men were sent to a hayloft which could only be accessed by climbing a ladder. As new transports kept arriving every day and the number of us went up to more than 1,600, we complained to the commandant that we had no room. The commandant was a trading assistant from Zagreb, a paralytic by the name of Pudić. Fear drove him to carry a rifle on his shoulder around the town, although the rifle was not a weapon for officers. He handled our complaint by calling all camp residents to assemble, with our luggage, in the courtyard at eight in the evening. At this point a storm began. The rain was pouring down in sheets. We stood outside, soaked through, until midnight, when he showed compassion by allowing us all into a room in which we could barely stand and in which we had almost suffocated by morning.

The next day, with fourteen of my colleagues, I was transferred to Gospić where we were supposed to be supplementary labour for the city's supply organisation. In the camp, until our departure, we worked on road building. Our food consisted of three or four potatoes per day. Because the camp was located outside the town and was strictly supervised we were unable to obtain anything else, so it was a certainty that most of us, particularly the children, would not survive for long.

My colleagues worked hard from morning to evening. They carried full bags of grain on their backs. Because my colleagues had appointed me as cook, for fifteen days, at our own expense, I prepared hearty and healthy food for them. We moved around freely in Gospić, which gave me the opportunity to learn many things of which others were ignorant.

Before the war the population of Gospić had been half Serbs and half Croats. The conflict between them had gone on for decades and when the Croats came to power the Serbs were their first victims. At this time their remaining families were rounded up for deportation. Then came a daring Italian officer who wanted to save these women and children and, because he was the commander of a vehicle convoy, he put them all in army vehicles and took them to Italy, with no orders from higher command posts and possible even contrary to a command not to interfere in these matters. Another hundred or so people were awaiting departure in the yard of the army unit. However, when further travel was banned, the people had to be turned over to the Ustaša.

There was a fratricidal war raging in the Gospić area. Every day we could see villages burning. These were mostly Serb villages, with a

Croatian village burnt in retaliation here and there. Rifle and machine-gun fire were daily music.

At one time I had to go to the hospital in Gospić to have a nail removed after my thumb became infected. In the hallway of the hospital I ran into about twenty Serb children between the ages of three and ten who were playing there. All these children had bandages on their heads, chests and arms. They told me that their houses had been set on fire and that when they tried to escape through the windows, the Ustaša jabbed them with bayonets to drive them back inside. They were saved by Italian soldiers who appeared on the scene and who also photographed them.

This is when information began to spread, and to be confirmed every day, that the Italian Second Army, which had remained on this territory as an Allied army, would take over the highest army authorities and supervision of the civil administration. Together with a colleague I visited the local Italian command to ask the commander, a major, whether this information was true and when the takeover would happen, and to inform him that if it were true we would seek Italian protection on behalf of everyone interned in Jewish camps in the vicinity of Gospić. After a long discussion he informed me, with regrets, that there could be no talk of any taking over of the Jewish camps and that the takeover of full power in the territory would happen only after the Ustaša left the field, along with all the existing camps. In any case, he said, no harm would come to the inmates because they would be released as soon as they reached Croatia. The Ustaša were spreading the same stories when the transfer of the camps began.

We decided to stay where we were, because no one cared about us at all. The main concern of the Ustaša was to move their families and their furniture to a safe place, to Zagreb, because they were afraid of retaliation. I had just returned from hospital and was heading to our accommodation when I found my colleagues waiting for me outside my building. All my luggage had been loaded into a vehicle. They told me about their chance encounter with the camp commandant who, rather surprised, established that there were a certain number more internees in the place and then asked them to go immediately to the railway station, where transport was waiting for them, because they would be liberated in Croatia. I made a split-second decision and explained to my colleagues that I would not obey. "I'm staying here and anyone who wants to follow me should do so." Because they did not agree with my

decision, I took my luggage from the vehicle and we said our goodbyes, embracing one another. And so our paths diverged, mine into freedom and theirs to the death that found them soon after this.

I hid for a few days in Gospić with a diligent baker woman then, when I received information that my wife and children had reached Sušak, a town annexed by the Italians, after a flight from Zagreb where they left everything behind, I boarded a train and set off for Crikvenica, near the Italian border. Because the Ustaša were no longer performing any services in this area I felt quite safe and so chose the far faster and more comfortable journey by train, rather than travelling on foot or by car as I had been advised to do. In Crikvenica I immediately found an Italian Army driver who said he was prepared to smuggle me over the Croatian border to Italy for 500 lire. He hid me among empty wine barrels he was driving to Sušak, covered me with a blanket and, for my protection, stationed a soldier with a fixed bayonet over the barrels and me. And so I crossed the Croatian border, without ever seeing it at all. I arrived in Sušak soaked in sweat and there, overjoyed, was met by my family. The news of my arrival from Gospić immediately spread throughout Sušak where many refugees from Zagreb were living. Many people would approach me in the hope of learning a little more about members of their families who were in Gospić. I had been in Sušak for only a few days when, without warning, I was arrested by the Questura, the Italian police. At that time in Sušak there were mass arrests of Jews who would either be sent back across the Croatian border or put into prison in Rijeka, from where, in four or six weeks, they would be free, interned in Italy.

A day later police agents came for my wife and children to transfer them across the border with me, as was customary at the time. They claimed that we were to be interned as free people in Padua, but we had already been warned that no Italian police agent ever spoke a single true word. Because of this, my wife lay in bed, claiming to be ill. But they took my daughters Lea and Vera from my wife anyway, and brought them to me in prison. For Vera, who was six at the time, this was all fun and excitement. As soon as I had a chance I whispered to her that she should immediately start to cry and ask to be returned to her mother. This she did so skilfully that all the police clerks and supervisors ran over to us, then after discussing it, felt sorry for the child. They could do nothing but take the child back to her mother. Lea and I were put on a bus back across the border to Croatia. Incidentally, the Italians were



not given to behaving so bestially as to separate a family across the border of two states, but Pilleri, the Sušak quaestor was an evil creature who subjected Jews to much unpleasantness and misery. By the following morning I had found an opportunity to head back to Italy, for 1,500 lire, in an army medical car, however this time not to Sušak but to Rijeka, which was separated from Sušak by a bridge. I made this journey with Lea, both of us in Italian regular army alpine uniforms. We crossed the border without even being stopped and spoke with a sick Italian soldier who was very kind. I made arrangements to meet the driver in town to talk about when and how he would also drive my wife and Vera over. As luck would have it, in the street we now ran into the same agent who had escorted us over the border the day before. Because Italian agents were known for their susceptibility to bribes, I offered him 500 lire to allow me to remain free. Had I offered him more, or had his colleague, unknown to me, not been standing nearby watching, this would no doubt have had a positive outcome. But now he was forced to arrest me. Lea, who was immediately freed, went to her mother, but I went to prison where I remained for five months.

I was charged with attempted bribery. This was very stringently punished in Italy, but such cases seldom reached the courts. A month later, on October 6, 1941, the case was heard. On my way to court, for the first time in my life, I had my hands were shackled. My defence lawyer spoke beautifully and was very moving. Two women in the public gallery wept during his presentation of my position. I was given the lowest sentence, sixteen months in prison. In its October 7 issue, the Trieste newspaper *Il piccolo di Trieste* published a report on the court proceedings under the title *Peripezio di un avvocato ebreo* (Adventure of a Jewish lawyer) which was written with rather a lot of sympathy for me. After this court decision I was in quite a difficult psychological state, which was understandable. My only consolation was the letters I received from my mother and my wife who wrote that they were in fact happy because they knew that I was safe while the lives of my colleagues were hanging by a thread. At the first hearing I had barely understood Italian and was so stupefied by what I had experienced in the preceding few months that I was barely able to give my lawyer any mitigating information. Now I diligently learnt Italian, studied Italian law and prepared my defence speech in Italian. At the appeal hearing I emphasised that, at the time of the alleged violation, I had no command of the Italian language and therefore could not have communicated with

the agent, and so could not have committed the violation. This position was made easier for me by the agent's rather unclear statement.

I sighed with relief on December 19 when they read me the decision of the appeal court, saying that I was acquitted because of lack of evidence. A journalist who heard about my acquittal immediately jumped up and approached me and introduced himself, congratulated me warmly and wished me all the best for the future. The newspapers did not publish any report of my acquittal, probably to save the agent's face. Although acquitted, I spent five more weeks in prison, first in Rijeka and then in Padua. I learnt Italian in the prisons and in Rijeka I worked as a nurse.

I was filled with happiness when I was released on February 5, 1942, with a travel warrant to go into internment in a health resort in Aprica where I would be reunited with my family. This relieved me from the serious nightmare of possibly being sent back across the Croatian border.

Life with my family now proceeded normally, first in Aprica and later, because of my health, in Sondrio. We lived pleasantly and well for a year and a half, while the authorities treated us with tact. I missed my profession and we were burdened with concern for our cousins in Croatia, from where the news continued to be worse and worse. My parents and my three brothers and sisters saved themselves in the area occupied by the Italians. After the events of September 8, 1943, I lost touch with them. My mother-in-law, a lively, sensible and good woman of 77, refused to take my advice. She was receiving a state pension and lived in her own apartment and favoured this state of affairs over the uncertainty of emigrating. To all our letters she replied: "Leave me be. I rely on God and He will not abandon me." But she faced misery anyway when, five days after her 77<sup>th</sup> birthday, on August 10, 1942, at two in the morning, she was taken, without any of her belongings, in an unknown direction, probably to Poland. After that there was no more news of her, although we appealed to various assistance campaigns and to the Red Cross. We were particularly worried and tormented over whether to believe her words and hope she would return soon.

At the end of 1942, the war was not going to Italy's advantage. Although the entire Italian population, almost without exception, was against the war, and most of them were also against Fascism, the fall of Mussolini did not surprise or excite us, nor did it fill us with the hope of liberation in the near future. Not unexpectedly, Italy capitulated on

September 8, 1943. At first we rejoiced along with a large crowd of excited people, but quickly realised that we must pack and flee.

Before I fled I also took on the obligation of seeing to the fate of two hundred Jews interned in Aprica by demanding from the authorities that they be released from internment. The supreme head of the civil administration of the Italian province, the quaestor, the police chief of the province and the authorised military territorial commanding officer all received me kindly, but to no avail, because they were unable to act without instructions from the Interior Ministry to release them. They sent telegrams and tried to telephone, but as all communications were cut they received no response. Meanwhile, the majority of the internees had fled Aprica. When I learnt this I set off on my own flight and was almost too late because of this delay.

We were going on foot from Sondrio to a hill 3,000 metres high close to the Swiss border. After being cheated by smugglers and wandering around for three days we returned and were twice arrested by the Italian border guards but then released because we had no documents.

On the fourth time we finally successfully travelled the road to the border, after the smugglers had already let us down. We crossed the Swiss border with great relief. Emotion brought tears to our eyes when the Swiss border guards, who had been watching us from afar through binoculars, came towards us with grapes and helped us to get down and carry our luggage.

After being in a number of transit camps, we finally reached this one, Gattikon. We've been here now for two months and are basking in the warmth around us which is generated by our dear commander, Lieutenant Ernst Morgenthaler, our friend and ally.

Through the Swiss Children's Aid, accommodation has been found for our daughter Vera with the family of a secondary school teacher, Dr Hans Waertli, in Zurich. There she has found a new and warm home, better than we could have hoped for. It is moving to see how Mrs Waertli takes care of our child, in spite of the fact that she herself is the mother of two even younger children, and all this at a time when, in Europe, the wild hordes of the "new order" are killing thousands of children or burning them alive.

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*Dr Emil FREUNDLICH*

## THE TRAGEDY OF ZAGREB'S YOUNG JEWS



**D**r Emil Freundlich was born in Zagreb on May 6, 1921. He was educated in his home town of Zagreb where he was studying medicine at the time of the attack on Yugoslavia. In spite of the horrors he experienced during the war years and that his parents went through, he returned to Zagreb, completing his medical studies after the war, in 1948, as a military student.

Soon after the end of the war, in 1947, he married Felicia (Licika) Sretna Klugmann, who had lost her parents and her brother in the Holocaust. After the war, he emigrated to Israel with his wife and worked as a physician in Jerusalem, Haifa and Nahariya. The Freundlichs' daughter, Edna, was born in Jerusalem. He lives in Israel.

For Yugoslavia, the second world war began on April 6, 1941, with the attack of the German Army. Several days later German troops entered Zagreb without resistance. Yugoslavia was defeated and the Independent State of Croatia was proclaimed on Croatian territory under the Ustaša regime with no resistance whatsoever.

Anti-Jewish laws and decrees were quickly passed. People were dismissed from their jobs and many were evicted from their apartments. And then the arrests began. My father was thrown out of the office he

ran together with several friends. But this was just the beginning, far more difficult things were to follow.

I was a medical student at Zagreb University. In the early days a decree was issued, written in large letters, that Jews were not allowed access to the faculties. At the time I was required to perform a brain dissection in the Institute of Anatomy, without which I would not be able to complete the second year of my studies. At the end of April some colleagues informed me that my name had been posted along with the time I was to perform this. Despite the ban I went to the faculty, none of my colleagues said anything. I completed my work in peace that day and the next, and so completed all the requirements for my second year of studies. I was not aware at the time just how dangerous this was and what could have happened to me, but everything turned out all right.

### *Arrest, imprisonment*

I was arrested on May 17, 1941. This was just five and a half days after the German troops entered Zagreb and eleven days after my twentieth birthday. Ustaša police agents came at night to our apartment in Martićeva Street in Zagreb, turned my room upside down in an unsuccessful search for compromising materials, and took me to the prison in Petrinjska Street.

The cell they put me in was overcrowded, the stench was awful and the lack of oxygen was palpable. There were five wooden beds in the room, it was a cell for five prisoners, but there were more than thirty of us in there, even one day as many as forty! We slept on the concrete floor, crammed up against one another like sardines. New prisoners would be put into the cell and many taken out to unknown destinations. One night, with a lot of noise, they opened the iron doors of all the cells. There was one guard standing at each door. They were calling people out by their names. One of the prisoners knew what this meant. He told us that they were taking them away to be shot, and that this list had been put together entirely without any court decision, that its purpose was solely to entertain the guards. There were probably about ten of them taken out. When the roll call ended and all the iron doors were again closed I felt an incredible pressure. But I also had the feeling that I would still be alive to see the light of the next day.

One morning I heard loud music from the radio. Someone said that they were taking a prisoner to beat and question him. And indeed, after

a short time, I heard cries. There was complete silence in the cell, no one could utter a single word.

I was interrogated in a room that looked like an office, with a police agent in civilian clothes and a secretary who was typing. The agent told me that I had been arrested as a communist and that I had written enemy slogans on the walls of houses. Of course I denied everything, but I signed the interrogation protocol and was taken back to the cell.

After nine days in prison I was dispatched, with a group of prisoners, in a closed police vehicle, the Black Mariah, to the Kerestinec camp.

### *In Kerestinec*

At first glance, everything in the camp seemed to me a pleasant surprise after the prison cell. The building was an old, eighteenth century castle, quite well preserved. At first we were accommodated in the rooms of this old castle, about fifteen of us to each room. There was a lot of space and we slept on straw. We were locked up, but allowed out three times a day into the courtyard where we ate and where we could talk to prisoners from other rooms. There were three groups of prisoners in the camp: the self-styled communist collective, then those who had been arrested as communists, leftists or something similar but who had not been admitted into the communist collective, and a group of Jewish lawyers from Zagreb. The lawyers were living in a barn next to the castle building which had once been used as a horse stable. I wasn't admitted into the communist collective so I remained in the other group.

Visits were allowed every day in the early afternoon. So my parents came, bringing me food, as did my dear friend Pavao Mayerhofer who told me that one or other of my friends would visit me every second day. Unfortunately this did not happen, because the young Jewish people of Zagreb were all taken to a labour camp three days after I arrived in Kerestinec. From there they were taken to the Jadovno camp and I never saw them again. A month later our small group was separated from the others and moved from the castle building to a barracks about two hundred metres away.

In the early evening of July 5, they took ten leading communists from the camp. These included two from our group, Prof. Zvonimir Richtmann and Ivan Korski. These ten were executed that same evening in retaliation for the killing of a police clerk. Of the ten shot,

six were Jews. From that time on, the situation in the camp deteriorated significantly. The guard was reinforced, visits were banned and days of uncertainty began. We now knew that we were being held as hostages.

During the night of July 13, I was awoken by the sound of gunfire. The guard at the door of our barracks shouted that we should all lie down or sit on the floor. If anyone came close to the door he would shoot without warning. One person from our group said that they were probably shooting everyone in the castle, and another added that they would come to us once they had finished the job over there. We waited. After a while the shooting died down and the sound was coming from further and further away. Gradually it all calmed down.

I was awakened early the following morning by shouts and the order that we were to line up outside the barracks. I was the last to arrive and received a blow to the ribs. They counted us. I heard the guard tell the Ustaša officer next to him: "They're all here."

They allowed us to move around freely in the barracks and in the courtyard. Several men from our group talked to the guards and heard from them that the whole communist group had escaped from the castle after killing a guard and the camp commandant, and that all the escapees had been either killed or arrested. As for us, they said, we were to be moved to other camps. The communists' escape had been a total failure: of the 89 prisoners who fled, only fourteen survived. Apparently the reason for this failure was betrayal in the communist ranks.

### *Transport to a new camp*

The same day, July 14, at about noon, they took us in police vehicles to Zagreb, to the courtyard of a police building in Petrinjska Street. There, a short distance away, I saw my parents who were shouting to me that we would be sent to a Jewish prison. I thought that this was good news for me because it seemed that it would be better to be locked up as a Jew than as a communist. Late that night they took us to Velesajam, on the Savska road, put us in a hall and ordered us to sit on the floor in two rows, without moving. Then the Ustaša began their sadistic performance.

As we sat on the floor, the Ustaša walked around us, continually cocking their rifles. They called one man out and ordered him to lie down, forcing him to do so by hitting him in the ribs with rifle butts. An officer ordered him sharply to stand up, and then again to lie down. At

first these orders were slow, but then began to be faster and faster. The prisoner was trying to carry out the orders while he could, but he soon began to stumble, lost consciousness and fell. He was then kicked and struck with rifle butts, but just lay there, unconscious.

Then it was someone else's turn, and this was repeated twice more. Later they called out a man, shouting that he had been a judge and used to pass sentence on them, the Ustaša. He was struck hard in the face with a fist and collapsed on the floor unconscious. The Ustaša were moving among us, shouting that we were not to move and that we were to watch what they were doing. There was one of us, a very fat man, who they pushed around with rifles and bayonets and ordered to sit still. There were maybe seven or more men who went through this torture. After this the Ustaša suddenly left the hall and we were able to sleep on the floor.

The following morning, July 15, they put us into cattle wagons and the train set off.

This was a hard and difficult journey. We were completely closed up and crammed in, with no hygienic conditions.

### *Arrival in Gospić*

A few hours later we arrived at a train station. They opened the wagons and we got out. It transpired that this was Gospić. We saw that our train was unusually long. People began coming out of other wagons, whole families, men women and children. The Ustaša were screaming at the them to hurry up out of the wagons. This was a great blow for me: up to now I had been in prison only with men, where everyone could take care of himself, but now I saw entire families coming out of the wagons, tired and exhausted. I cannot forget this image outside the cattle wagons in the station. When we spoke to them we discovered that they were from Varaždin, and that entire families had been arrested together and shipped off. They were wearing Jewish signs. We advised them that this sign should not be worn in camps.

When this sad procession headed towards the town I could see that they were all carrying, in their arms and on their backs, supplies, clothing and bedding for themselves and their children. Many were carrying small and bigger children who were so tired they were unable to walk. Deeply etched in my memory is the sight of a young man, short, very muscular. He was carrying on his back a large parcel, next to him were three little girls and a woman who was also carrying a heavy load. This



was their entire belongings, all that could be carried, so that the children would have something to sleep on, cover themselves with at night and dress in. We helped them carry their things as far as we could.

The journey was long and tiring, the heat was immense. On the way through the town, the locals were standing along the road. They were watching our transport and it seemed to me that they were totally indifferent, as if they were watching some almost normal scene.

We reached the prison courtyard and there we found a large number of Serbs. The Ustaša were standing at the windows of the first and second floors with rifles aimed at us. Here they separated us, Jews from Serbs, and we continued our journey into the town.

### *At the cinema*

We arrived at a hall which turned out to be a cinema. It was completely empty, the chairs had been folded and placed against the wall. An Ustaša officer met us there and told us that if even one of us tried to escape, they would immediately shoot five of us. After this greeting, the Ustaša left and they put guards on the door, on the outside.

We took our places on the floor of the hall. We were crammed in, each family and small group used their belongings to fence off their space. We kept the place clean as far as possible, despite the difficult and cramped conditions. They allowed us to dig two latrines in the courtyard, separate for women and men. We also set up a space for showers, similarly separate.

In various ways we managed to feed ourselves. The Varaždin people had one man, very skilled and resourceful, who had permission to buy food in the town. Along with this we also received parcels from Varaždin and Zagreb. We used our supplies economically, from one day to another.

The discipline and order in the cinema and the impeccable behaviour of all these people are etched forever in my memory. In the three weeks I spent in the cinema, I didn't hear a single serious fight or quarrel.

We tried to organise ourselves as much as possible. The doctors set up a kind of infirmary in one corner, using their own instruments which they had brought with them. The way the children were cared for made a particularly strong impression on me. They were to have some kind of entertainment during the day and that was organised as a kindergarten where the children gathered. They played with the toys they had

brought from home and entertained themselves so that they would be as little affected as possible by the difficult and depressing situation.

We were allowed to leave the cinema and go into the town with a guard. The guards were ordinary young soldiers, judging by the way they spoke, villagers from the Gospić area. They seemed rather primitive. Some of them spoke to us briefly and invited us to eat in neighbouring taverns owned by their cousins or friends. This was good business for them. It was also a chance for us to walk a little through the streets of the town.

While we were staying in the Gospić cinema, the Ustaša carried out mass executions of Serbs and Jews in other camps in the vicinity of the town. It was not until later, just before we left Gospić, that we learnt about the liquidations in these camps.

### *Gospić street sweeps*

Walking around the town outside the cinema one day, I saw a group of my friends from Zagreb. They told me that they had been in the Jadovno camp, with all the other young people from Zagreb. Conditions there were terrible. About ten days after they arrived in the camp, an Ustaša officer, Janko Mihajlović, also came there and recognised a few of his Jewish acquaintances and school friends. He ordered that ten of them be sent to Gospić to clean the streets there. Most of those sent were my friends and people I knew.

Several days after their arrival in Gospić, one of them, Saša Blivajs, was set free, following his father's intervention. The others asked that he be replaced and that a few more inmates from their group be included. This was because the work was easier. They were given approval for only one more to join them, but not anyone from Jadovno. So they decided to ask for me, from the camp in Gospić. My friend Viktor Rosenwasser came to get me, escorted by an Ustaša. And so I became one of the small group of "city street sweeps" as we called ourselves. It was only much later that I realised that the Ustaša had not approved their request for an inmate from Jadovno to join them because these had already all been killed at the beginning of August.

It was easy work. They didn't watch us much and we were free to move around the town. We could easily have escaped, but we knew that they would then kill people from the camp. In any case, we had no idea where to flee or to hide.

One day, perhaps about the time I joined the street sweepers, while I was at work I suddenly saw my parents. They had come to Gospić with a pass issued by the Ustaša police in Zagreb which allowed them to travel to Sušak or Split, anywhere in the occupied Italian territory. The travel pass included my name. The Ustaša record-keeping was obviously sloppy because, at the time the pass was issued, in July 1941, I was already in the Gospić camp. They tried to get me out of the camp using the pass, but this was refused. Not knowing what to do, they stayed in Gospić, rented a room and moved freely around the town. We often saw one another and were able to talk, but only briefly.

I saw a great deal in the streets of Gospić during this time and began to realise what dreadful crimes the Ustaša were committing. I watched them drive processions of Serbs, tied to each side of long metal chains, barefoot and in peasant rags. They were being taken towards the Velebit Heights and it was clear they were taking them there for execution. I remember well one column of Serbs which passed through the town. One of them was singing, in a thundering voice the well known Chetnik song: "Get ready, get ready Chetniks, it will be a great battle."

One day while I was working, an Ustaša officer came up to me and asked me to follow him because he needed my advice. He took me to a room full of table settings, crystal and vases. It was obvious that these items had been stolen from Serbian houses. He wanted me to choose for him the finest and most expensive table setting, plates, cups and glasses, because he was getting married and wanted to take all these things for his new apartment. He was not the slightest bit ashamed to take possession of these stolen items.

There were Italian officers moving around the streets of Gospić and throughout the area; they saw everything that was happening and yet did nothing to save these people from certain death.

### *The tragedy of Zagreb's young Jews*

At the end of May, 1941, young people in Zagreb, between the ages of 16 and 24, were arrested. They were told that they were going to a labour camp. There were 165 young people from the city, apart from a small number who either weren't in the records because of some mistake or who had managed to flee Zagreb in time, before the arrests, or those who were children of mixed marriages. Among those arrested was my wife's brother, Solomon Klugmann, a 23-year-old medical student, and many of my close friends, colleagues, friends from school and

acquaintances from my younger days. They came for me too, but I was already in the camp.

At first they were in the Danica camp, near Koprivnica, where they were forced to work on filling in anti-tank trenches. Conditions in the camp were harsh, the work was hard, the supervision was cruel and the food was inadequate. Despite all this the group had an enviable level of morale, with anyone who was able helping those were finding it very difficult.

After a month and a half they were transported to Gospić and from there to Jadovno camp. This camp was up in the hills in the middle of a forest, far from any inhabited places. The conditions there were particularly harsh. People slept on the ground under the open sky and were not permitted to change clothes when it rained. The work was very hard, up to twelve hours a day, accompanied by beating and swearing from the Ustaša guards. The rations bordered on starvation. Ten of the inmates were separated from the group and brought to Gospić. These were the self-styled street sweepers who I met. This group of young Jewish people from Zagreb, together with a group of Jews from various parts of Croatia and a large number of Serbs, were all killed in Jadovno at the beginning of August that year. How they were killed is not known.

The young people who were in compulsory labour in Gospić were later taken to Jasenovac and were all killed except for one, Božo Švarc, who escaped from the camp, joined the Partisans and was in the battle until the end of the war. Of the 165 young people arrested, only Božo Švarc and Saša Blivajs survived.

An article entitled *The arrest of 165 young Jewish people in Zagreb in May, 1941*, was published by the Zagreb Jewish Community in 1998 in their publication *Novi Omanut*. This article describes the tragic fate of these people and lists the names of all who were in the group. When I saw the names of my dear friends, I swore that would do something to preserve the memory of these wonderful young people. So I launched a campaign to erect a plaque with all their names. Today there is a beautiful plaque on the Jewish Community in Zagreb and another at the Ghetto Fighters House museum near Nahariya in Israel. The names of all the young people who perished are on both plaques.

### *In camp on a farm*

In mid-August we heard that the Italians would take over the military administration of the whole area and that the Ustaša would with-

draw from the region. All the inmates of the cinema were moved to a new camp. We “street sweepers” also received orders to move to the new camp, set up in an abandoned farm outside the town.

There was much more room than there had been in the cinema but there were also more people. The attitude of the Ustaša guards was much more cruel. One day, in the early evening, we were made to stand in the rain. There were about thirty or forty of us in the group. As soon as the rain stopped, the Ustaša put us in a tiny room. We were crammed in, leaning against one another, wet and freezing. It wasn't possible to sit because there was no space. We spent the night standing up and passed urine in our pants because there was no option. Not until just before dawn did the Ustaša allow us out of the room.

At that time new transports arrived in the camp from various parts of Croatia, mostly entire families. Groups from the camp on Pag also arrived. They said that they had been kept separate from the women and did not know what had happened to them. Later we found that the women and children had been killed shortly after their arrival in that camp. We also waited in vain for the inmates from Jadovno to arrive.

I was in this farm camp for several days. We were prepared to be transported to the interior of Croatia. The men were transported to Jasenovac and the women to Stara Gradiška. The Italians saw everything, but made no move to interfere.

### *Rescue*

On the morning of August 20, we received orders to proceed on foot to the railway station. We passed through fields on the outskirts of the town. We were surrounded by armed Ustaša guards forcing us to move forward. It was a very hot summer day. Suddenly I saw some people putting their belongings, their bags, on a farm cart. I hurried and also put my things on that cart. At that moment the driver shouted that there was no more room and told us to step away. He drove off and a wheel of the cart ran over my left foot. The pain was so intense I passed out and came to only once my friends had put me on the cart.

We were heading towards the railway station. I was screaming from the pain on the way and began to think that it could possibly be helpful to scream as much as possible.

We reached the railway station. I saw cattle wagons and people being forced into them. At this point two Ustaša officers came to me, took me from the cart and put me in their car. I was sure they were driv-

ing me out of town to execute me. It was a short drive. We pulled up outside a low building on which a sign in large letters read "Hospital".

The Ustaša took me from the car, into the building and put me into a bed. A doctor came and asked the Ustaša to leave the room. He asked me what had happened. I told him that I had been in the Jewish camp and that I had been injured. He examined me and told me that there was no damage. He then called the Ustaša who were waiting outside and told them, clearly and sharply, that I had to stay in hospital. The Ustaša left. I have been unable to find out who this doctor was who saved me with his persistence and dedication. But I have never forgotten what he did for me.

A few minutes later a young doctor whom I recognised came into the room. I knew him from the university and from secondary school I knew his name: Fulgozi. He didn't recognise me because I was younger. At first he didn't believe me when I told him who I was, so he asked me questions about who my teachers were. After I answered everything, he told me that a bed needed to be arranged for me in the hospital and left. After a short time he came back and told me that I actually didn't need any medical assistance and that I could disappear, because the Ustaša had left. He gave me a short note written on a hospital prescription form which read that I was receiving outpatient treatment in the hospital. I still have the note to this day.

I had no idea what to do, everything was happening so quickly. I was sitting in the hospital hallway, there was no one around. Suddenly I saw my parents. They had been at the railway station to see the transport and had heard that I was injured, so they came to the hospital. They took me into the town, to the room they had rented. I lay there in bed for five days, because I was still unable to walk and also so that, if anyone came, they would see that my leg was injured and that I was sick. The people in whose house we were living must have known what had happened to me and where I had come from, but they did not betray me.

The transport left with all the inmates. I have no information on how many saved themselves and survived all the horrors in the camps. I believe that the number who survived was small: almost all of those who were in that transport perished in the camps.

Five days later there were no more Ustaša in the town. Father found a taxi driver and made a deal with him to drive us to Crikvenica which, at that time, was just outside the Italian border.

The roads were completely empty, with no traffic. Suddenly we saw a car standing on the road and two Ustaša officers next to it. They stopped us and ordered the driver to get out of the car. We realised that their car had broken down. The driver managed to fix it and, in no time, we continued our journey. My mother was as white as a sheet.

### *Italy*

We reached Crikvenica. We crossed over to Sušak by boat and were already in Italy. There we met my grandmother who had come from Zagreb. We learnt that the Italian police were arresting refugees and sending them back to Croatian territory. However we managed to stay in the Sušak area for more than two months before we were arrested, put in prison for two days then transferred over the border, from where we again managed to return to Sušak.

Late one afternoon I was in the town when I suddenly noticed two people looking at me, talking to each other and slowly approaching me. It was obvious to me that they were police agents. I turned around and ran as fast as I could. They ran after me. We lived up a hill in the town. I ran as far as I could, up stairs and down narrow alleys. They didn't catch me.

At the end of December, led by a guide who received very good payment from us, we crossed the old border and reached Trieste by train. The journey was very complicated: we set off by boat, reached the other side of the border then travelled by buses and train before arriving. In Trieste we reported to the police as refugees and asked them to lock us up. They were very kind to us and said that they would accommodate us in a village, as prisoners, what they called *confino libero*, and that we could choose where we wanted to go. We asked for the province of Asti in Piedmont, because we knew that some cousins of ours were staying there. They gave us a ticket for travel and a letter for the mayor of the village of Cocconato, which was close to the town of Asti.

In this little village, not far from the city of Turin, there were about sixty Jewish refugees, twelve families. We were free, we could move around the village, but we needed to obtain permission, which was easily granted, to go into the town of Asti. We also received a little financial assistance. The villagers were really lovely people and the whole situation during our stay was very pleasant.

In the summer of 1942 I developed iridocyclitis, an eye inflammation which I had had several times previously and was sent to the hos-

pital in the town of Asti. I had a bed there in the main hospital and received very good treatment, all at the state's expense.

At the beginning of March, 1943, we received a letter from the mayor informing us that we would be moved to Ferramonti, a concentration camp in southern Italy, in Calabria. Families who had children or elderly members were permitted to stay in Cocconato.

The camp we now arrived at was officially known as Campo di concentramento Ferramonti di Tarsia. It was located in a very sparsely populated area, in the deep south of Italy, and was nothing like the concentration camps set up by the Germans or the Ustaša. The area was fenced off with wire (not barbed wire). Everyone had their own place to sleep. We were completely free to move around the camp during the day; in the evenings and at night we weren't allowed to leave the barracks. There were many activities in the camp: school for the children, lectures, concerts, religious services, various performances and active political work. The food was very poor, but we weren't starving. In the six months I spent there (from March to September 1943), no one died of abuse or of hunger.

At the beginning of September, 1943, the British Army crossed over from Sicily to southern Italy. The camp administration immediately opened the gates, took down the wire and we were free to leave the camp and walk around in the area, in the fields and woods, and to hide if retreating German troops should try to get into the camp and kill the inmates. A few days later British soldiers appeared and we were free.

I stayed in Bari for some time. I managed to enrol in the medical school there and was admitted into third year. I passed three exams and then signed up with the Partisans. I was sent to a Partisan hospital in a place called Grumo near Bari and, later on, I worked in the base headquarters in Bari. At that time my eyes became inflamed again and I spent more than two months in bed in a British military hospital.

### *Return home and emigration to Israel*

The war came to an end. I returned to Zagreb. It was sad and miserable. My parents had remained in Italy and most of my closest friends were no longer with us. I walked the city streets, looking at the windows of houses where my friends had once lived. There were now other people in those apartments.



But the hardest blow for me was when some people I know saw me and shouted "You've come back, too; actually a lot of you have come back!" It was very difficult to hear this.

I continued studying medicine as a military student. A year later I met the woman who is now my wife. We were married in 1947. I graduated in 1948 and became a physician.

My wife, Felicia (Licika) Sretna Klugmann, had endured a great deal during the Holocaust. She had been sixteen when the Germans entered Zagreb. Her father (Sigmund Klugmann, a Yugoslav Army colonel with a master's degree in pharmacy) was killed in Jasenovac, her brother (Soloman Klugmann) was in the group of young people in Jadovno and she herself was arrested with her mother in 1943 and put into the transport for Auschwitz. She managed to escape from the transport on the first day, from the yard of the prison on the Savska road, and hid for several months in the basement of the Jewish Community in Zagreb before joining the Partisans in Moslavina where she remained until the end of the war. Her mother was killed in Auschwitz.

In 1948 the state of Israel was founded and it became possible to emigrate to the new country. We applied for permission to leave the country, but I was denied this as a military student. With great difficulty however, I did get permission, thanks to President Tito after my wife spoke to his secretary and was granted an audience with him. It was mainly because of my eye that I received permission. However, in order for my demobilisation to be approved I had to pay an enormous sum of money to the Yugoslav Army.

We began a new life in Israel, first in Jerusalem, where our daughter Edna was born. I worked there as a doctor in the University Clinic for seven years. After that we moved to Haifa and later to Nahariya, where I was head of the department for children's diseases for 26 years.

We tried to forget everything we had been through, partly on purpose and partly because this happens over time. However I have never been able to forget the summer months of 1941. The faces of people I was with in those difficult times, and who are no longer living, often come to me in my sleep. I have never forgotten my friends from childhood, those with whom I grew up and who so tragically lost their lives at an early age.

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*Jolan STRAPAČ*

WITHOUT FRIENDS, NOT EVEN A BAPTISMAL  
CERTIFICATE WOULD HAVE HELPED



*Jolan Strapač was born on April 12, 1926, to father Dr Sigismund Schapringer, an engineer, and mother Ana, née Paunz. Her father was born in Pécs in Hungary, and her mother in Osijek. They married in Osijek in 1922.*

*The entire immediate and extended family of Jolan's mother perished in the camps, from Jasenovac and Dahau to Auschwitz. She has an elder sister, Valerija, who was born in Osijek on July 28, 1924, and with whom she lives in their family home. Her father Sigismund died in 1940, so they lost one parent very early and faced many difficulties together with their mother, especially in the years of general suffering which followed the death of their father. Although all three were interned in the Tenje camp near Osijek, they managed to escape and save their lives thanks to the efforts and kindness of their friends.*

*From her marriage to economist Lovro Strapač she has a son and daughter, both university graduates, and three grandchildren.*

*She lives in Osijek.*

My parents were Jews. My father lost his father very early so my uncle, Oskar Weissmayer, who lived and worked as a banker in Zagreb

but had no children of his own, put him through school. My father Sigismund studied in Germany, in Karlsruhe where, during his studies, he converted to Catholicism. He never spoke about his reason for this, but my mother Ana also converted at the time they were married. So we children, Valerija and I, became Catholics at birth. During our schooling we went to Catholic religious classes. Religion and nationality were never spoken of in our home. We celebrated all festivals, Catholic and Jewish.

My first encounter with anti-Semitism occurred when they registered us and gave us yellow bands with stars. The consequences of the yellow stars which we were required to wear on our sleeves included being avoided by some people who up to that point had claimed to be our friends. My good friend Neda Lukac was not one of these: she helped me as much as she was able, given her age. In our house nobody was involved in politics. My father used to say: "There is only one God, everything else is created by people." The most important thing is to be good and to respect everyone. Life has taught me that there are good people, just as there are bad.

For me and those closest to me, 1941 was a very difficult year. First they labelled us with the yellow arm-band while some people who were not only Jewish but also Freemasons wore bands on both arms. Every day there were new bans proclaimed in the newspaper *Hrvatski List*. For example, in the tram we were only allowed to ride in the trailer and only in the open section. We were allowed to go to the market only after 11.00 a.m., by which time everything had sold out or what remained was what people didn't want to buy, so it was always very difficult for us to buy anything. Jews were dismissed from the services and those who owned shops had administrators appointed to them before they were eventually confiscated. The Croatian



*Walking with her future husband, end of 1942*

authorities, together with members of the German *Kulturbund*, introduced what they called the contribution. This meant imposing on all members of the Jewish community the obligation to pay a certain amount of money with which they would somehow secure the right for themselves and their family members not to go to the camps. Bank accounts were also seized. An order was issued requiring all Jews to move out of the city centre. And so the family of Julije Herzl came to stay with us, his daughter Ilze, whose married name was Mirjana Mihić. As an officer of the general staff, her husband had been taken into captivity, while she had returned to Osijek with her two sons, Mihajlo and Danilo. So our family grew by six members. Their estate, a desolate stretch of land called Drvaruša had been seized from them. Fortunately they had an honest administrator who used to send them some food from the land.

It was a very hard blow for me when they expelled me from the sixth year of secondary school only because I was a Jew. There were also many Jewish teachers who were dismissed, for example Professor Miroslav Pollak, and Professor Dežma, who was an excellent mathematics teacher, Professor Gaun and many others whose names I don't remember. The Osijek Jewish Religious Community, as it was known, organised a school in an apartment, a secondary school with no public rights, so that the children would not waste time. Many people had no idea, or did not believe, all the things which were to happen. So I, too, attended this secondary school in 1941 and 1942, which helped me more easily to matriculate after the war. Things were getting harder and harder every day. When the harassment of Jewish families began, anyone who was able, and who had the money, tried to flee to Split and from there to Italy in an attempt to save their lives. Unfortunately only a small number of Jews managed to do this and to escape the camps and compulsory labour. Then large numbers of arrests began when the Jasenovac and Stara Gradiška camps were set up. All that was needed was for someone, out of sheer spite or for the sake of personal gain, to denounce a person as a communist or a Jew and that person would immediately be taken to the camps or, at best, to compulsory labour. When we went out we were only allowed to walk in twos, or at the most threes, and were required to keep out of the way of anyone coming in our direction.

In the spring, on March 1, 1942, the Jewish Community received orders to build a camp outside Osijek, towards a place called Tenje. Every day we had to finish school early and go to compulsory labour or,

as they called it, construction of a settlement for Jews. There were engineers and builders among us who, unfortunately, had to employ their skills in this way and we, the others, were unskilled labourers helping them. The famous Rijeka master craftsman Neurat was in charge of building the hygiene facilities, which did not include a classical bathroom, but just one room with taps and squat toilets. Given the situation in other camps this was a luxury.

Every day at the crack of dawn, from March 1 until we were finally taken away to camp on July 21, 1942, my sister and I went on foot to compulsory labour five or six kilometres away, taking short cuts across the fields. We worked from six in the morning until six in the evening, with a one-hour break for lunch, if anyone had anything to eat, which had to be brought from home. We were building a barracks, about three metres high with a roof. I remember well one hot summer noon before our lunch break. I was carrying buckets with mortar. As I passed a bucket to a young man named Eliša, he was overcome by heat and exhaustion and fell from the top of an almost completed wall of the barracks. Although he survived with only some major bruising, I'm not sure that this was a lucky escape because, as far as I know, he was taken to a camp in Germany and did not return. The camp was to be finished as soon as possible because people from nearby places were already being moved in. As far as I know there were about two thousand people in the camp.

I was still going to work every day when some of the inmates who had survived the camp typhoid epidemic were moved from the Đakovo camp to the Tenje camp. It was at this time that the secret, nocturnal removal of Osijek Jews to the Tenje camp began. Just as we thought they'd forgotten all about us, a man from the police rang at our door and asked us what religion we were. We were honest and said that we were baptised at birth but that our parents were Jews. He didn't know what he should do, so he took us to the police. That very day an officer named Tolj, a notorious anti-Semite had come to the Osijek police from Vinkovci. They took my mother, my sister and me to him. I still remember as if it were happening now the horrifying way he looked. In great fear we explained to him that my sister and I had been baptised since our birth and our mother since her marriage. Having heard this he said that my sister and I were free to go but that our mother had to go to camp. We both said that if she was going, we would go too. He just laughed cynically and said: "Well, then, go!" And that is how we came to arrive in the Tenje camp on July 21, 1942.

We had to report to an office at the camp entrance. There they asked us to turn over any valuables, our gold. They took the chains we wore around our necks, our earrings and a gold watch. They wrote everything down neatly and gave us a number, but I can't remember what it was.



*Saviour and saved: Neda Lukac (L) through whose efforts Jolan was saved from camp and (R) Jolan, from the days about which she writes*

On the second morning we were assigned to work. It was harvest time and I was assigned to work in the fields. I had never done this before, nor had I even held a shovel in my hand before that day. Fortunately I was given the job of binding wheat into sheaves. I was young and naïve at the time so, in some way, I thought this was the worst thing that could happen to me and I just accepted it as a fact, as something that had to be. Mother was assigned to work in the kitchen, and my sister in the garden. We slept in barracks, my sister downstairs and my mother and I upstairs. The lights were turned off at eight-thirty in the evening and the officer on duty would tour the barracks, checking that everyone was asleep. To this day, if I speak about this I see the officer passing through the barracks and, from my position, I see only part of his cap. I often squinted so it would seem as if I were asleep, because I was afraid, but in reality I would be watching through my eyelashes, to see if anything would happen.

A group of young people we called the “flying squad” went to the city every day to obtain supplies we were short of and to move inmates’ belongings out of their apartments. They also visited the Home in Donji Grad where elderly Jews who were unfit for work were interned. Once I managed to sneak out of the camp with the flying squad and visit the Home. This was the last time I saw my grandmother, my grandfather and my aunts alive. It was very hard to watch them. Some could hardly walk and there were others who were just lying on the stairs. On the way back I was very scared because, having sneaked out of the camp, I didn’t know how I would get back in. Fortunately for me, outside the camp there were children playing under the supervision of women who had been put in charge of them, so I managed to mingle in with them and return to the camp unnoticed. I don’t know what would have happened to me if I had been caught.

Had it not been for my best friend Neda Lukac, whose father was a senior officer in the Independent State of Croatia, I don’t know how my life story would have ended. Thanks to them we were released from the camp on August 7, 1942. I later discovered that, although he was an Ustaša, he saved two other Jewish families as well as us.

When we returned home we had to start our life again and find jobs, although we were not Aryan. I was fortunate that, before she fled to Italy with her family, Mrs Vinski had recommended me to Mr Ferdinand Speiser Jr. Mr Speiser didn’t care who was what but only about how someone worked and whether they wanted to work. When I began working, my great advantage was speaking German, which we used at home. I worked with Mr Furman, the chief book-keeper. What was even better was that this same Mr Furman worked in the factory at the time when my father was director there.

When I returned from the camp I met a very wonderful young man who could not seem to understand why they had taken me away to camp. He lived near me and saw them taking us away. This was my future husband, with whom I spent 56 years in a happy marriage. I have a son and a daughter who both have university degrees and have started their own families. I also have three grandchildren.

I am sorry about all my fellow sufferers who weren’t lucky enough to survive. This was an extraordinary young generation whose lives were destroyed as they were just beginning, and I always wonder why, because of whose insane ideas. With our memories of these grievous events, we also want them never to be repeated.



# III

## UNDER ITALIAN RULE





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*Gabi DELEON*

BORN THREE TIMES



**G***avrilo-Gabi Deleon was born in Belgrade in 1927 to father Leon and mother Loti, née Kajon. He had two elder brothers, Ašer-Bata, who lives between Paris and Belgrade, and Elijas-Eli who died recently. He graduated in mineralogy in 1951 from the Belgrade University Faculty of Natural Sciences and earned a doctorate from the same university's Faculty of Mining and Geology. Until 1971 he worked mainly for the Institute for Raw Nuclear Material Technology in Belgrade. Since then he has lived and worked in Sydney, Australia, in various industrial and academic institutions in the field of applied mineralogy.*

*For a number of years he was a member of the Executive Committee of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Yugoslavia and in this capacity in 1958 he attended the congress of the World Union of Jewish Students in Jerusalem, the first Yugoslav representative to do so.*

*He is married to Ana, née Vajs, of Subotica, a technology engineer. He has a daughter, Rut, and a son, Ivan.*

In the old Serbia and Yugoslavia there was only one Deleon family, that of my grandfather, Ašer Deleon, a Belgrade merchant who died immediately after the first world war. There is no record of any earlier history of the family. My father, Leon, had a brother Gavriilo for whom I was named. He was one of the first doctors of law in Serbia. He also

had a sister, Matilda. They all grew up and lived in Belgrade. My father was known in Belgrade business circles as a representative of the Slovenian and Austrian steel, wood and timber industries. Gavriilo died of tuberculosis during the first world war while Matilda disappeared during the Holocaust as an inmate of the Jewish camp at Sajmište.

My mother Loti, née Kajon, came from one of the many well-known Kajon families in Sarajevo. My father and mother met in 1913 during a tour of Belgrade's Serbian-Jewish choral association in that town.

Until the war began in 1941, my brothers and I attended school in Belgrade. Ašer was a student at the Belgrade University Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry. Eli was a secondary school graduate and I was finishing the third year of secondary school. Our family didn't lead a particularly strict Jewish religious life. Jewish traditions and the most important festivals were respected to some extent, but we were very actively involved in the activities of the Jewish community in Belgrade. My father held office several times in the Jewish Community. He was president of the Potpora humanitarian association and a member of the B'nai Brith lodge. My mother was an active member of the Jewish Women's Association before and after the second world war. At the time of her death she was deputy president. Because of all this, in the years preceding the war, many refugees passed through our house, mainly people from Austria and Czechoslovakia who were in transit through Yugoslavia and whom the Jewish community wanted to help. So anti-Semitic pogroms in Germany and other European countries with pro-Fascist regimes were a frequent topic of conversation in our house. It is interesting that contact with the broader community of Serbia and Yugoslavia was nurtured in our house, particularly on my father's side of the family, based on the romanticist patriotism and traditions of the Serbian people. For example, one detail which has remained in my memory: when I was twelve years old, under the influence of my friends, I mentioned the possibility of joining Hashomer Hatzair. My father was against this, saying it was more important for me to remain in Sokol, which I had been a member of for a number of years.

The war interrupted this comfortable life and even safer childhood.

During the April bombing of Belgrade, the family was together. After the first morning attack we fled the city centre, in which we lived. In search of safer parts of the city we passed suburbs then quite unknown to me, Voždovac and Kumodraž, and the area now known as

Šumice. It was then I experienced my first surprise and disappointment of the war, one which has followed me all my life. I came across rural people, in the midst of panic and confusion, selling drinking water from wells to refugees fleeing a city in flames. As a child I couldn't understand this. In two days, my father, my mother and I, as the youngest, were on a train for Sarajevo where my mother's extended family lived. People were counting on resistance to the aggressors to be mounted somewhere closer to the country's borders. At the same time my brothers, although they had not been conscripted, were heading south in search of an army unit they could join.

We arrived in Sarajevo a day or two before the city was bombed. The first German troops came in after this and the capitulation of Yugoslavia followed immediately. Because they hadn't managed to find a unit willing to enlist them, my brothers also turned up in Sarajevo during this time.

Within weeks of the establishment of the Independent State of Croatia, a series of drastic racist regulations and decrees were proclaimed. Many limitations were imposed on Jews, together with various personal humiliations in the form of yellow armbands, confiscation of property, a ban on conducting independent businesses, a ban on education, individual harassment and the desecration of synagogues and monuments. In contrast to the Independent State of Croatia, the Italian occupied zone seemed safer for Jews. At the end of May, Father went to Ljubljana to employ connections of his in order to move us there. From there he returned to Belgrade in an attempt to move his sister Matilda, a bedridden rheumatic, to Slovenia. However, while there he fell into the hands of the Germans who took him, along with hundreds of other Jewish hostages from Belgrade and Banat, to the Topovske Šupe camp. I no longer remember how, but he managed from there to get a short written message to us in Sarajevo. It ended "Pray for us." It is obvious that if he did not know with certainty the fate that awaited them, he at least sensed it. The testimonies of a handful of inmates who survived, and the existing historical documents, confirm the liquidation of this group of hostages.

At the same time my father went to Slovenia, my brothers left Sarajevo for Boka Kotorska, which was in the Italian occupation zone. For a full year we had no news of them at all.

Alone in Sarajevo, in the circle of our extended family, my mother and I tried to live some kind of normal life. Despite the anti-Jewish regu-

lations and constant harassment, there were no harsher reprisals and pogroms until the end of the summer.

At the beginning of September, 1941, about four hundred Jews, men, women and children, were unexpectedly interned. This coincided with the arrival of a notorious Ustaša official – Francetić, as far as I remember – accompanied by senior SS officers. We didn't know whether the internment was in retaliation for the first armed Partisan operations which were happening near the city at that time. By coincidence I happened to be spending the night with relatives in Marin-Dvor when a sudden raid was carried out, as it was in other parts of the town. We were all taken to what was then known as the Kralj Aleksandar barracks and put in warehouses there. At this point no one had any idea why we had been interned or what our fate was to be. On the fourth day we were all lined up so that Ustaša officials and German officers could walk between our lines. There was a young woman among them. As she passed my cousin and saw her with her husband and her children (seven and three years old), she stopped and said "Lori, why are you here too, and with the children?" It emerged that this was a woman from Sarajevo (I no longer remember her name) who had once been an intimate friend of her brother who had fled to Dalmatia and was now a companion of the Ustaša official. At her insistence, they separated my cousins and me from the others. Later, after quite a lot of persuasion, they let us go home. A few days later they allowed other women and under-age children to return home but sent all the men over sixteen to concentration camps in Croatia, from which no one returned. A few months later all the remaining Jews in Bosnia-Herzegovina, women and children included, were shipped to various concentration camps in the Independent State of Croatia, mainly Đakovo and Jasenovac, where they were killed. This is why I see this release from the Ustaša-German prison as my rebirth.

The following weeks passed with vigorously seeking a way to flee Sarajevo for any part of the Italian occupation zone. At the end of November, with some luck and courage, my mother managed to purchase false identification papers in fictitious Muslim names as well as travel passes and bus tickets for Split. We managed to get to the border of the Independent State of Croatia without serious problems. However in Metković, where we were crossing over into the Italian occupation zone, the Croatian border guards were suspicious about our documents and took us in at the border station. They insisted we tell them what the

origin of the documents was. For some time we refused to admit to anything, but the pressure became ever stronger and more cruel. It was alternating swearing and blackmail, with agents taking turns: the shouting and threats became stronger and our weeping all the louder. In the middle of this nightmare a young Italian lieutenant suddenly appeared on the first floor of the building asking what was happening and why a woman and a child were crying. When it was explained to him that the people in question were in possession of false documents, and that they were believed to be Jewish fugitives from Sarajevo, the young lieutenant ordered that we be brought immediately to his office on the floor above. There, with no Croatian police present, he explained to us that the situation was clear to him and that he would try to help us. He told us that he was the military commandant of the place, that the Croatian civil administration and the Italian military command were located in the same building and that, from that point on, we were under his protection. And so I was born for the third time.

That evening we were accommodated somewhere in the town, under guard, and the following morning we were taken by bus to a prison in Split. Through a combination of circumstances the prison was crowded with young patriots and Partisan sympathisers charged with the assassination a day or two earlier of an Italian army band which was passing through the town. (We learnt much later that several of them were executed for this). With the help of bribes we managed to send information on our whereabouts to our cousins in Split, together with a plea for them to do something. Everything which happened from there on was out of our hands. On our fourth day in prison, Mother and I were suddenly released and taken to the office of the Jewish-Italian organisation DELASEM. From there, together with a large group of Jewish refugees from all over Yugoslavia who had taken refuge in Dalmatia, we were taken under army escort aboard a boat which sailed for an unknown destination the same evening. The faces on board this ship were unfamiliar. I remember only my close friend Hari Štajner from Belgrade, and his mother, who had somehow reached Split. The next day we were in Sušak, from where we were taken by train to the town of Citadella, close to Vicenza in northern Italy. There we were divided into smaller groups of what they described as civilian war internees and these groups were scattered in villages and small localities in northern Italy. We were with another three people from Belgrade: a young couple named Nahmijas and an elderly gentleman whose name I don't

remember. We were taken to a small village called Rosa in the province of Vicenza, where we spent the next few months with only minor police supervision. I still remember our reception at the railway station of this tiny village: the commandant of the local *carabinieri* station with two assistants, the parish priest and sexton welcoming five civilian internees – a young couple, an old man who had great difficulty moving around and a mother with an underage son. As they took us from the station to the little village down a road about two kilometres long, from the pitch black, with only the outline of an unusually tall church steeple, the piercing and melodic voice of a child, an unforgettable sound, suddenly echoed the then popular Italian song “*Mamma, son tanto felice.*” (Mama, I’m so happy.) Was there something symbolic in this? It wasn’t clear to anyone in the group, not to us who had just arrived nor to those who had welcomed us, where we had arrived or why. Nor was it clear who these people were who were suddenly introducing changes to the routine daily life of this tiny village. Jews were more familiar to the locals from New Testament quotations than as human beings. Before this, probably none of them had had the opportunity to meet a single one of us. We were accommodated in a church building and monitored every day by the *carabinieri*. We were not allowed to do any work nor have any contact with the locals and I was not allowed to go to school. We were only allowed written contacts. At first this was adhered to strictly, but gradually it loosened and was forgotten. I remember feeling lonely as I watched, from the distance, the village children playing football in the church yard while I was not allowed to join them. Despite the ban, some people wanted to make things easier for us during the unusually harsh winter of 1942 and had the tacit approval of the village police commander for this. This applied particularly to the family of the local café owner, Baggio, who cordially welcomed us into her home to warm ourselves up. Acts such as this which, at first, may seem insignificant, over the difficult and dangerous years, instilled in me great faith in human kindness.

Through my father’s Slovenian business friends in Ljubljana and their Italian connections, we managed to learn that my brothers were interned in the concentration camp in Ferramonti, in southern Italy. This was an admirable act on their part, not just as a demonstration of friendship but particularly as an act of civil courage. Our friends from Ljubljana, Slave Simončič and his wife Vera, who was of Czech origin, would visit us from time to time and give us the money Father had left

behind in Ljubljana. At the same time they contacted their Italian business friend and extreme anti-Fascist Acchile Ceccarelli from the little town of San Benedetto del Tronto on the Italian Adriatic coast. He took it on himself to have my two brothers released from camp and their status changed to that of civilian internees. Thanks to the legal regulations on reuniting the families of war internees, he succeeded through personal intervention in the ministries concerned in getting them out of the camp and reunited with my mother. And so, sometime in the summer or autumn of 1942, mother and three sons found themselves back together in one place in northern Italy. This humanitarianism of Acchile Ceccarelli, a man who had never met my father and whom our family had not met before our arrival in Italy, is worthy of recognition. We never discovered, not even later, whether and to what degree there was risk involved in his efforts to secure the release of my brothers from the camp. To do this he had to travel to Rome a number of times to personally ensure that the request was positively resolved. In addition, when they were released from the camp, he took advantage of their journey from the far south to the north of Italy, where we were interned, to first take them into his home and feed and dress them decently so they would be looking better when they met Mother. It sounds incredible, but it is true, that all of this was done spontaneously, without the least personal gain for him.

For me personally, the reunion with my elder brothers was extremely important. In their camp, on the initiative of the internees themselves, there had been some kind of educational classes organised for children of school age. Now they shared this experience by passing it on to me and, later, to a broad circle of child internees in the place we lived. My elder brother Ašer taught us literature, French and history, and my middle brother Eli, mathematics, physics, chemistry and geography. The knowledge I acquired in this period made it much easier for me to fit into the normal school program immediately after the war, in both Italy and Yugoslavia.

At the end of 1942, we moved to the nearby village of Sandrigo, in the same province, Vicenza, where we joined a rather bigger group of civilian internees from Yugoslavia. I remember the family of the Belgrade merchant Maclijah, who had a son and two daughters, and the two Mandil sisters with a small child. There were also another two families, one from Belgrade and the other from Kranj, whose names I don't remember. At this time there was increased tension for Jewish and other

internees in Italy because the fortunes of war had begun to change to the advantage of the anti-Fascist coalition. This became particularly obvious in the period following the fall of the Mussolini government in July, 1943, and the final capitulation of Italy in September the same year. I remember the long and largely unrealistic debates during those months on whether there should be an attempt to flee to Spain, which was, officially at least, neutral. In our family we decided that we had a better chance of a speedy return to our home country if we were closer to it and rejected the idea. We were deeply attached to our country and, by this time, there was quite a lot of information on the resistance against the occupying forces. Both my brothers wanted to join the liberation movement as soon as possible, particularly Ašer who, even before the war, at Belgrade University, had been in close contact with the leftist student movement. But even more than this, we had heard nothing about Father so we wanted to find him and clung to the hope that we would find him alive in Belgrade. We spent the months leading up to the capitulation of Italy expecting major changes every day.

On the day of the capitulation the majority of us internees in Sandrigo decided that we should leave the place. At that time, the Allied forces were already penetrating deeply from the south of Italy and the Germans from the north, trying to replace the Italian troops which were falling apart. Because of this it was decided that we would be safer trying to cross the front than going over the Alps into Switzerland. The president of the village municipality issued us with identification papers as Italian refugees from the north.

Those days were the beginning of the country's total collapse. The Italian Army was falling apart, its members just wanting to get to their homes as soon as possible. The Germany Army was occupying more and more cities. We thirteen former inmates took a train for Rome with no idea how far we would get, and found ourselves between the advancing Allied troops and the occupying German Army. Through a combination of circumstances the train arrived at the main railway station in Rome at night, during a curfew, at the exact same time as the German armoured forces arrived, occupying the city. In Sandrigo, Italian friends had given someone from the group the address of their cousin to whom we could turn for help in finding temporary accommodation. Because the railway station was packed and we were exhausted from the long journey, my brothers and I crept into a wagon on a side track and fell asleep. We suddenly awoke to find we were moving. It was dawn



already and we were in a train which was leaving the station. My brothers somehow jumped from the train, but the other passengers held me back at the door, fearing I would kill myself. I was on a train travelling in an unknown direction, with no personal documents and no train ticket. I learnt from the passengers that we were travelling eastward, toward Avezzano. I kept telling them the story I had learnt by heart, that I was a refugee from the north who had come with my family to Rome, and that I had to join them. The station master was waiting for me at the first stop with the information that my family was waiting for me at the station in Rome, and made it possible for me to return without a ticket.

At first glance I saw no one from our group on the platform at the Rome railway station. Then I suddenly noticed my brothers, who were pretending not to know me. It was clear to me that everyone else had scattered, in case I had been caught as a fugitive internee and followed by the police or the Germans in order to get to the rest of the group. After passing through the station in several directions and making sure that no one was following me, my brothers came up to me and took me to the northern outskirts of the city where part of our group had accommodation. For the first few days we lived in complete isolation, doing our best to remain unnoticed. We did not go out at all. Eventually, as the youngest of the group, I was given the role of courier and supplier for several families scattered around the city. I very quickly got to know the city really well, and thus was easily able to deliver supplies. We all believed that this was a temporary situation and that the Allied troops would soon manage to get through to Rome. However the reality turned out to be very different. Almost nine months would have to pass before they arrived. Naturally this extended sojourn in the city called for a different way of solving problems. First it was necessary to obtain authentic identification papers. At that time these were not difficult to obtain, because these documents were issued on the basis of statements from two witnesses. And these were easy to find, for cash, in any institution. So right up to the liberation of the city, we had a new surname – Deluca. We also found new accommodation.

We had many difficult episodes in Rome. During the raids on Jews in the autumn of 1943, we sheltered in the basement of the building we lived in. I don't know how much use this would have been if our neighbours, who had some idea about us, had been inclined to denounce us. We also went out into the streets with the neighbouring residents during the frequent short daytime or night bombing of the city. We were parti-

cularly insecure whenever my elder brother Ašer was absent, taking part in Partisan operations out of town.

However, in spite of the difficulties and dangers, our months in this city had the result of alleviating tension and ignoring the dangers which lurked on all sides. For most of us, Rome was a special experience. Even under occupation, the city could offer certain pleasant moments. I particularly remember the extraordinary but infrequent performances at the Rome Opera, which we attended, despite the risk involved. After two years spent in villages in northern Italy, these were special experiences.

I was still in Rome for the liberation from Fascism at the beginning of June, 1944, when the British and American troops entered the city. We thought we were just one step away from the end of the war and our return home. However it would be another year before this happened. My brothers immediately joined the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia while I was in Bari and Brindisi in southern Italy with my mother until the end of the war. At the end of May, 1945, we came to Belgrade, by way of Split and Zadar. There we faced the reality that Father had disappeared in the Topovske Šupe camp, he was probably executed in Jajinci, and his sister and part of his extended family from Belgrade had disappeared in the Sajmište camp. More than half of my mother's large family from Sarajevo perished in the Holocaust.

My most impressive memory from the period just after our return is that of my mother's encounter with a stranger, a clerk in an institution. When he heard her last name and learnt about my father's fate, he approached her and said: "Madam, I used to have contacts with your husband. I want to tell you that we have all lost in him an extremely honest man." Never before or after in my life have I felt so proud.

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*Dr Paja CINER*

## ROLL-CALL OF DEATH IN TAŠMAJDAN



*Dr Paja Ciner was born in Bela Crkva in 1922, to father Dr Max Zinner, a lawyer in Bela Crkva at the time, later in Vršac, and to mother Irma, née Szigeti.*

*He has lived in Belgrade since the age of fifteen. He lost his father very early, before he turned twelve, and his mother perished as an inmate of the Sajmište camp near Zemun.*

*In Belgrade, as an excellent student, he was exempted from the matriculation examination when he finished secondary school. After the war he graduated from the Belgrade University Mechanical Engineering Faculty. He experienced all the atrocities of war and persecution of Jews, saving himself by fleeing Belgrade via Kosovo and Albania to Dalmatia, then staying in Italian camps until he returned to the country and joined the National Liberation Army. In 1977 he was awarded a doctorate in the field of automation. Until 1970, he worked at the Military Technical Institute and was later a lecturer and full professor at the Technical Military Academy in Zagreb and in the mechanical engineering and naval architecture faculties at the universities in Zagreb and Ljubljana until his retirement in 1983. He was very active in social and professional organisations.*

*He lives in Belgrade with his wife Olivera, née Janković.*

My youth and my expectations of life were brought to a sudden and cruel halt by the outbreak of war and permanently marked by the tragic events which ensued. This is not only my experience, it is also the tragic collective experience of the Jewish people. The very few who remained alive were left with traumas and scars which time cannot heal.

My memories of warm family life interrupted by the death of my father and, later, by parting from my mother and her murder, go back to the days when I was a young boy. Because my parents had already lost two children before I was born, they paid close attention to my health, which wasn't enviable given that I was so thin. In gymnastics classes I was always the last in line, but when it came to studying I was among the first. One world collapsed for me when my father died two days before my twelfth birthday although, financially, mother and I were secure. I was fifteen when we moved from Vršac to Belgrade and I enrolled in the Second Boys' General Program Secondary School. The *Anschluss*, the Czech crisis and the beginning of the war were of decisive importance to me in spurring me to seek answers to many questions I was asking myself. I spent the summer holiday after my matriculation purposefully reading Marxist literature and establishing connections with progressive youth.

The *Numerus Clausus*, which awaited me at the door of the Engineering Faculty at Belgrade University, was yet another confirmation that I had made the right choice. As an excellent student I was exempted from the requirement to take the matriculation examination. However I was admitted to the faculty based on the merit and authority of my father. He had been president of the Jewish Community in Bela Crkva for one term and of the Jewish Community in Vršac for a number of years. I took part in student movement activities with the same passion with which I attended lectures and classes. This culminated in my taking part in demonstrations against the signing of the pact with the Axis on the evening of March 26 in Belgrade. Luckily I managed to evade arrest. That night the coup was carried out against General Simović and the following day, March 27, all of Belgrade was on its feet in general rejoicing.

I was in the streets at the time of the bombing of Belgrade, in the morning of April 6, 1941. My best friend, Ivan Singer, and I had set off to the USSR Embassy to welcome the signing of the Soviet-Yugoslav pact on non-aggression. Late in the evening of April 5, one of our col-

leagues, a member of SKOJ, informed us about the apparent signing of the pact and the planned assembly outside the Embassy.



*Maks and Irma, Paja Ciner's parents,  
about 1912*

full of fear, threats, horror and despair and we too were caught up in this. Convoys of German Army vehicles, German commands in public buildings with huge swastikas, German military slogans in the streets. Bilingual notices and orders such as "... under threat of death sentence a ban is enforced ...", "... a death sentence has been executed on ... Jews and communists ... in retaliation for ...", and, all this insanity was embellished with the refrain "*für Juden verboten*" – "forbidden for Jews". One of the many bilingual orders demanded, under threat of a death sentence of course, that all adult Jews report for compulsory labour by April 19, 1941 at the latest.

One day after the bombing I left Belgrade with Ivan. We headed for Bosnia, assuming that defence would be organised from there. Seven days later, in bombed-out Sarajevo, they refused us when we wanted to join the volunteers, so we set off south. We arrived in Mostar, which was as far as the train went. The Ustaša had taken over the airport. There was a general exodus to Nevesinje. There in Nevesinje we learnt about the capitulation of the Yugoslav Army. Fearing Ustaša ambushes on the way to the coast we decided against attempting to flee the country by ship. Instead we made a great mistake by deciding to return home: I to Belgrade and Ivan to Vršac.

A scarred and occupied Belgrade was waiting for us,

My first “workplace” was the site of a demolished building on the left side of Makenzijeva Street. We were to dig up and remove the remains of those killed in the bombing. The bodies were already in a state of decomposition. My specialty was the disinfection of bodies with quicklime. The stench was unbearable. I paused to breathe in a little fresh air out in the street. Two German soldiers were passing and a powerful kick from behind put me back in the hole. The humiliation was worse than the stench. In Zeleni Venac a bomb had cut a vertical cross-section of three floors of the building we were clearing, that’s how I remember it. I have forgotten the others. We were also cleaning the streets, I remember being in Cvijićeva Street. We also beat rugs in the court park.

We were young, determined to persevere, we encouraged one another with jokes, endured humiliation with internal resistance, dreamt the impossible. We used our free time to gather in youth organisations, monitor events and maintain our faith in the future and in victory over evil.

When the war began I had the desire not to be killed on the first day so I could see what war was like! I saw too much of it, and in the shortest time possible and in the most tangible way! The bombing of Sarajevo caught Ivan and me (during our first flight) in a meadow in Potekija, two hundred metres from a railway line which was being targeted by aircraft. The bombs were buzzing and one was making an increasingly deep roar which ended in an ear-splitting explosion and darkness. The next moment it seemed to me, and was probably the case, that I was high above the ground. There were tiny people below me running around in chaos. “So this is what death is like,” I thought, before falling heavily on the soft ground next to Ivan who was half-buried under a mound of earth. It wasn’t death, but it had missed both of us by a hair’s breadth.

July 27, 1941, was my second birthday, because this was the day I came closest to death. I can take the credit for salvation myself, or at least it should go to my command of German and a bold decision at a crucial moment. The day before a rumour had spread among Jews, although there had been no official notice, that an *appell*, a roll-call, would be held that day in Tašmajdan. You never knew with these roll-calls whether you were falling into a trap by attending or whether, if you didn’t go, they would hunt you down in the streets later. Because of the way it was scheduled, unofficially, on Saturday for Sunday, the lo-

gical conclusion was that the trap lay in not going, so we all hurried to report. My first suspicion that I had made a mistake in coming was aroused when they sorted us according to status: students, teachers, merchants and so on. My suspicions grew when I heard that a young Jewish man had sabotaged a German truck. Just before they began counting us, the name Almozlino was read out loudly with the order to report, and everything was clear to me. I made the firm decision that if my name was called I would escape at the first opportunity. I had a fifty-fifty chance of success, as opposed to a certain zero in front of a firing squad. I was standing in a group of students, between my school friend Josip Rex and his younger brother, Tibor. (They both survived the Holocaust and lived in Hungary after the war.) Every fifth person was taken out of the group. The first Rex was fourth and I, as fifth, was taken out of the group while the agent was taking out subsequent fifths. While this was happening I was standing off to the side and talking to a teacher from a group standing next to us. He tried to reassure me, saying they must need a certain number of labourers for some job and I had no reason to fear. I remember telling him that, unfortunately, I knew very well what it was all about! Then, suddenly, I thought of my mother: what a blow this would be for her! And then I remembered my early decision and, when the agent began taking those of us who had been selected to the German commandant, I slowly began lagging behind while I assessed the situation. At that moment I heard: "*Fünf ist genug einer ist überflüssig*," (Five is enough, there's one too many), at which I immediately turned around and quickly went back to stand between the two Rex brothers. Behind me I heard the agent ask: "Who was... ", but he didn't finish the question. I suppose he noticed that I had already gone but that he also had enough people, the required number. As for whether the agent had selected an additional person by chance, or my talk with the teacher was the reason for this, I have no idea. The following day I read in the newspaper that "... in retaliation ... for ... 122 Jews and communists have been executed ...".

After this incident it was clear to me that this was a struggle for life itself and that I mustn't allow them to kill me like a sheep. At about this time I was admitted into SKOJ (the League of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia). Admission was a demonstration of great trust in a person, and the assumption of responsibility. I immediately signed up to join the Partisans, something I had decided on earlier. Our group met by prior agreement at the railway station on August 21. To our surprise the group

leader said he was unable to go because of appendicitis and introduced us to a comrade we had not seen before, saying she was his deputy. This would have all been more or less alright had she not taken us off the train in Kijevo instead of in Ripanj where our contact was to meet us. We decided to proceed on foot, in groups of two or three, taking different routes, to Resnik and from there to get a train for Ripanj. However when we reached Ripanj, the contact was not waiting for us. In order not to appear obvious at the station, with rucksacks on our backs, we went to a nearby cornfield to decide on what to do while the deputy returned to Belgrade to get in touch with our contact. On our way we passed German soldiers deployed along the road. As the second half our group were to arrive on the afternoon train, we decided to wait for them and get in touch with their contact. We decided that another comrade and I would go to the station to meet the contact. It turned out that our group was to be their contact. This meant that neither we nor they had a contact. We took this group into hiding with us along the same road. During the night we came to the conclusion that the best solution was to return to Belgrade on the first train in the morning and re-establish contact. We were lucky that there wasn't any special control at the station in Belgrade, which was not the case for passengers on the following train, who were searched. Later we learnt that there had been some disclosures during that period, so our network had been broken.

This failure really rattled me. The main question now was when we would establish new routes for departure. And in the meantime, how many other people would find themselves in more danger than me, and further delay me getting another chance to leave? I had become fair game again, with little chance of a new departure. I had to return to compulsory labour because my sick leave, which I had taken to cover my flight, had expired. Raids, arrests and executions continued at the same pace. At that time I had a close encounter with an arrest in Dorćol, where I was caught up in a raid. As I came out of a house where I had attended a meeting, I saw German soldiers approaching from both ends of the street. I could hardly return to the house because I would have put the people living there in jeopardy. I was saved by a vacant lot across from the house which I had spotted, so I managed to escape the trap. Jews arrested in raids were taken to the Topovske Šupe camp, which had supposedly been set up to accommodate Jewish men brought by force from Banat. However it quickly became a proper concentration camp for all Jews. Groups of about a hundred people would be taken from the camp,



supposedly for labour, but this was labour from which they never returned. It very soon became clear to everyone what was happening and what going to Topovske Šupe meant. It meant extermination.

One Saturday at the end of October we were at our workplace when, at about noon, our supervisor, a German non-commissioned officer named Konrad, told us that after work, at 3.00 p.m., the Gestapo would come to take us to Topovske Šupe. Because of this, he said, he would allow us to finish early in order to go home and pack our things for our departure. Camp meant death, I knew, so I certainly was not going to return to work! I didn't go home for my things, instead I hurried to find Ivan's father, Dr Josif Singer (he had treated me when I was a boy because our parents socialised together and were close friends). At that time Ivan was living with Dr Eškenazi, the head of the Jewish Hospital in Belgrade, for home care. I went to Ivan. Dr Eškenazi's daughter, who was about the same age as us and worked as a nurse in the Jewish Hospital, was also there. She found Ivan's father and he consulted with Dr Eškenazi. Together they declared me terminally ill, a young man unfit for work who should be allowed to die at home. (Dr Josif Singer saved his son Ivan and me but, unfortunately, failed to save himself or the rest of his family. Dr Eškenazi and his family survived the Holocaust.) So I largely escaped the immediate danger hanging over me thanks again to the fortunate circumstance of having come across a person, rarely found among the Germans, who saw that we Jews were human beings and warned us about what lay in store for us. However I was crushed by the knowledge that the Gestapo had decided that all able-bodied Jews should be incarcerated that day in a concentration camp. A concentration camp from which Jews were shipped off to "labour" from which they would not return. We were intended for immediate liquidation. So we had to flee as soon as possible, because tomorrow might already be too late. But where to? And how to flee?

I planned to flee by joining the Partisans. Ivan took a different approach – leaving the country using false documents. There were many offers for these on the black market, for a great deal of money. Even if one had the money, it was difficult to discriminate between honest people offering these services and swindlers who took from many people the last money they had by demanding advance payments. Because Ivan was staying with the Eškenazi family who were preparing for their own departure, he had the opportunity to see many

offers they considered and so gained valuable experience in choosing the best option.

Jewish men were subject to all measures of repression, persecution, internment in camps and execution, but their wives and children were left in their apartments, free and in peace. This gave the women a feeling of false security in the sense that nothing worse could or would happen to them than those restrictions which had already been applied. Some of the men were also taken in by this base ploy. Unfortunately Ivan's father also fell for it, believing that, on the basis of having been highly decorated by the Germans in World War One, he could secure the right to depart legally for himself and his family. I was also included in this fantasy as a fiancé of Ivan's sister, Ana. However he fell into the trap of one of the many raids, was taken to Topovske Šupe and perished with the others. The last little money he had was stashed away with friends, earmarked for the purchase of false documents for Ivan and his flight to Split, to the Italian zone of occupation. He believed that fleeing to Hungary was not a secure solution and, later, this was proven to be true.

My dear mother spent all the money she had managed to save on documents for me, firmly assuring me that she would not be exposed to any danger if she remained in Belgrade. She consciously sacrificed herself for her son and we both knew that. My only comfort is the fact that I managed to call her from Priština, as we had agreed, and that she knew her sacrifice had not been in vain. I saw my mother for the last time at the house of friends, on the afternoon before my departure, because I did not sleep at home on the night before I left. Even now, sixty years later, I still see the same image: I was standing in the middle of an empty room without furniture (a parquet floor was being laid), still daylight; on my left there was a white door, half-open, Mother standing in it, looking in my direction but already on her way out.

I had an employment record book issued by the labour exchange in the name of Pavle Šicarević which I had obtained through the League of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia when I was preparing to leave to join the Partisans. Ivan had a baptismal certificate from the Catholic Church in the name of Boris Sojka. Its original owner was using a different surname which he had acquired when his mother remarried. So the Church's refusal to recognise divorce made it possible for Ivan to obtain a new identity. Taking advantage of the experience gained while staying with the Eškenazi family, Ivan had chosen the best. As well as

having documents, it was also necessary to have protection against any traps, to have an escort in dangerous places, to be instructed on how to behave before and during the trip, in other words to have everything properly organised.



*Berta Sigeti, Paja Ciner's maternal grandmother; died in a ghetto in Budapest in 1944*

A day before we left, my school friend Boris Magulac (he was killed as a Partisan on the Srem front), checked in our bags at the left luggage office at the railway station and brought the receipts home to me. The first danger point was arriving at the railway station. For this reason, when our train left, Bora was at the station again so he could call my mother and tell her we had cleared the first hurdle.

We also met our escort, Branko, and agreed with him on everything in detail, as well as when and where we would meet near the station before the train left. He would buy the train tickets, retrieve our bags from the left luggage office, board the train

with us and travel with us as long as necessary. He would hand us over to the conductor who would take us to a safe hotel for the night in Niš. The next day we would continue on our own to Kuršumljija, that is to the Kuršumljija Spa. The document itself was a *lasciapassare* (pass) issued by the Italian Embassy in Belgrade and verified by the German occupation authorities for our return to Split which was, allegedly, our home. We were supposedly in Belgrade as students at the university and were returning home to our parents.

We were advised against sleeping in our homes on the night before our departure and took this advice. Our acquaintances who agreed to take us in for the night were not exactly comfortable with this, and were very frightened during the evening and the whole night. Unfortunately we had arrived at their place just before the curfew so we were unable to leave.

We left Belgrade on November 21, 1941, in the morning while it was still dark, jumping into the train as it left the station. Our escort was so late that we were both desperate, thinking that we had been conned after all. Branko claimed that one of his family members was ill and that this was why he was late. He bought the tickets on the train from the conductor, paying an extra fee. In all this rush, Ivan managed to spot Bora at the station, so we knew that our mothers would be informed. When I think about all this today, I'm not sure whether Branko arriving late might not have been part of the plan, in order to reduce to a minimum the time we spent hanging around the station. When the carriage, which had been packed when the train set off, emptied out a little at stops along the way, Branko managed to talk to the conductor and disappeared soon after. At the station in Niš, the officer at the exit stopped us because we didn't have train tickets. They were with Branko. Terrified at the possible consequences we began to search in our pockets. In the pocket of my coat I felt a round, metal object – a yellow pin, compulsory for Jews. My legs turned to jelly. At that moment the conductor appeared and explained to the officer that he had charged us for the tickets, proving this with his signature. When he took us with him he explained to us that he would take us to a hotel, as Branko had asked him to. It is possible, although by no means certain, that Branko had forgotten to give us our tickets through sheer carelessness. However in this way, although it was frightening for us, it was possible for the conductor to do his part of the job discreetly, without us talking about it, and take us to a particular hotel in Niš. We filled in the forms and paid for the room in advance and they brought us dinner to our room so we would not have to go to the restaurant.

Our company at the Kuršumljia Spa was diverse, not the least what one would expect in a spa, either in appearance or mood. It included a Jewish family we knew well from Vršac. The border with the Italian zone of occupation was temporarily closed. One night our entire company was taken to the Serbian police station. We were standing in line, horrified, because this could have been an ignominious end to a well-devised endeavour. I heard, right beside me, a conversation between the two gendarmes taking us in. One of them said: "The one on the right (that was me) looks to me like a Jew, but the other one (Ivan) doesn't." These police officers obviously kept what they knew or suspected to themselves, because we all received "pass grades".

Soon after this check, the border was reopened and we set off in a horse-drawn cart. In Podujevo we spent the night in Albanian lodgings because, for our taste, there were too many German soldiers at the hotel. The next day, in the same transport and with the same driver, we continued on to Priština which was already part of the Italian zone. At the border crossing our documents successfully passed the test. This was partly because of the merry atmosphere we created by our attempts to hold a conversation in Italian.

We took this cheerful mood with us, it was overtaking us more and more. Was it possible that we had really made it and escaped from hell? Well, the world is not only about threats, persecution and violent death! There's also life in the world, simply human life for living with all its joy and sadness. We were young again, full of joy, optimism and faith, rejoicing in life. However the border with hell was too close for us to give up on our original destination – Split and the sea. We travelled with the help of truck drivers who were carrying cargo to Skadar. Frozen, but happy, lying on tarpaulins, we passed through the most beautiful mountainous regions.

After travelling through these rugged areas we reached Skadar. This was already far enough from the threatening hell, warmed by the coastal sun and it seemed to us that we had reached a small haven. The little money we had brought with us was rapidly melting away, so we decided to look for employment. We didn't find a job, but an agent found us and took us straight to the quaestor, the Italian police chief and his assistant. We spoke French, because the quaestor was fluent in that language. He explained to us that we had entered Albania illegally because we didn't have Albanian visas. He accepted our explanations and, once he and his assistant had inspected our documents, he stamped Albanian visas on them and signed them on the spot. And so in this way we got our first visa with fake documents. We were fortunate in that both police officers looked at the documents separately, that is they each inspected one of our documents. This way they failed to notice that the numbers on both documents were blurred and unclear. However this did not escape the eye of the receptionist at a hotel in Dürres when we arrived there the next day to continue our journey to Split. In Dürres we discovered that the next ship for Split would not leave for another week. The fact that idle people who have achieved unexpected success are capable of the most blatant stupidity is something we proved to ourselves while we were waiting for the ship to sail.

The kind *quaestor* in Skadar had suggested to us, among other things, that we go to the Italian Embassy in Tirana for financial assistance to cover our travel expense to Split. No sooner said than done! It was incredibly lucky for us that the officer in charge of this wasn't at the Embassy so his associate advised us to leave our documents and return in an hour when he would be there. So Laurel and Hardy cleverly left their documents there. We had taken only a few steps into the street when we realised that the Italian Embassy was the only place in the whole of Albania, and probably beyond, where they were sure to discover the documents were fake. We returned in a panic and managed to get our papers back, with the excuse that our bus was leaving early. We had confirmation of the joke "Speak Serbian so the whole world understands you," in Dürres when we asked a shoeshine boy where we could spend the night. Because we spoke neither Albanian nor Italian, we asked him in German, French, English and Hungarian. When I finally exclaimed: "Is it possible that he doesn't understand anything at all," he just looked at us and said: "Well, why don't you speak Serbian so I can understand you!"

The ship berthed at Split at four in the afternoon and the curfew began at six. Fortunately Ivan had good and dear friends who took us in immediately and without hesitation. Thanks to them and their connections we managed to legalise our status in Split and to earn a living. However this idyll did not last long: in July 1942 we were arrested in a raid. Up to that point Jews who had been arrested would usually be sent into confinement in Italy. Hoping that they would do the same with us, we revealed our true identities to them. We were wrong, because they threw us into the Scipione di Salsomaggiore concentration camp in the province of Parma. In July, 1943, the whole camp was moved to the Ferramonti di Tarsia concentration camp in the province of Cosenza. This camp virtually fell apart after the British Eighth Army landed in southern Italy on September 3, 1943. We left the camp on September 5 with a group of inmates who had chosen to return to Yugoslavia and join the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia.

The First Overseas Brigade of the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia had formed in Bari at the time and we immediately joined. I was deputy commissioner of the Second Company of the Second Battalion of the brigade when, on the morning of December 2, 1943, we boarded our ship, the Bakar, to transfer to Yugoslavia at night. In the winter night I found a warm spot to lie on the upper deck beside the

hatch to the engine room. Looking at the starry night and hearing the sound of aircraft, I was thinking to myself that these were “our guys” returning from a bombing raid because there had been no air raid siren. When the first bombs fell and the sky turned red, the siren also began. “Their guys” had been flying behind “our guys” and, with this trick, managed to make hell in the port full of ships. I saw that all hell was about to break loose, so I sought shelter on the lower deck. A huge piece of steel fell where I had been lying. “Jude” had managed to escape from them once more!

We disembarked from the Bakar in Starigrad on the island of Hvar. The beast once hunted out was returning to his homeland, but armed and in the ranks of the liberation army. From Starigrad the unit transferred to Grohote on Šolta, from where it would carry out a landing operation on the shore. However during the very execution of this task the vessels were redirected to Brač because the place for landing was now in danger from the enemy. In Nerežišća on Brač, I suffered a bad bout of malaria, which I saw as a souvenir of my sojourn in the swampy area of Ferramonti. From Brač we sailed to Vis where I ended up in the hospital in Komiža and then in Podhumlje. Between my bouts of illness I was a translator in a British surgical team, assigned to our army. Following my recovery I moved to the Naval Command’s division for communications with the Allies in liberated Split.

After the war I asked to be demobilised so that I could continue my engineering studies. Instead I was sent, in December 1945, to work with the Military Mission of the Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia in Germany, in the Repatriation Division in the British Zone. I was first a secretary and then assistant department head until the end of 1948 when, after my repeated requests, I was returned to Belgrade. At the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering at Belgrade University, as an active officer, I first studied part-time and later as a full-time student. I graduated in 1954. Until 1970 I worked in the Military Technical Institute in Belgrade, developing hydraulic systems for mechanisation and automatic control. I underwent specialist training in France and in the USA. As a tenured professor and head of the Automatic Control Department of the Technical Military Academy in Zagreb, I taught classes in hydraulic and pneumatic devices, automatic control, and mechanical elements of automation. I was awarded a doctorate in the field of automation in 1977. I taught subjects in this field to graduate and post-graduate students both at the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering and

Naval Architecture of Zagreb University and at the Engineering Faculty of Ljubljana University.

I retired in 1983 with the rank of colonel and continued teaching as an associate professor. I was chairman of the committee for the professional conference of the Yugoslav Association for Electronics, Telecommunications, Automation and Nuclear Engineering (ETAN) from 1967 to 1981 and, from then until the break-up of Yugoslavia, I was a member of the presidency and, for one term, president of this association.

My wife Olivera, née Janković, transformed my solitary state into a warm home.



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*Mirjam FERERA*

USTAŠA, GERMANS, ITALIANS...



*M*irjam Ferera was born in Dubrovnik in 1925 to father Moric and mother Stela. The surname of her maternal grandfather was Finci and he moved from Sarajevo to Dubrovnik, where he opened a business. He died very young. His wife, Mirjam's grandmother Mirjam, after whom she was named, died in Trieste after undergoing surgery there. On her father's side, her grandfather, grandmother and some of her relatives remained in Sarajevo. Her mother came to Dubrovnik where she grew up, was educated and worked. Her father arrived in that city as a young man. He was a travelling salesman. For several years he travelled and lived in Vienna. They had three children: two sons, Jakob and David, and a daughter, Mirjam-Mimica.

*Mirjam spent her working life as the secretary of the Dubrovnik Theatre and then as secretary of the Dubrovnik Summer Games. At the same time she was one of the most active members of the Jewish Community, including holding the offices of deputy president and president of the Women's Division, taking a great deal of responsibility.*

*She has two children and three grandchildren. She lives in Dubrovnik.*

It began in 1941, following the regulations introduced by the Ustaša: this is banned, that is banned. The orders were signed by Rojnica and others, by the Buća district prefect. The bans included

going out between eight in the evening and seven in the morning, going to public beaches, going to restaurants or to the cinema and more. There was even a poster which read that all public buildings were out of bounds to Serbs, Jews, Gypsies and dogs.

I used to see Rojnica every day from 1941, when the war began. We were separated only by the street, his shop on one side and our front door on the other. We would greet each other; he was a perfectly decent and peaceful man. However, he was appointed the district head of Dubrovnik and then appointed his brother as a public commissioner for our shop.

This meant that we had a new boss, and that everything, the whole inventory, everything in the shop, all the textiles, no longer belonged to us, that they were being sold and the money was turned over to the commissioner. Where it ended up I no longer remember, but in any case we no longer had it to live on.

For some time we had a commissioner whose brother was a close friend of my brothers. He still lives in Dubrovnik. I testified in his defence in 1945 when the war ended, because he would say: "Miss Ferera, I am leaving now and won't be here for the next hour and a half." And then he would go. This meant: collect, take what you can, hide it, sell it, do what you like, because he believed he should help in some way. He was tried later on, but for other things, not as an Ustaša. They realised that he wasn't trustworthy so they replaced him and appointed Rojnica's brother as commissioner.

I found it very hard that I was unable to continue my education. I was in the third grade of the Commercial Academy. My class teacher, Dolore Bracanović was a senior Ustaša official. She taught us German and after she had questioned me for a whole hour and given me a top grade, she came to my father at the store and said "Mr Ferera, unfortunately I have come to tell you that, from tomorrow, your little girl cannot attend school. Those are the regulations."

The family council then met. How would they tell me? They thought that I would take it very hard and indeed it really was difficult for me. I wept bitterly. I was miserable and didn't go out into the street for some days. Then I realised that this had also happened to others. I was the only one at the Commercial Academy. However my classmates didn't stop talking to me or inviting me to events or to go for walks together.

We wore pins which were specially made in Dubrovnik. They were made of metal and were very insulting and ugly, so crudely manufactured that they made holes in all our blouses and shirts. We ourselves had to pay the tradesman who used to make them.



*Mirjam out walking during her stay in Dubrovnik*

My younger brother David was about to complete a course in textile techniques in Leskovac. One day a message was broadcast on the radio from the school in Leskovac asking all final year students to attend because the final examination was to be held. We heard this and he said: "I'm going, I'm going." Mother was weeping bitterly and said: "Please don't! It's not important. Stay here. It's important for us to stay together." And my father, who was always open-minded said; "Listen, no one knows what will happen to us or to those who leave. If he wants to go and has decided to go, we should allow him to and hope that everything will end well." And indeed he went and received a diploma.

But the war then escalated to such an extent that he stayed in Serbia.

He really suffered. He was with the Chetniks because this was the only way to save himself. There were no Partisans in the region. He hid in trenches and even managed to get to the headquarters of Draža Mihajlović. From here he began to withdraw towards Bosnia. Then, in 1943, Italy capitulated. He ran into some school friends of his who said to him: "Where are you going? You're coming with us. Your whole family in Dubrovnik has been killed, taken away. You no longer have anyone left alive." And this was horrifying for him. On his own, on foot and in rags, a sorry sight, he set off to find out for himself what had happened to his family. Near Mostar he was caught by a Partisan patrol. They locked him up and then a very strange letter arrived from Mostar, from a Mrs Gaon. "Here, imprisoned in Mostar, is a Jew from Dubrovnik. I don't know what his surname is exactly, Ferera or Finci, but his name is definitely David. So if he has anyone alive in Dubrovnik, this is just to let you know that he is alive." The letter came into my hands. I informed my elder brother Jakica, who was by this time a Partisan officer, about the letter. He came immediately, on the

first military transport available. The two of us got ready that evening and set off in the morning. At that time people used to travel by cattle wagon to the Neretva river. The bridges were demolished so we hauled ourselves to the other side on some improvised pontoon and arrived in Mostar where we learnt which prison he was in. We went there. When my brother appeared in a Partisan uniform, a man from OZNA asked him: "Why are you coming to enquire about this man, about David Ferera, who you say is your brother? Did you know that he was captured as a Chetnik, although I see that you're a Partisan officer?"

My brother then told him how we had parted in 1941 and gone our separate ways, surviving as best we could. And it was only then that he told us: "He is no longer here, he's been moved to Sarajevo. He will most probably be returned to Leskovac to investigate his activities there and what he was doing." My brother asked if he could follow him to Sarajevo and look for him. He received permission, but I was refused because this was still a time of battles and it was not safe. I returned from Mostar in despair, knowing nothing, while my brother travelled on to Sarajevo. There he learnt that they were all in Koševo and that there were about ten thousand prisoners. He managed to send photographs for him to see that we were alive and a letter saying that our parents were also alive in Italy, in internment, and that we were all accounted for. This certainly raised his spirits.

Then came some major holiday and all ten thousand prisoners were amnestied. They were unable to feed them or provide accommodation. And they were all over Sarajevo. My brother went to the Baruh family, close relatives of ours and there learnt the truth. They dressed him, washed him, cut his hair, shaved him and sent him to Dubrovnik. I had been for a long time on the terrace of the house in which I lived with my husband. I already had little Bob and was pregnant with my second child. I was sitting there, sad and thinking, when suddenly I saw a man with a shaved head walking with difficulty up the stairs! He had been a man of more than a hundred kilos and this one didn't even weigh fifty. And at that moment I recognised my brother who had returned after all that Calvary. We informed our parents in Bari that my brother had returned alive. My mother managed to learn this before her death.

Because I was married to an Orthodox Christian and lived with him in a house, an Italian officer moved into our apartment with his family. He managed a military supply store, what they called the *Unione militare*. They were very decent people. I kept in touch with

them and they would come to my place. Italians – Italians! Always full of emotion, especially with children.

My parents were on Rab when Italy capitulated. My brother Jakica immediately joined the Rab Battalion. My parents, while they still had some money, rented a boat and got themselves across to Vis, to the liberated territory. When the Germans arrived and occupied Rab they were no longer there. From Vis the group broke up and went their own ways. My parents went first to Bari, then to Monopoli, then to Barletta, where they lived, and then they set off to Taranto. They also found private accommodation there in Taranto. My mother ended up in hospital there, died and was buried there. (I went to the cemetery after the war with my son and daughter-in-law. We found the common grave. The Italians had kept records on everything. I knew that she was in the fourth common grave at such-and-such a cemetery, and that's how we were able to mark her resting place.)

On November 1, 1942, we were all required to move to the Hotel Vreg. The Italians had received orders from the Germans that a final solution should be found for the Jewish question, but they were stalling. Their senior leaders were mostly anti-Fascists. There was little sense of anti-Semitism there, so the people helped as much as they could. I know this from my parents: they were in Taranto and always talked about it.

At the hotel they gave me 24 hours, just long enough for me to go and get married and return. Then the orders came for transport to Rab. Colonnello Gianbertoni, the commander of the Fifth Corps, which was based in what is today the Excelsior Hotel, said “The little lady should get ready, we'll let her out, see her off with the *carabinieri*, let her go to her husband.” And so they let me go. My parents were transported to Rab.

By now it was 1943. The Italians left, the Ustaša reappeared and the Germans came too. We were hiding, my child and my husband and I, in a bedsit without electricity, without heating, without anything, for several months. This was also somewhere in Boninovo, with the wife of the famous General Černi.

Most of our family in Sarajevo perished. On my father's side of the family no one survived. Our last contacts were with my cousin, whose name was also Mirjam Ferera and who had completed pharmaceutical studies in Zagreb. She married before the war. She was taken to one camp and her husband to another. I would get letters from her. She

asked us to send her old jumpers, things she could unravel and knit again, because otherwise she would have a nervous breakdown. She wrote to us that the atmosphere was terrible. We sent her food hidden in two tins of ersatz coffee. We emptied half the tin out, put in a layer of sugar cubes and then put the coffee on top again. The parcels which arrived were being stolen. They took anything good and valuable from them. We also sent clothing. We tried to calm and comfort them in some way, assuring them that there were better days ahead. However those better days never came for them.

My grandmother, Bona Ferera, ended up in Đakovo. I found her grave there. Then Aunt Bonči ended the same way and my cousin Mrijam Ferera was also killed. Whether they died of typhoid or hunger I don't know, but none of them survived. Twenty-seven family members!

At the end of the second world war, I was in Dubrovnik. When the Partisans were liberating Dubrovnik and heading for the Dubrovačka river, suddenly the light began to shine and the whole city lit up. From our terrace, where we lived in front of the Srđ hill, we could see everything and everything was clear to us – our boys had arrived. Then began a celebration which lasted for several days. Nobody did any work, people just danced, kissed and hugged, and went to welcoming receptions and speeches. There was enormous joy everywhere.

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Dina KATAN BEN-ZION

## DARK KINGDOM OF CHILDHOOD



*Dina Katan Ben-Zion was born in 1937 in Sarajevo where she lived for the first four years of her life. Her grandparents, Simon and Dona Katan had a well-known bookshop and stationers in which her mother worked. After her father finished electrical engineering studies in Prague, he joined the business, mainly in the department for radio sets.*

*When the war broke out her father was with a unit in southern Serbia. Because the army units broke up, he managed to reach Sarajevo, disguised as a villager. But the very next day he was ordered to report with other army officers and they were all taken into German imprisonment which lasted until the end of the war. This was a group of about five hundred officers and soldiers who were serving in the Army of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and were, in this capacity, captured by the Germans. So despite being Jews they were, as prisoners of war, under the protection of the Geneva Convention.*

*Dina Katan Ben-Zion is a poet, literary researcher and literary translator, mainly of writers from the territory of the former Yugoslavia into Hebrew. She has translated the works of Ivo Andrić, Danilo Kiš, Aleksandar Tišma, David Albahari, Vasko Popa and the works of many other writers including Filip David and Ivan Lalić. She has published five collections of poetry and a comprehensive study entitled "Presence and Disappearance – Jews and Judaism in*

*Former Yugoslavia in the Mirror of Literature". Her most recent book, "Serbian Mythology" was recently published in Israel.*

Campo Bari, Italy, March 1945. I was eight years old. I was in hospital. It was really hard for me, I hated every minute of it. It had been several days since my mother had been to visit me. Then my aunt came to tell me that my mother was ill.

I had fallen ill. First I had measles and then, immediately afterwards, whooping cough. Twice in succession I was admitted to the city children's hospital in Bari. My mother, Berta Katan (née Altarac) visited me every day, travelling from the Bari camp to the hospital in any vehicle she could find until, returning in a jeep one day, she was badly wounded by a freight truck and was lying in hospital with nine ribs fractured in twelve places and a torn pleura. She had had no news from my father, who was in German captivity, for more than a year. Not knowing whether she would survive and be back on her feet, concern for me forced my mother, from her hospital bed and with the help of friends, to get in touch with Aliyat Hanoar to have me sent to Palestine. I remember them taking me to visit my mother and then asking me whether I would agree to travel to Palestine. I felt, to the depths of my being, an enormous resistance to parting from my mother but, at the same time, a strong feeling of inevitability, that the whole thing was out of my hands, that the decision had already been made, that this was how it was to be and there was no other option. So, on March 25, 1945, ten days after my eighth birthday, I arrived at the Shaar Haamakim kibbutz where my distant cousin Sarina Talmi welcomed me very warmly. Then, when it emerged that there was no room at Shaar Haamakim in my age group, I was moved, on April 22, 1945, to the Merhavia kibbutz where I was put into a group of my peers (I was the eldest among them) who were beginning primary school that year.

At the time my father, engineer Isak Katan, had been in German captivity since immediately after the fall of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in whose army he served as commander of an artillery unit. At the time my mother was injured and I was sent to Palestine, from January to April, 1945, he was among a group of prisoners being taken eight hundred kilometres on foot from Barkenbrige in Germany to Alexisdorf in Holland. One of my father's colleagues, Dr Željko Lederer, described this walk:



“...trampled heels, making the ankles twist and every step insecure, so we walked, stumbling, so that every time we slid on an unnoticed slippery stone it hurt. And then this pain would go up, from our feet to our hearts, to our shoulders and our backs, and finally the whole body was screaming from pain, the heart from the strain, the shoulders from the burden, the throat from the thirst. [...] Our thoughts are drifting. We are silent because we are walking awake but each with his own vision before his eyes: that of sitting at a table covered with a white tablecloth, white plates in front of us [...] A thousand times we dreamt these dishes: pancakes, white coffee, buttered buns ... this vision was so vivid that, staring at it, we covered the twentieth kilometre, the twenty-fifth, the thirtieth, forgetting that it was four days since we were last given three hundred grams of bread, that we had set off in the morning five minutes before they came to give out the soup [...] After twenty kilometres our consciousness becomes numb: the only thing alive is the awareness that we are slaves, that we are riveted to one another with chains and, all together, to world history. Our marching in step is the rhythm of world history: we marched through Pomerania two days ahead of the Soviet troops, ten days before the British troops through Hanover,” (December 21, 1947)

During the bombing of Sarajevo and the arrival of German troops in the city, our family – my grandmother, mother and my father’s sister with her husband and two sons – were in the basement of our house, which served as a shelter. My memory is a blur ... darkness, some crashes from outside, great fear. Our three-storey building was not hit. There was a German officer living in one of the three apartments. Thinking that he had been “invited to dinner” he came to the family Seder, not knowing that this was a Jewish Seder. When he discovered this, he didn’t leave, astounded to be confronted with “cultured Jewish vermin” who spoke excellent German and knew how to communicate with him.

A commissioner was appointed to the shop, a former customer named Grulih. This was a man who had often owed money but never been harassed because of it. Our family was forbidden to enter the shop. Grulih took over the cash register and, from that point on, never even tried to offer the family any money. He even persuaded them to hide the

stocks of food they had collected before the war in the store so that he could “safeguard” it and ensure that it didn’t fall into the hands of the Germans. However he took for himself everything they put there. My mother was called up for compulsory labour, cleaning in the German city compound.

One night at the beginning of September, 1941, they took my grandmother, Dona Katan, away. She was 59. First she was in Kruščica, then in Lobargrad. My father made a great effort to send her parcels there from captivity, but it turned out that the Ustaša took them for themselves. My grandmother eventually reached Auschwitz where she perished in the gas chamber at the beginning of 1942.

My mother fled Sarajevo with me on September 18, 1941, with the help of a Croat named Pavao Sehtel. On his own initiative he offered to take us to Mostar with the help of false documents he had obtained. As well as helping my mother and me, he also did the same for other people, including my father’s sister Tilda Pinto, her husband, Professor Salomon Pinto and their two sons. From Mostar we travelled on our own to Dubrovnik, to my mother’s sister and brother-in-law, Mirta and Leon Albahari, who lived in Dubrovnik. My aunt, Tildo Pinto, also arrived in Dubrovnik where she was reunited with her husband and sons, Bencijon and Šimon (Bato). Our two families went through most of our emigration together. When it became dangerous in Dubrovnik, we managed to cross over to Split on February 20, 1942. From Split the Italians deported us to Milna on Brač, then to Postire. This lasted from September 22, 1942, to May 25, 1943.

According to my mother’s testimony, we lived very modestly, because the Italians gave us a minimum of staple foods and we no longer had any money of our own. We were required to report and sign in at the Italian police station every day. Going out was forbidden after



*Dina Katan in the warmth  
of her family*

seven in the evening. It was also forbidden to leave the island. On May 25, 1943, the Italians deported us to the island of Rab, to the camp there. On Rab I began some kind of first grade of primary school. After Italy capitulated in September 1943, my mother fled with me (together with my aunt and her family) with the help of the Partisans, to the liberated territory. After a very hard walk we reached the regions of Lika and Kordun and then, in Rujevac, we were attached as supplementary workforce to the school for the children of fallen Partisans. There my mother cooked, my aunt sewed and her husband taught. The conditions were harsh and we would flee into the woods during the sixth and seventh German offensives during which time, because of circumstances, I was separated from my mother for a couple of days. We found places to spend the night in village houses where, on one occasion, a village woman spilt hot water from a cauldron on my chest, so I became very ill, with an infection in the wound and a fever. On July 27, 1944, the British moved the whole school by cargo aircraft to Italy, where we parted company with the school and moved to the Bari camp.

Nothing remains in my memory from that period which would be worth writing in this testimony, all the more so because, as soon as I arrived in the kibbutz among a group of children who had had normal childhoods, I was urged to “forget” as soon as possible that I had ever been anywhere else, so I began to hate the Serbo-Croatian language and my own name – Dona – and made an effort to distance myself from all of it. It’s clear to me today that I had been deeply affected by the feeling of flight, of insecurity, of being under threat, of being in fear, of being hungry, the horror of lice, because of which they had twice completely shaved my head, of the feeling that I was always in someone’s way in this world and that I was being pursued from one place to another, that what was most important was always most in danger: home, a sense of belonging, a normal life. It seems as though the state of feeling threatened, and the flights, the suffering and the fear, in some way grew out of proportion to become dominant as the integral material of my own perception of my childhood, despite that fact that I had been by my mother’s side up to the age of eight and in more or less immeasurably better conditions than those experienced by those children who ended up in German camps or lost their parents. It appears that I have never completely lost this original feeling, that I am some kind of “moveable” matter, a wandering quality, independent of my wish or will, which is incapable of resisting important events which have had fateful conse-

quences in my life, that my wishes or my will mean very little, that the “force of circumstance” prevails, and all of this had some kind of destructive effect on a series of my decisions as an adult. All this, of course, is the contemplation of an adult. I feel that my childhood, as a treasury of riches for life, is pretty meagre. The memories I have of the “little” things, the blessings that make up the world of childhood, like the first discoveries of the basic ideas of life, or the small joys of day-to-day life are, in my case, very few in number, deafened and muted, accompanied by fears, limitations and proscriptions. I have often wondered whether the cause of this is my nature, my personal disposition not to remember cheerful occurrences or, indeed, whether all that surrounded me was really unpleasant and largely cheerless. Still I remember, during our emigration, my mother firmly, feverishly and unwaveringly holding to her belief that my father would return and that everything she told me and the way she responded to my questions reflected her efforts to preserve him as a “living presence”. Several examples of such moments are still vividly present in my memory.

After the end of the war my parents were reunited in Sarajevo. However, as it was difficult for them to live in a place in which everything reminded them of their lost home and family, my father sought a job in Mostar, where he was employed in the electric power plant. Later my parents returned to Sarajevo, where he was employed in Bosnia Film.

Of his immediate family, my father lost his mother and first cousins, and my mother lost her father, her grandmother, her brother and sister and more than forty members of her extended family.

I was returned to my parents from Palestine in March, 1947 (by



*Tombstone of Dina Katan's grandfather and grandmother which reads that her grandmother Dona perished in a Nazi camp and that her grave is unknown*

that time I had already completely forgotten Serbo-Croatian) and then, as soon as Aliyah was made possible, I returned to Israel with my parents in June 1949. Until my parents settled in I was again in the same kibbutz for another two years. I then joined my parents in Jerusalem, where I finished secondary school.

I was with my parents from the age of four to eight, and then from ten to twelve and finally from the age of fourteen on. They survived and cared for me in every way possible and I was provided with a warm home in which there was love, joy and happiness. Despite this my personal view of the world has been in some distinctive way burdened by an inexplicable gloom, difficulties, unexpressed pain, an inclination towards the sad and painful as the dominant theme of life and as the "real truth". My parents did not hide what had been irretrievably lost for them, but they did not dwell on it. They tried to live each and every individual moment in the best and nicest way possible under the conditions in which they found themselves, and knew not to poison life by clinging to the memory of injustice, loss, suffering and horror. It seems that I, in some way, carried inside myself a deeply concealed sense of tremendous suffering from the past, to a degree which is disproportionate to my personal experience. To some extent I could grasp this in my encounters with books by Danilo Kiš, Aleksandar Tišma, Filip David, David Albahari and other writing important to me. Through reading and translation, these have enabled me to transfer into my language a part of the intimate feeling of a severed trunk which I have unconsciously carried deep inside me for years.

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*Klara PINTO*

## MOTHER'S WISTFUL LOOK

*Klara Pinto was born in Sarajevo in 1936. She was the eighth surviving child. Her older siblings were Remika, Kokolo, Braco, Blanka, Zlata, Mošo, Lunčika and she was followed by Sida and Florica. Before she was born her mother delivered twins who died at birth. Another girl was born in 1935, named Klara after an aunt of that name who died before she was born. And so she is named after her late sister and aunt. She comes from a poor family. Her father was a cobbler named Abram Pinto. Her mother's name was Mazalta, née Samokovlija.*

One day they threw us out of the apartment because we were unable to pay the rent. For some days all our things were out in the street. I remember that we children guarded our belongings during the day and at night my father with an uncle took over. We children slept in the houses of our relatives and mother's friends. The sight of our things there was horrible. I know that we were even in the papers. A reporter came and wrote that there was a family out in the street. I don't know how the problem of our apartment was solved, I just know that, ten days later we got an apartment in the courtyard. There were two rooms and a wooden balcony. There were a large number of tenants in the front building and in the courtyard apartments. One day I was playing on the balcony, I had a scooter and was coasting over the balustrade. My little sister came up to me and I would have fallen over the balustrade had she not held me back! She was holding me by my dress. She wasn't strong enough to pull me back, so I stayed in this unenviable position for quite

some time. The gate was open so there were a lot of people out in the street who expected me to fall. They were banging on the wooden entrance downstairs for someone to open it or to break the door down to save me. I don't know how they saved me, I suppose they broke the door downstairs. My little sister and I were probably at home alone.

We used to make our own bread and then take it to the bakery. I remember that one day I took the bread to the bakery and the basket fell on the ground. I began to cry. I was afraid of what they would say to me when I got home and that we wouldn't have anything to eat. I picked up all the dough and put it back in the little basket and, while doing this, I rolled all the little stones into the dough with my hand. When we ate that bread we all wondered why it was full of little stones and I was the only one who knew and I didn't dare tell them. From that period I remember going swimming in the Miljacka river with my mother. One day I took my little sister's comforter from her and hid under the blanket to suck it without anyone seeing me. Someone lifted the blanket and saw that I was sucking, so they laughed at me and I was ashamed. Judging by everything, it seems that I had to grow up rapidly because I had a little sister, but I still wanted to be small.

The year 1941 came, the Ustaša came, our enemies came. Then I learnt that I was a Jew, that I had to wear a yellow armband. I was very surprised at this because I didn't know what Jews were. To me it seemed that I was no different from other children and it seemed to me that other people who weren't Jews were no different from my father and mother. There was chaos in my head. I began to think a lot and to think turbulently about what was happening around me, about what the adults were talking about. I learnt that I was five years old and that my sister Renika was to be married. I heard that she had never seen the man she was going to marry. I have already written about my father's sister, whose name was Renika and who had a husband, Vinko Škaro. This Vinko had a brother, Jozo. My aunt asked Jozo to take one of her nieces as his wife, and so save at least one child. Jozo, who was a Catholic, chose our eldest sister, Renika. She immediately went to Busovača to him and I never saw her again in Sarajevo. There was a lot of talk, a lot of whispering. I didn't understand anything. I was just afraid. I didn't leave the house. I spoke to no one, I was simply disappearing. A doctor was called in, this was the first time I had heard of a doctor, and I didn't understand why this man was touching me like that. I was afraid that he was also an Ustaša and that he was angry because I wasn't wearing a large letter "J".

Then they told me that children didn't have to wear the "J". If he wasn't an Ustaša then why was he asking me what was hurting when there was nothing hurting me? The doctor left just as he had come: nothing changed, I continued to be surprised and to be afraid.

Suddenly some men came, banging about in their boots which were black, new and nicely polished. There was dead silence in the house. There was fear reflected in the eyes of my whole family. My brother Braco said that we should go and beg those people not to take them away. I didn't know who or what was to be taken away, but I did go with my sisters to beg them. We started begging and when that didn't work, we all started to cry and kiss their boots. It was no use. They took away Kokolo, Braco, Father and Mošo. Later I heard that they had taken them to the Jasenovac camp. This was the first time I heard the word "camp". I understood that they were taking all men who were Jews to Jasenovac. Little by little I began to understand who the Germans were, who the Ustaša were and who the Jews were. It was just that this was all a bit vague for me. With my father and brothers away, life was sad.

Mother and we six girls remained in the house. One day we packed up and put our things in a cart. The packing of the things was supervised by a man with a rifle. When the cart with our things set off and we all started to walk behind it, a neighbour ran over. I thought she had come to say goodbye to us, but she spoke to the man with the rifle saying: "That's not all of them, they have another sister who was married yesterday." The man with the rifle said "What business is it of yours?" and we set off. I realised that she meant my sister Renika and that she was evil and mean. I realised that the man with the rifle was better than her. He was our enemy but she was our friend because she had many times drunk coffee with my mother. We reached the railway station and got into wagons that were used for carrying cargo and animals. There were a lot of women and a lot of children, most of them female. I don't know how long we travelled, I just know that we set off during the day and left the train during the day. I don't know whether we spent one or more nights travelling. I know that we unpacked our mattresses and blankets and that we slept in the wagon. I also know that there wasn't enough space. Some of us slept underneath, some of us beside, some up some down. We had a bowl in which we relieved ourselves and which we emptied through a small window. They could barely fit this bowl through the little window. Mother told us that we were going to where



things would be better. She promised that we would see Father and our brothers. I was again happy and cheerful, although I never saw my father and my brothers again. I know that Mother said that I looked as if I was better. I was surprised that she talked about my illness all the time when I was healthy and there was nothing wrong with me. We left the train at the mill in Đakovo.

I remember that we lived upstairs, and would climb up there on wooden stairs. The upper floor was made of wood and there were wooden bars on the walls. The whole floor was one, big, long room with a lot of people in it. Again we slept on the floor, on our things, and we had as much room as we had had in that wagon. I can't say that life in the camp was bad for me. We children always played outdoors. Our only problem was the lavatory. Right in the middle of the yard there was a big hole with some wooden boards over it. We had to stand on those boards and relieve ourselves. I was always afraid that I would fall into the faeces. Because of this we children would go to the real lavatory which was only for the camp guards, who had rifles. Sometimes we would keep guard, watching the place where the men with rifles were, and then go one by one to the nice lavatory. This was a major event for us. There were people selling food who used to come to the camp (probably villagers). We used to buy that food, we gave away gold and nice things to survive. My mother had a gold chain and she said that it was with me. I didn't know where it was. Later I discovered that this chain was sewn into the collar of my coat. I don't know what eventually happened to this chain. One day I saw my sister Renika at an iron door. I was some distance away, but I was really happy and ran to the gate as fast as I could. As I ran I was stopped by two men with bayonets on their rifles and, with a terrifying "Halt!", they crossed their bayonets right in front of me. Although it's almost forty years since that day, that "Halt!" still echoes in my ears. I stopped short and just couldn't understand why I couldn't go over to my sister. Even though we were all locked up in that camp, I didn't feel as if I was in prison, instead I thought that we had moved in there and that all of us were there waiting for our fathers and brothers and that when they came we would return home. Mother always had us believing that Father would come for us one day.

My younger sisters Sida and Florica, and I got into a wagon inside the camp itself and headed for Osijek. My sisters immediately became lost among the other children while I stayed behind on the steps of the wagon and waited for Mother to come with me. Mother told me to get

inside the wagon with my sisters because I was older and should look after them. I didn't want to go. Mother played her last trump and said that I should go inside, take care of my little sisters, and that she would follow. I remember that moment as if it happened today. I remember my mother's wistful look. I think that this was the moment at which I became an adult. I realised that we had to go and that we would never see Mother again. I didn't want to tell my mother that I knew she was just saying this to keep me calm. I pretended to believe her and told her I would look after my little sisters until she came. I don't remember the journey to Osijek at all. I just remember the rooms at the Jewish Community to which we were taken so that we could be taken in by families who wanted to adopt us.

That same evening, Mr Vladimir Ebenšpanger came to adopt a male child. He used to say, later, that he came up to me, caressed my head and said: "Isn't this girl pretty." I don't remember that. He went on to pick a boy, however I kept running after him and pulling him by his trousers. He thought for a long time about what he should do, he had agreed with his wife that he would bring a boy, but I wouldn't leave his side. Finally he said: "Maybe it is my destiny to take this little girl," and decided on me. I wanted to go with him immediately, because he seemed so nice to me, but I didn't want to leave my sisters behind. I said that I was the grown-up one and that I had to look after them. They explained to me that Mother had told me that I had to look after them in the train and that, from now on, grown-up people would take care of them. Not until they promised me that we would be separated only at night and that we would see one another every day did we agree to be separated and each of us took our things from our bundle.

I remember that my foster father (Vladimir Ebenšpanger) took me to a shop across from the cathedral in which my foster mother worked selling leather goods. They put me on the counter and everyone came to look at me. I was given something really nice to eat, although I don't know what it was. I remember banging with my little legs against the counter. When my foster mother came she began to shout because he had brought such a small and skinny child, although they had agreed he would bring an older boy. My foster father looked at me and said: "Look, isn't this child a darling, and beautiful!" My female vanity must have been activated at that moment because this was something no one had ever said about me before and I fell in love with him. I know that galways held him by the hand and never left his side. That

evening I went to the apartment. This was a one-room apartment with a bathroom and running hot water. Everything looked pretty and clean to me. That evening they said that they would give me a bath but, to their great surprise, I washed myself. I remember that later they used to say that they didn't need to take care of me because I knew how to do everything on my own. They would say that I was a decent girl and well brought up. The problems continued in the morning, when we got up – I had slept between them in their double bed – and there were lice crawling from my head into the bed. My foster mother clutched her head. I was very surprised that she should make such a fuss about so many lice which, probably, I had always had and saw as normal inhabitants of my head. I never again saw the clothes I had brought with me. They immediately dressed me in some new and, for me, beautiful things and new pyjamas. I hadn't known such things existed at all, because I didn't know that people should undress before going to bed and put on something called pyjamas.



*Klara (L) is embraced by her mother's sister, Fina, in the first days of her adoption*

I was by then six years old. Obviously the next thing was delousing. I was very pleased with all the attention I was given. I felt like a princess. I forgot that I had Mother, Father, brothers and sisters. I had arrived in a new world which I liked a great deal. I had become rich, everything was very clean. I found everything entertaining. I admired everything and was astonished by everything. The clothes I had been given came from Vesna. My foster mother had a sister, Judita Bakajlić, who had a daughter, Vesna, and another sister, Fina, who had no children. So there were three families and only one child. This Vesna was a spoilt brat who had a very nice life. On the other hand, I was from a poor family, whose life had been very difficult. I was content to have come to a completely different environment where I was given the kind of things and toys which I could not even have dreamt existed. She, however, had been given a little cousin with whom she had to share everything, although up to that

I was by then six years old. Obviously the next thing was delousing. I was very pleased with all the attention I was given. I felt like a princess. I forgot that I had Mother, Father, brothers and sisters. I had arrived in a new world which I liked a great deal. I had become rich, everything was very clean. I found everything entertaining. I admired everything and was astonished by everything. The clothes I had been given came from Vesna. My foster mother had a sister, Judita Bakajlić, who had a daughter, Vesna, and another sister, Fina, who had no children. So there were three families and only one child. This Vesna was a spoilt brat who had a very nice life. On the other hand, I was from a poor family, whose life had been very difficult. I was content to have come to a completely different environment where I was given the kind of things and toys which I could not even have dreamt existed. She, however, had been given a little cousin with whom she had to share everything, although up to that

point she had never shared anything and had been everyone's favourite. Now these three sisters and their three husbands also shared their love with me. It goes without saying that they always took my side because I was far more modest and I always gave in, because I had learnt to share with my brothers and sisters. I think that for Vesna, this period was like days spent in hell. If I put on a pair of slippers she wanted exactly that pair; if I took a different pair she no longer wanted the ones she had cried for but the ones I had taken. Of course when the adults saw this they shouted at her and defended me. I felt sorry for Vesna. She was a year and a half older than me. She was born in 1934. When my foster mother wanted to spank her, I put my little hand on her behind so that the blow fell on my hand.

When I had had enough of all these new and pretty things, and when I had had enough to eat, I began to feel nostalgia for my mother and my little sisters. First I remembered the things I had brought from the camp. Somehow it seemed to me that these were the most direct connection with my previous life. At first they would tell me that they had taken these things to have them washed because they were all dirty, just as I had had lice; however when enough time had passed for them to have been washed, they told me they had taken my things up to the attic and locked them in a cupboard. I had grown and could no longer fit into these things, so why should I need them now when I had other things which were nicer! When I persisted in asking for my things, at least to see them, they kept repeating that they were up in the attic. I know that after that, for many years, I would go to any possible attic to look for my things but that I didn't find them. Even now I don't know what happened to those things. They probably threw them out because they weren't worth keeping but didn't want to tell me. Later I stopped enquiring about them, they probably would have told me when I was grown up, but by then I had completely forgotten about them. I know I occasionally visited the families who had taken my little sisters in, but even that became all the more infrequent. One day I felt like eating *ašlame*. I asked them to get some for me. But my family didn't know what these were, nobody knew. I thought, at that time, that *ašlame* grew only in Sarajevo. One day my foster mother's sister Fina fell ill and went to hospital. I didn't want to let her go to the hospital. When we went to visit her I ran over to her and began crying and sobbing: "I told you not to go to the hospital." Everybody laughed, although this laughter of theirs was something I could not understand at all. When it was

time for us to go home, I couldn't be separated from her bed. They had to simply drag me away from it. As we started walking towards the door, the nurse was bringing Aunt Fina her supper and I shouted "Those are *ašlame!*" Then my foster parents saw that they were cherries. I haven't mentioned yet that the family which adopted me was Jewish. Aunt Fina had married a Catholic, Joza Đurđević, and Aunt Judita, Vesna's mother, a Serb, Jovo Bakajlić. When the time came for Jews to be taken from Osijek to camp, my foster parents paid quite a lot of money and moved to Split, which was under the Italians. They left and I stayed with Aunt Fina.

She was afraid to keep me with her in case she too would be taken away, because she was Jewish by origin. She gave me away to some people. I didn't want to stay with anyone else so I returned to my aunt. I found my way back to my aunt just as a dog finds his way back to his master. She again gave me away, to some other woman, this time a little further away, but again I returned. And so she sent me away like this four times, to various families, and she wanted me to stay somewhere but no family was good for me. I would always return home on foot, no matter how far away she took me. When my aunt had had enough of this she said: "I won't send her anywhere any more, if the child is so dependent on me then let them take me to camp along with her. So, thanks to my persistence, I achieved my goal. Not long after this, perhaps a month or so later, some Irma came, I don't remember her last name, to take me to Split. She had a passport with my photograph in it. I was to travel as her daughter. Before we set off they told me that I was to address her as mother and that I mustn't get confused. And so, at the age of six, I got my third mother. They also told me that I wasn't to speak to anyone. They told me never to leave the side of this mother of mine, not to answer any questions and that, if anyone wanted to speak to me I should just say "I want to go to my mother. Where is my mother?"

I don't remember coming ashore in Split or how I reached my home. I only remember that I was hidden behind a curtain in a house. When I saw that Vladimir Ebenšpanger had come, I cried "Father," and ran into his embrace and I was really happy to see him.

In Split we lived with the Jagodić family as tenants and we had a floor to ourselves. My foster father worked as a dentist in a dental clinic. I liked going to the clinic with him. One day we went swimming at Bačvice; I didn't like the sea and began to cry. My foster father threw me into the sea, which was over my head. I was screaming, so the

whole beach was buzzing, people asking him what he was doing and accusing him of mistreating me and torturing me. He replied to them: "Leave me alone, she is mine and I know what I'm doing." It seems that he was also persistent and didn't give up without achieving his goal. I learnt to swim that same day. The following day we went swimming again and I wouldn't get out of the water. On the third day I was jumping into the water and swimming in the deep, where the bigger children were swimming.

I began school in Split, at the private school of Mancika Levi. I attended school for about six months until Italy capitulated. When we heard about the capitulation of Italy we went to Žrnovica. There we lived in peace for a short time, before the bombing happened. Every time the bombing began we had to go to a shelter. One day I said that I would have liked to be the enemy. They asked me why and I said that in that case no one would be attacking me and dropping bombs on me. They told me that we also dropped bombs on the enemy. Once more, I didn't understand.

We didn't have peace in Žrnovica for long, we had to head for the hills. We set off on foot. Once more some men with rifles escorted us. But these were different people, not the kind we had met up to that point. These people were nice to us, they talked to us and laughed with us. They were guarding us. We walked a long way in the hills. Sometimes there were aircraft flying over us and bombing. Then we would have to lie down and wait for the planes to leave. One day when the planes came I was lying on my stomach and didn't want to get up. They were calling me. I heard them calling me and didn't want to get up. I don't know why. Then they said that I must be dead. I think they said they should either leave me behind or bury me. Then, calmly, without saying anything, I finally stood up. They looked to see if I was



*Klara as a first grade student  
in the public primary school  
in Split, 1942*

wounded, they were surprised at what had happened and I was wondering about it too. Who knows why I wouldn't get up.

After fleeing for several days we arrived at some house. Now it seems to me that it was some climbers' lodge. I think that Tito rode in that day, with some woman, probably a nurse. He gave me some sweets. At the time I was far more interested in the sweets than in this man. I had the feeling that everything was being done the way he wanted it. I too was swallowing everything he said, but I actually never swallowed anything. It was some kind of sublime state, as if we had expected this man to take us to heaven. Or maybe it was that people were hanging onto his words the way a drowning man clutches at a straw. However, watching the other people, I followed their example. We were at that house for only one afternoon and then continued on. We both slept in and walked through the woods. I don't know how many of us there were, I just remember that it was a largish group of people and that it grew larger every day until, one day, we arrived at a castle on the land across from the island of Vis. The Partisans were already there and I think that a welcoming reception was organised. We were given food, but I remember they kept telling us to be careful with food, because we hadn't eaten for months. We children, there were five or six of us, were given a glass of milk each.

That evening we quietly went to the beach. It was a cold and dark night, drizzling rain. We were waiting for a boat to come and get us. There were wounded people, Partisans, with us. The wounded men were lying on stretchers. They told us to be very quiet so that the Germans wouldn't hear us. Smoking was forbidden. I remember that some people were smoking and that they were holding their cigarettes in such a way that they were hiding them with their hands. There were different warnings and bans being heard all the time. To me it seemed as if we waited forever before the boat came. In the boat we were standing and the wounded were lying on stretchers.

We finally set off for Vis. The rain set off with us, falling more and more heavily. Not much later, as we were sailing quietly, they opened fire on us from Vis. Everyone began shouting that the captain should turn back. The captain listened to no one, he just went forward, towards the shooting. People on the boat were shouting: "People, children, friends, don't shoot!" Nothing helped. They fired on us mercilessly from Vis. We threw ourselves down on the floor of the boat. Now the wounded men in their cots were the most exposed. The wounded, who were as

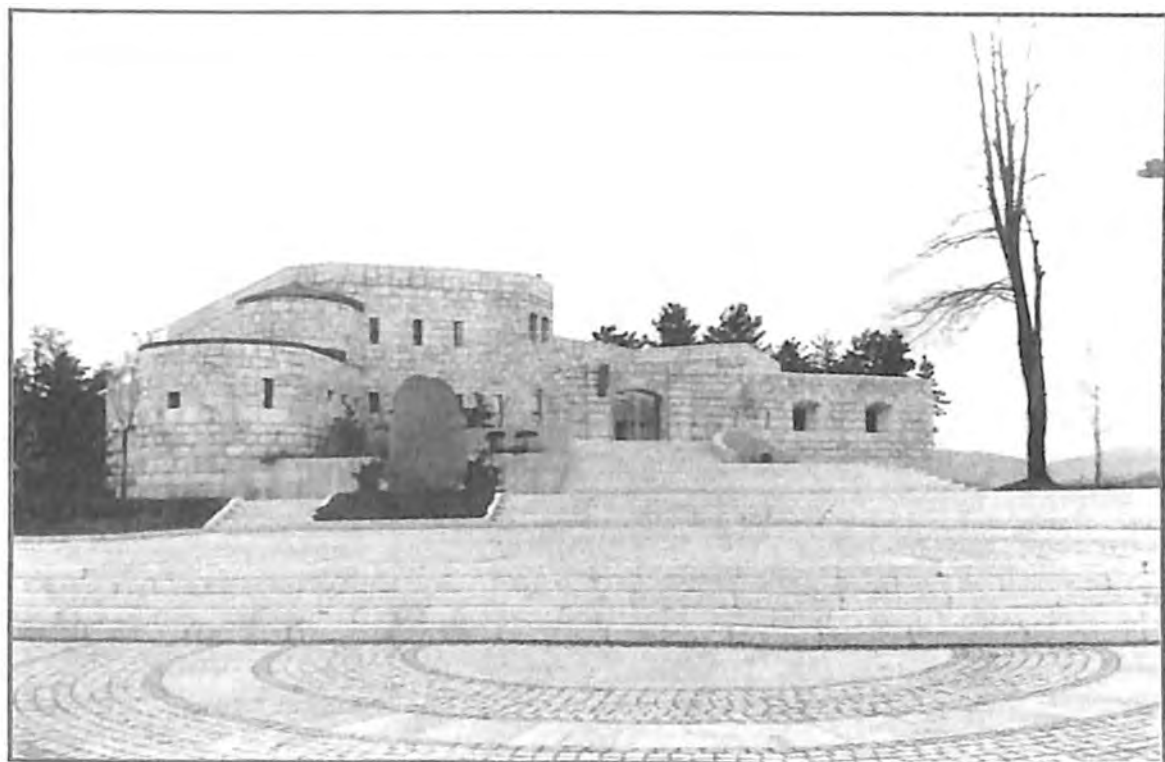
afraid as we were, simply rolled off their beds and fell on us. After sailing for an eternity, we reached Vis. Just before we reached the shore they stopped shooting at us. When we came ashore, they asked the people there on the beach if they had heard the shouting from the boat. They replied that Ustaša could shout the same way. They had opened fire on us from Vis either because the signal had changed, or our commander didn't know the signal, or he was unable to send the signal because of the rain. I don't know exactly what happened. Anyway, the people on Vis were sure that this was an enemy vessel. That night they put us up in a big room and, as much as possible, they warmed us up. I don't know how long we were on Vis. I don't know how we reached Vela Luka. I just know that one day I boarded a boat and set off for Italy with my foster parents, another group of people and two Italian soldiers.

In Bari we had to report at some counter. Those who were reporting stood in line. The family in front of us said that they were Croats. The man at the counter didn't want to register them. He said: "We're not taking you in, we have no room for you. Why did you flee? The Germans weren't bothering you, you weren't being chased by the Germans and you didn't need to flee!" He simply wouldn't register these people. After this registration we travelled to the Carbonari camp. This was a reception camp.

The camp was fenced off with wire. We lived in barracks. There were a lot of beds in each barracks. Each family had bunk beds. These bunks were actually a family apartment. We lived and ate on these beds. We were given food from a cauldron. Next to our bed was the bed of Dragec Ebenšpanger, my foster father's cousin. How they ended up there with us I don't know. Dragec had a wife Terka and a daughter Ljerka who was my age. There were Jews from everywhere in this camp, under the protection of the British. Life in the camp was quite peaceful. We all actually lived like one big family. We shared one bathroom with many showers and there were wooden boards on the floor. One day I found an earring on the bathroom floor. I played with it for quite a while. Then I wanted to change it for something else. It was only then that the grown-ups saw the earring in my hand and asked me where I had got it. I said that I had found it in the bathroom. Everyone in the camp except me had heard that an earring had been lost. Unfortunately, the woman who had lost the earring had left on a transport to Israel. They sent the earring on another transport to Israel. However we later learnt that neither the first nor the second transport had ever reached Israel, they had both been sunk.



There was a social life organised for us in the camp. There were also religious services. We children also gave performances, they taught us recitations. At Purim they would give us gifts. We were also bombed while in the camp. The night was like day because of the bombing. The British watched all this calmly and smoked. I found out that evening that the British are very cold. After about six months in the camp, a British woman commander came asking for seven Jewish families who would go to Selva di Fazano to be janitors in villas in which British convalescents were to be accommodated. Seven families signed up: Vladimir Ebenšpanger with his wife and daughter, Dragec Ebenšpanger with his wife and daughter, Kon with his wife, Kabiljo with his wife and daughter. I don't know who the others were. And so we set off to Selva di Fazano.



*Entrance to the Vrace Monument in Sarajevo where the names of those who perished in the winds of war and the Holocaust are recorded for all time*

There the British had confiscated the villas of wealthy Italians who lived in Fazano and had these villas as their summer houses. Each house had several rooms in which British soldiers and officers were staying, mostly officers who had been released from hospital as conva-

lescents. Each family was assigned to a villa in which there were about fourteen officers. The janitors' duty was to make tea in the morning, clean shoes and sweep the apartment. The bed linen was washed in communal laundries and lunch and dinner were served in communal restaurants. There I enrolled in the second grade of Italian primary school. My mother tongue was Spanish (Ladino). I had been adopted by people whose mother tongue was German (they were Ashkenazi). I went to the Italian school and lived with the British. I was able to communicate in these languages and I also spoke Croatian. In fact I didn't know any language really well. I failed the second grade of primary school at eight years of age. I repeated the second grade. I got a ten in mathematics and a six or seven in the other subjects, so I passed.

We no longer felt that it was war. I would often go swimming with the officers and travelled with the British to Bari, where I went to the theatre for the first time, to Taranto and Brindisi. We lived well and we were carefree.

We set off for Yugoslavia on the first transport after the liberation. The journey to Yugoslavia was very tiring. On board the ship, one man after another had epilepsy, they would throw themselves around on the deck. Each man had to be held by four people so as not to hurt himself. As we approached the shore of Yugoslavia, a minesweeper sailed ahead of us. We were moving very slowly and expecting the whole time to hit a mine. We were lucky and reached the shore. We got to Osijek via Zagreb. There I finished the third and fourth grades in six months. I lived happily with the Ebenšpanger family until I married.

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*Vera ROBIČEK-SIPOREN*

SAVING MESSAGE:  
DON'T COME BACK TO BELGRADE



*V*era Robiček-Siporen was born in Belgrade on October 20, 1927, to father Adolf, from Niš, and mother Marijana, from Vienna. Her paternal grandfather was born in Sarajevo. Together with her brother Aleksandar, Vera attended secondary school and Jewish religious school in the synagogue.

*After the war and her immigration to the USA, she completed studies in human resources management at the Pepperdine University and, as a professor, worked in education in this field. She has three chil-*

*dren and five grandchildren. She now lives in San Jose in the United States of America.*

*Her mother died in 1989. A large part of her family from Yugoslavia and Austria disappeared in the Holocaust.*

My father Adolf, my mother Marijana, my brother Aleksa and I left Belgrade in April, 1941, when German bombs demolished our home. Many of our neighbours were killed during the bombing, either by the bombs or by machine-gun fire from the German pilots.

Having seen some German aircraft coming closer, we tried to find a shelter, hiding in the entrance doors of houses. Finally we found a shelter, but it was full of people, so we continued on. Several minutes

later this shelter was hit and everyone in it was killed. Belgrade was unprotected. The German pilots took advantage of this and massacred the civilian population.

My father managed to secure transport out of the city for us, which was a real miracle. Along the way, whenever we heard German planes coming, we would have to jump out into ditches. We saw many dead people along the way. We arrived in a village where there was looting on a massive scale. Our driver refused to stop in this village, so we went on to a nearby town. The Germans seized the village we had left and the town to which we went was occupied by the Italians.

We finally reached Split. After we had spent some time there, Father decided we should return to Belgrade. He ran into an acquaintance (a minister from the parliament?) and told him of our plans. This acquaintance advised him to postpone the trip. He was just about to leave for Belgrade and promised to inform us about the situation there under German occupation.

We waited for a few weeks. Father bought tickets for the trip. On the morning we were to board the bus, a message arrived: "Don't come back to Belgrade!"

Montenegrin insurgents were attacking and killing German and Italian soldiers. The Italians took us as hostages. First we were in an Italian prison in Split, and then we were taken by ship to the concentration camp in Kavajë, in Albania.

About two hundred of us were put into a big barracks. There were wooden triple bunk beds. We were each given two sheets which were dirty from fleas. The food was disgusting and we also battled with mice.

About three months later they put us on a ship bound for the Ferramonti concentration camp in Calabria. Again we were surrounded by barbed wire. Our family was given one small room.



*Vera Robiček from her time  
in Ferramonti, portrait  
by Mihael Fingenštajn*

On August 1, 1942, Father was vaccinated in the chest against typhoid. He died of a severe heart attack. He was 48. He was buried in the village of Tarsia. Many inmates and the camp commandant attended the funeral.

On March 5, 1943, Mother, Aleks and I left Ferramonti and went into free confinement (*libero confino*). We were escorted by a guard – a Black Shirt. He carried our luggage and was very kind to us. He told the other passengers that we were dangerous prisoners and they mustn't come into our compartment. This enabled us to have a comfortable journey.

We arrived in Brienza, in the province of Potenze in southern Italy. The people of the village were very welcoming to us. They didn't report us to the Germans when their soldiers were withdrawing north through the village.



Postcard sent by Vera Robiček from the Ferramonti camp to Germany, showing censorship stamps

We stayed in Brienza, where we were liberated by the British troops. The officer who commanded the unit mobilised us as interpreters. At first Aleks and I worked as translators with the British Army and later we were given assignments in the administration. We wore British uniforms and were given personal documents and food rations. This is how we reached Bari.

Following the departure of the British troops, we worked for the UNRA. I decided to work for the ORT. In ORT, refugees were trained in various crafts which would help them in immigration. In 1949 we emigrated to the United States of America, from where our uncle and a cousin had sent us guarantees. Because we had good command of the English language, Aleks and I found jobs in Oakland (California) within a few days.

Aleks was drafted into the army and spent two years in Germany. After demobilisation he enrolled at California University. He completed his studies with extraordinary success. He became a highly respected expert and gained an international reputation. He died early at the age of fifty-two. His three children all graduated from Stanford University.

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*Lea SORGER*

## UNDER THE WING OF CHANCE



**L**ea Sorger was born on June 17, 1923, in Sarajevo, to father Josip Bretler and mother Čarna, née Cveher. She has a younger brother, Hajim.

Until the beginning of the second world war, the family lived in Sarajevo. All members of Lea's immediate family survived the Holocaust, but a number of members of her closer and extended family, on both her mother's and her father's side perished.

When the war ended, Lea returned to Belgrade together with her husband Maks Sorger, whom she had married in Italy, and their newborn son, Mladen. She completed her high school education, which had been interrupted by the war, and enrolled in language studies. She graduated while working at the Yugoslav-Italian Chamber of Commerce and raising two young children.

After graduation she worked as an English language teacher in schools.

From her marriage with Maks Sorger she has two children, a son Mladen, a daughter Jelica, and four grandchildren.

*She lives in Belgrade.*

My family lived in Sarajevo. We were a large family. My grandparents on both sides had come from Poland during the time of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, following their stomachs to bread. Because

a number of public works were underway in Bosnia, there was work everywhere. My maternal grandfather was a watchmaker and came to Višegrad, where he opened a shop. My mother and her twin sister were born there, followed by her brother and another sister. They remained in Višegrad until 1914, when the first world war broke out. Višegrad was on the border between the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Serbia, so they fled to Sarajevo. They had planned earlier to move there. My mother and her sister had just finished four grades of primary school and this meant they and the other children could continue their schooling there. They were very successful in Sarajevo. They opened a shop which, before the war, was one of the most famous watchmaker's, jewellery and optical shops in the city.

My grandmother (whose maiden name was Frid), came to Bosnia when she was four or five months old. She lost her mother early and was brought up by her mother's sister. She had a younger brother who emigrated to America during the first world war. We were in contact after the second world war but later lost touch. He died without children.

I didn't know my paternal grandfather, who died before I was born. My grandmother returned as a girl in the great migration. She was the eldest of a large number of children. Her mother exploited her, or so she felt, and, at the first chance she had, when a family of friends came to Bosnia, she joined them and cut off all contact with her family. Later she married my grandfather and managed to bring up three children as a young widow. My father was the middle child of his parents. He left home at the age of fourteen, learnt the typography trade and, as a very industrious, clever and bright man, achieved a great deal in a very short time. Before the war he was the director of a printing house which published one of the two biggest newspapers in Sarajevo. He was a representative for the Croatian Paper Industry. He set up a factory to make small bags for food staples and various other goods. Today this would probably be called a workshop, but it was a very successful one. He was very active both professionally and in Jewish social life. In 1932, he built a house in Sarajevo which we moved into. This house was in the centre of the city, in what was then Kralja Petra Street. We lived on the ground floor of this three-storey building, rented out the first floor and my mother's twin sister and her family were on the second floor. They had a daughter three months older than me and a son who was a year younger than my brother, so we always had company. I went to school



together with my cousin until matriculation. We sat at the same school desk and had the same friends. It was only when we grew up that we began seeking our own company, and later it was boys, but the war soon brought a halt to everything.

In 1941, when I was in my final year of secondary school, the war broke out, and in the cruellest way – with bombing. The school stopped working. Fortunately no one from my family was killed in the bombing, but problems began. All of our plans, mine included, were dissipated. I was practically engaged. My boyfriend had just graduated in law and I was about to matriculate and we had planned to go to Belgrade. I wanted to study languages and my boyfriend planned to become a legal advisor in a company. His parents owned an apartment in Belgrade, near the city centre, close to where I now live.

When they began rounding up Jews in Sarajevo, they began in the main street, where he lived. The day they came for them he sent me a message through his maid, who ran to our place to tell us that we would be next and that we should flee. My fiancé's name was Silvio Gaon.

We had all been thinking of fleeing anyway. I had also suggested to him that we should run, but he said that he couldn't leave his parents behind. My mother's brother, with his wife, also perished in the same way with them, not wanting to leave his parents. He couldn't leave my grandfather and grandmother. My boyfriend was taken to Jasenovac. I heard, although I am not certain of this, that he was killed before his father's eyes because he had taken a slice of bread from somewhere.

The four of us left home, our nicely-decorated four-room apartment, with three suitcases. We had been living a very comfortable, nice life. We managed to flee thanks to an acquaintance of my father's. Because this man was often in financial difficulties, my father, who was a kind-hearted man, had often helped him out and lent him money. He felt the need to repay this kindness in some way and so took us to his apartment and then accompanied us to the railway station. This was in September, 1941. There were four of us, my brother was five years younger than me, a child of 13. My brother's name is Hajim, but we called him Braco and that name has stayed with him to this day. My mother's name was Čarna and my father's Josip, they called him Joži. Somehow we got on a train. We set off for Split, because we knew that Split was under Italian administration. We wanted at all costs to go somewhere where there were no Germans or Ustaša. Dalmatia belonged to the Independent State of Croatia, but the Italians were in

Split. Somewhere near Mostar, I'm not sure if it was exactly there, we got off the train and continued by bus. We had to get out of the vehicle because there was some Ustaša checkpoint on the border between Croatia and the Italian occupation zone. They asked us for our documents, permits to continue. Now my father suddenly remembered something important. As director of the printing company he had been given a permit by the German occupation authorities to move around Sarajevo, even after the curfew. On this document there was a stamp with a swastika. He showed this document to the border guard who was, I suppose, semi-literate, and when he saw the swastika that was enough for him and he let us pass. We continued our journey and reached Split.

In Split we ran into people we knew. There were many of our people there, and not only from Sarajevo. At first we lived for some time in private accommodation and then in Sumporna Banja, the sulphur spa. This building no longer exists. It was a kind of hotel. We had some money and we managed to get by. Later, mother's sister also arrived with her family, the ones with whom we had lived in the house in Sarajevo.

I remember that I began learning Italian then. Newspapers were published half in Croatian and half in Italian, so I could compare and learn. I already spoke French. In this way, I passed the time more easily. A month or two later there was an order issued for refugees to be placed under house arrest until further notice. We in Sumporna Banja didn't know what was going to happen to us. I think that this applied only to Jews. One day they came for us and said they were taking us somewhere. We were taken on board a boat. The Italians were playing at being strict rather than actually being so, this is the impression we had of them compared to the Germans.

They separated the men from the women. Younger boys stayed with their mothers. And so, on this boat, we were separated from father during the journey. We didn't know anything about where one another was. The boat was armoured.

We arrived in Trieste. From Trieste they drove us in buses to various small places. We were taken to the province of Treviso, to a mountain place called Asolo which was a resort for wealthy Venetians. Here they had houses and villas and the locals rented out rooms to tourists. One such room, a floor in fact, was given to us by a family which owned a grocery store. There were four of us, because my cousin and

her family did not leave Split with us. They had gone to Hvar before that, because they had some acquaintances there. My uncle, an engineer, was a department head in the Yugoslav Railways. He was a state civil servant, quite a bit older than my father, and had already considered retiring, drawing a pension and finding shelter on an island. So they went to Jelsa on Hvar, and then to the camp on Rab, where my uncle and his daughter went off with the Rab Battalion. Unfortunately my aunt and her son were captured by the Germans somewhere in Lika among a mass of refugees and were executed.

We stayed in a small, very pretty place on a mountain. We spent our days in internment with another seventy or so souls, Jews from Sarajevo, Zagreb and Belgrade. The locals behaved towards us in various different ways. There were organised Fascists, and they kept their distance and looked at us disapprovingly. Others behaved towards us in the same way they treated anyone they rented a room to. They were wondering who we were, what we were. We were forbidden to socialise with them. Our movements were limited. I don't know how many kilometres we were allowed to move around in, between dawn and dusk. We also received some assistance. Rent was paid for families and each person was given enough money to cover the most basic costs of food, in food coupons of course.

It was not until the 'fifties, here in Belgrade, that I learnt where this assistance came from. I read a book by my friend Danko Samokovlija, "A Dollar a Day". In this he explains that he was first in prison and then reached the Rab Battalion. His mother was in hospital and, during visits, they noticed that the patients weren't receiving any medicine. They were simply lying there, being given the very minimum to eat and nothing else. They asked a doctor why this was so and he said that they were being given as much as was covered by one dollar a day, in Italian lire. After Italy capitulated, the head of the hospital was captured. Again they asked him what he had meant when he said they were being given one dollar's worth a day. He explained that the Italian authorities had decided that not much money should be spent on Jewish patients and sent out a memorandum forbidding them to spend more than a dollar a day, which was the amount American Jews were donating for every Jew alive. Whether this was really true I don't know, but this is what he claimed and I believe it. It appears that I really survived thanks to that dollar a day.

We remained there until Italy's capitulation, until September, 1943.

How did we spend our days? Among us young people there were students and also those of us who wanted to study but were unable to, so we sought ways to make our days pass more quickly. We organised classes for the children, so that their education would not be interrupted. I worked with four children up to the age of ten. I remember that it was terrible for my father. He was without his career, which he had successfully built with his own ten fingers from the time he was fourteen. He suffered a great deal. Along with suffering because everything he had built was now lost, he also found it very difficult not to have anything to do. He had been accustomed to working all the time and now he really fell into a bad state and lost weight. Physically I had never looked better. Quite simply there was nothing to wear myself out and the air was excellent. And so we endured, from one day to the next, we never knew what tomorrow would bring. Adult refugees had to report every day to the *questura*. In order to avoid all reporting individually, which would have disrupted our regular work, we had to choose a representative who reported in every day for all of us and guaranteed that we were all there.

They gave us an identity card which bore the words *Internati civili di Guerra* in red ink. We could move around during the day within a radius of four kilometres, I think. Once I went with Mother to the town of Trevizo, because her eyesight was weak and she had to see a doctor. We needed to get permission for this. I don't think we had to have identity cards, but we asked for them. Later, this was one of our documents from the wartime. When Italy capitulated, we were in a panic, because we knew the Germans would soon arrive from the north. We were very close to Tyrol in Austria. Somehow everybody got themselves together and made their own plans. We were making plans together, as a family. My father was unable to make the decision to escape again into uncertainty, while I did not want to again part from a man with whom I had fallen in love, so I joined his family.

We decided to flee southward, because we knew that the Americans were to come ashore in the south of Italy.

It was first necessary to get to a nearby place by bus and then travel further by train. There was a lot of changing trains, you couldn't go forward, you had to backtrack, then go forward again and in this way we came to Pescara. There we were met by bombing. We left our things

in the station cloakroom and were given receipts. We took with us only our rucksacks and few things. Now our wandering around began. We reached the interior on some local train. Later, I remember, we stopped in the Salmona tunnel, unable to go either forwards or backwards. We left the train and continued on foot. We came across a group of boys and began chatting to them. They told us they would take us to their village. We arrived in the village and settled in. The people there were very kind. Again there was an air raid. The aircraft flew very low and fired all around from machine guns. Somehow we survived. The family with whom we were staying used to bring us food. We stayed there until we realised there was no sense in wasting time, and that we needed to head south, towards the Americans. Again we separated. My future husband and I set off on our own. His name was Makso Sorger and he was from Daruvar. He had finished secondary school in Zagreb and his elder brother was working there. He had begun to study law. Then his brother had suddenly died. My future husband had had to interrupt his education. They were rather poor and he had no financial security. He had to get a job and later moved to Belgrade.

And so the two of us headed south on our own. We would hide in the huts in which the Italians made charcoal. We slept on beds of ferns. One night a German patrol came by. They came into our hut and asked us for directions because they were lost. They were speaking in German and they noticed my husband's green socks. And one said to the other in German: "Let's take his socks!" And the other said "Oh, leave it, you'll get new ones when we get to the base." Of course we were pretending not to speak German. We showed them the direction they should take using gestures. From here we kept listening all the time to the movement of troops and heavy artillery. One minute we would think they were advancing, then that they were retreating, now going in one direction, then the other. In the end, after that night, we finally did arrive, following tracks to where we came across the first Americans. It was October 24, 1943. For us, this was the day of rescue, of freedom.

We told the Americans who we were and where we were coming from. There was one Jew among them, I remember his name was Kaufman. We made contact with him. Before the war I had begun to take private lessons in English and I had learnt German and French in school, so we somehow managed to communicate. I didn't know much, but enough for us to understand each other. My husband told me to take the chain with the Mogen David from my neck and give it to him as a

gift. I had never once taken it off all through the war, even though it had been dangerous in some situations. He told me "Give it to him, let him send it to his wife in America." And so I did.

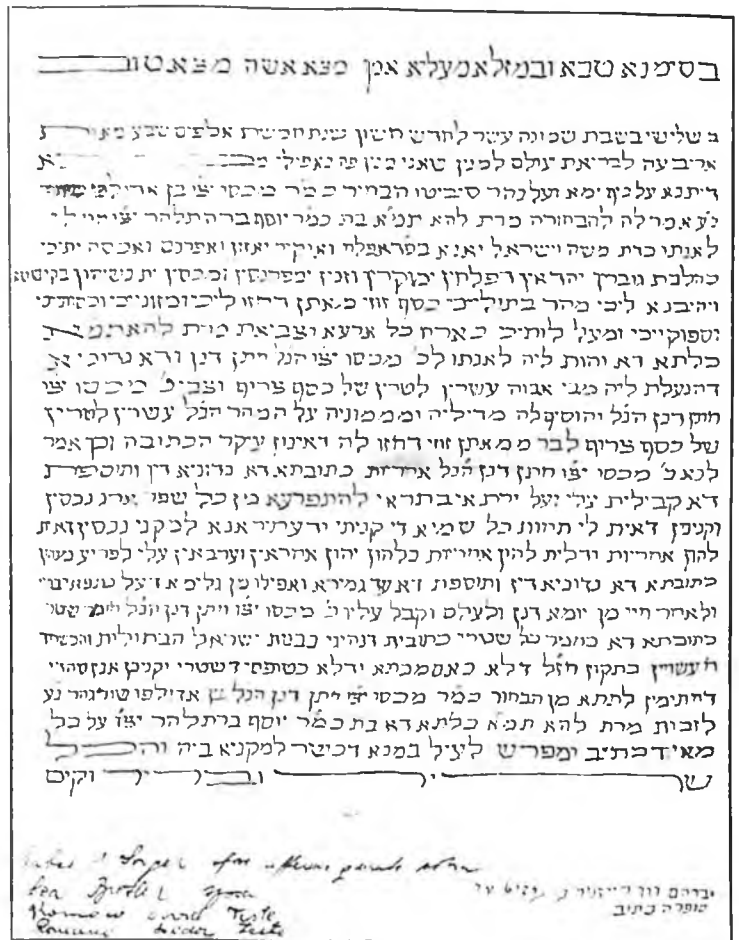
We continued our journey, according to the direction he had given us. I no longer remember how we went on, part of the way by train, partly by horse and cart. In any case we headed south. We spent one night in an Allied hospital, in Benevento. I remember this night was horrifying because we could hear the wounded all the time. Somehow we reached Naples. I think the Americans took us there in their vehicles. In Naples we reported to a refugee centre. They asked us whether we wanted to work or whether we wanted assistance. We wanted to work. Because my knowledge of Italian and English was enough for me to communicate, they took me to work in an institution where the Americans needed to hire Italians for physical labour. I was an interpreter for the Italians and the Americans. My husband, who was an economist by profession, said that he would find a job somewhere he could eat. He got a job in a kitchen for the Americans, so he also brought me food from there. For some time, we got by like that.

I don't know why I stopped working there. The front was very close. The Americans set up a centre where they could bring their soldiers from the front lines for a couple of days' rest. Here they were given the best food, they could change their clothes, they had rooms with indoor games, sports fields and a shop. I was packing souvenirs and they were sending them to America. I had to make boxes and packages from various kinds of cardboard.

In the meantime, we wanted to make our relationship somehow official, to register a civil marriage. But for this marriage, they were asking for documents which we didn't have. So we decided there was no other option: we would go to a synagogue. We found a synagogue. There they required at least two witnesses. Fate, which so often takes a hand, didn't abandon us now. In the street I ran into two Sarajevo Jews who used to play table tennis in the yard of our house with a young man who lived on the second floor. I knew them well so I asked them to be our witnesses and they agreed. In the meantime we bought wedding rings of some metal and took them to the temple. They quickly went to a restaurant and got a glass. According to Jewish custom this is broken so that the pieces of glass symbolise prosperity. During the wedding ceremony, the rabbi asked whether the wedding ring my husband was giving me was real gold. The witnesses looked at my husband, he nod-

ded and so we were married. This was on Tuesday, November 18, 1943, in the morning. The rabbi wrote us a document in Italian, and he also wrote for us a *ketubah* in Hebrew, the Jewish nuptial agreement. I still have this marriage document. When my daughter was getting married in Israel it served very nicely for her to prove that she was Jewish. I photocopied it and sent it to her.

*Ketuba, the prenuptial agreement, handwritten in Hebrew, given to Lea and Maks by the rabbi at their wedding in Naples, and which, many years later, served as credible evidence for her daughter to prove that she was Jewish at her wedding in Israel*



A little later this American centre was moved to Caserta. There I became pregnant. The landlady with whom we lived was very happy about this news – she said it was a good sign for their house that a child had been conceived in it.

As the Allies were advancing to the north, the centre also moved to Rome. While out walking in Rome, we ran into some people from Sarajevo who told us there was a National Liberation of Yugoslavia Committee in Rome. We immediately went there and registered. They told us they would send us to Bari, where the headquarters were. This was August, 1944. By now I was no longer able to work because of my

pregnancy. Now we set off to Bari in a jeep. The roads were rutted, we went through villages, through gullies, the jeep travelling very fast, this journey was a real adventure. When we arrived my husband was assigned to the technical service of the base headquarters where some kind of bulletin was being published for various units of our National Liberation Army in Italy. In this editorial office he made copies of articles, because he knew how to use a typewriter. I helped as much as I was able, dictated, made corrections and did other work. Here we would come across acquaintances from Yugoslavia.

When I was due to go into labour, I went straight to the camp at Carbonara di Bari. This camp was built for people of various nationalities who happened to be in Italy during the war. Greatest in number were Ethiopians. There were our people there too, mostly from Dalmatia, who had been brought over by the Partisans: women, children, endangered people from the islands. Again I was a kind of interpreter for our Partisans, for the Italians and British who were in charge of the administration. My husband came from Bari to visit me whenever he could. For eleven months I knew nothing about my parents and my brother who had stayed behind in Asola when the two of us decided to go to the south of Italy. One morning in August, 1944, the camp commandant called me and said, "Go there into the quarantine barracks! They're calling you."

At the entrance of the Carbonara camp there was a quarantine barracks to one side, and across from this barracks the "prison". I went over there and, in the quarantine facility, were my parents and my brother! They had found out that I was here because on the other side, in the "prison" barracks, there was a Jewish woman from Sarajevo with whom I had spoken earlier. She told my parents that I was here. This meeting was a shock to all of us. Everything had happened so suddenly and unexpectedly. When my father saw that I was pregnant, his first question was whether I was married. They were soon out of quarantine. I think that our acquaintance from Sarajevo was in prison because there were unanswered questions about her connection with the Chetniks. She must have been somehow saved by the Chetniks.

My parents had left the place we were interned in together shortly after I did. They had wandered around the non-liberated part of Italy, under the Germans. They didn't hide, they just blended in with the mass of Italians who were also fleeing from one place to another for various reasons. They were hungry, but somehow managed to survive, they



found ways to do this. When my brother, my mother and I used to meet later and recount these stories, each had their own version. I wasn't with them and so cannot judge and say which are true. Father was trying, at the time, to get them to some place in which there was a factory which he had done business with at some time, but it was wartime and he didn't find these people. And so they saw the end of the war. My father was taking it all very hard and my mother used to say that the most difficult thing in her life was not knowing what had happened to me. Father always carried my photograph with him and used to show it to anyone he thought might possibly have run into me somewhere.



*Life triumphs, even in the hardest of times: Lea with her son Mladen in Bari, 1945*

Later, when I was due to deliver, I went to a place called Gravina, about eighty kilometres from Bari, where there was a Partisan hospital. A building which had once been a technical school now housed the Maternity and Gynaecology Ward. This is where I was delivered. My mother came and so helped me and everyone else in the maternity ward at the time. My doctor was Dr Premru. He told me "When a son is born we doctors immediately say it's a son, but when a daughter is born we say a beautiful healthy child, everything is all right." When I had a son, he jokingly said to my husband: "You have a

beautiful healthy child." He didn't immediately say "a son".

We stayed a while longer in the technical department of the base headquarters, making a room out of a former kitchen. I was young, nothing was too hard for me. I was a happy mother. We had already learnt to improvise. Anything could be improvised. The baby needed to be bathed. What can we do? Italy, cooking oil, cans for cooking oil. My husband took a few cans to a tradesman for him to make a baby bath.

This bath, lined with blankets, was also a cot. Nappies and baby clothes were given to us by an acquaintance, the head of the Partisan hospital. Later I removed the sleeves from a jumper of mine and made trousers for the child. We somehow found ways to get by. And everything went smoothly until I developed a severe case of appendicitis. I had a high temperature and was breastfeeding the child, so there was nothing I could do but leave the child with my mother and go in for surgery at the Partisan hospital in the primary school building, again in Gravina. I had to stay there for ten days. My mother somehow managed with powdered milk. The child lost weight, but in the end everything was fine. This was in May, 1945, and by June that year it was time for us to return to our liberated homeland.

We travelled to Split by ship. And then everyone went their own way. My parents went to Sarajevo, but my husband, who had lived in Belgrade before the war, wanted us to somehow get to Belgrade. They got us to Zadar where we were to get a plane to Belgrade. We waited and waited for that plane, but it never seemed to come. We needed to find a cot for the child again, so somehow a rabbit cage was turned into one. Before that a case for oranges had served as a crib.

Because there was no plane, we got into a truck and travelled through Velebit to Zagreb. The truck was carrying bags of salt and on top of the bags of salt were my husband and I with Mladen who was four and a half months old at the time. We named him after debating whether he should be Mladen, to be always young, or Zdravko, to be always healthy.

We somehow managed to reach Zagreb. It was a difficult trip, we had a thermos flask and would take ordinary water from taps at stations and powdered milk and feed the child that way.

When we arrived in Zagreb we found a lively city full of young people. The Youth Congress was being held. My best friend from Sarajevo was in Zagreb, she had come from the Rab camp and, later, from battle. In Zagreb she was living in some richly decorated, abandoned apartment. We slept there, on Persian carpets, until we were able to get to Belgrade.

We arrived in Zemun. The railway bridge had been demolished so they got us into the city over the road bridge, in a horse and cart. We reported to the Command and were given accommodation in the building which today houses Radio Belgrade. Before the war this was a hotel, Zanatski Dom. We had a room there and our son's crib was now

the little table on which suitcases are put in hotel rooms. We made a fence of chairs around it.

My uncle, who had been in German captivity, was already in Belgrade. He was an officer. He came to visit us, but we weren't in the room. Later we found a gold coin which he had put under the child's pillow. He had no children of his own, his wife had perished in Sajmište.

Soon we acquired an apartment of our own. We lived in this apartment for quite a long time. Two years later we also had a daughter. And so a new life began. I always regretted that I had never studied as I had planned to, but only taken care of the children and the house, and I found it very difficult when I was socialising and people would talk about work. I suffered a lot and didn't want to live like that. As soon as my son began the first year of primary school and my daughter was in kindergarten, I enrolled at the university to study languages which was what I had always wanted to do, what I knew and loved. I knew that I would be able to graduate, despite having two children. While I was studying I worked for the Yugoslav-Italian Chamber of Commerce. As soon as I graduated I went to work teaching English in a school, which I had always wanted to do, and I worked there until I retired.

My parents returned to Sarajevo. There my brother finished "Partisan" secondary school, completing two years in one, and then enrolled at Zagreb University, in the Faculty of Electrical Engineering. Later, in Israel, he graduated and gained a master's degree in chemistry. He emigrated to Israel with the first aliyah, and my parents left the following year, with the second. Unfortunately, my father wasn't able to endure all these difficulties and changes, and he died a year later. We decided that my mother should come to Belgrade and live with us, and here she died at a very old age. My brother, who by now had a family, moved to Switzerland for business reasons, and lives there to this day. In the meantime, my husband died and our children each went their own way – my daughter to Israel and my son to Canada – and I stayed here alone. We see each other occasionally and speak regularly on the telephone. Our extended family now lives in seven different countries!

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*Flora ALBAHARI-D'ACAMPORA*

SAVING ONE ANOTHER



**F**lora Albahari-d'Acampora was born on August 13, 1919, in Sanski Most, to father Jakob and mother Rene Albahari, née Levi. She lived in Sanski Most, Sarajevo and Banjaluka. Immediately before the war she was living in the village of Hrváčani, near Prnjavor.

*She had three brothers, Moric, Šalamon and Braca, and two sisters, Matilda and Rahela. All perished with their families and she is the only one who survived. She lives in Florence in Italy. She has three children.*

*As a member of the Women's International Zionist Organisation, she received a medal for her thirty years of work in this organisation.*

In our family home we observed all the festivals, my family lived strictly according to Jewish customs. We ate kosher, we had two stoves, two kitchen dressers, two sets of crockery. I had religious education at school and learnt Hebrew, we read prayers but didn't understand the language.

My father Jakob was killed by the Chetniks at the beginning of the war because the Command of the Zdravko Čelar Proletarian Battalion spent a night in our house. My youngest brother, Mita-Šalom, was captured by the Chetniks in the village of Potoča near Prnjavor and was killed there in 1942. His wife Tilda and son Moric also perished. My eldest brother Moric lived in Zagreb. He and his wife were captured by

the Ustaša at the Zagreb station when he was attempting to go to Dalmatia with his family. They perished in Nazi camps. My middle brother Izidor-Braco, lived in Sarajevo and was taken off to Jasenovac. He did not return. My sister Matilda was married to Fajngold, a German Jew. Both of them, together with her little son Leon, were sent to some camp from which they never returned. My sister Rahela, married name Lajpnik, was sent with her husband from Podravska Slatina to Hungary and then further on. No one returned and there has never been any information at all about their fate.

My mother stayed behind in Hrvaćani, all alone, until 1943 when the Chetniks killed her, believing that she had gold belonging to her son Moric. There were rumours that he had left this gold with her before he fled to Split. She was killed with an axe.

I also stayed behind in our family home in Hrvaćani for some time. One day my father said to me: "My child, all kinds of things are going to happen here. You're young, you must run. We can't." I kept refusing, saying that whatever happened to them should also happen to me. My parents insisted that I leave. Mother packed things for me, embraced me and said "Fiža, kali ke vas, tu sos manseva." (Daughter, you must go, you are young.) Father comforted me, saying that they had never harmed anyone and so no one would harm them. He gave me money and I began to cry as though I knew that I would never see them again."

During my flight from Hrvaćani, I was helped by the village postman, a young man named Vlado. Somehow he managed to get me false identification papers in the name of Fedora Mlinarić. I went by train to Banjaluka. There I stayed with a cousin of my mother's, Ernestina Levi, who told me a few days later: "Mira, jo sto jendo a Jajce ondi mi iža Luna. Tu vaz venir kun mi!" (listen, I'm going to Jajce, to my daughter Luna. You're coming with me.) And then she told me to leave Jajce and go to Split, that many Jews were seeking refuge there. Her other daughter, Flora, was also there. Before I left my mother had also told me that I should go to Split and there get in touch with Mrs Budiselić, a friend of hers. I had to get a permit for travel to Split and this was issued by the Supreme Command of the German Forces, in the department for passes. I managed, with my fake identification papers, to get this document that I needed. I went to Jajce with Aunt Ernestina to Luna, who was married to a Muslim. Her husband, Naim, kept trying to talk me into staying in Jajce and converting to Islam, which would save my life. But

my aunt simply said: “Para nada, tu vaz ir a Split!” (It’s out of the question, you’re going to Split!).

The following morning I boarded the train. Three German SS officers came onto the station. They were checking personal documents. I noticed them from the distance, while they were still at the beginning of the wagon. Although I had a permit, I was very frightened that they would discover me. I sat on a seat close to the other door. When they had almost reached me, the train stopped, I opened the door, got off and got back on the train again through another door. They, too, left the train.



*Photograph from Sanski Most, 1928: Flora in the front row, fourth from (L); father Jakov and mother Rena in the second row, second and third from (L); third row, (L) brother Šalom Albahari-Mito (perished in Šnjegotina), second from (L); sister Rahela Albahari, married name Lajpnik (perished in Hungary), and third from (L) sister Matilda, married name Fajngold (perished in Stara Gradiška)*

I found refuge with my mother’s friend, Mrs Budiselić. The director of the civilian flying boat port, Valentino d’Acampora, also lived in her house. I established contact with the Jewish Community, from whom I received seven lire per day. For some time I lived with Mrs Budiselić. I worked in her house. I cleaned, went to the market, worked as a maid to repay her kindness in taking me in. There were many peo-



ple in the town whom I had known in Banjaluka and Sarajevo, where I used to go often to visit my immediate family. There was also a rabbi from Sanski Most, Kabiljo, and another from Banjaluka whose name I don't remember. We helped one another.

Because the tenant d'Acampora was very interested in me and knew that I used to swim at Bačvice beach, he would go there as well just to be close to me. At that time Mrs Budiselić's niece had also come to her place. She was a pretty, blonde girl and she fell in love with Valentino. In order to get me away from him, she reported me to the police, saying I was a communist. The Italian police took me to the prison in Tartaljina Street. I spent four months there. No one knew I was Jewish. They interrogated me three times, but didn't beat me. They never physically abused me. I only had psychological difficulties.

Then the Italians decided to send me to some camp in Italy. When Valentino learned this, he intervened to stop them sending me to Italy because he knew that he would never see me again. The Italian police released me on condition that I go to Croatia, so an order was issued for me to move to the Independent State of Croatia. Valentino knew some fisherman who supplied their canteen with fresh fish. He found accommodation for me with a fisherman in a place very close to the border, a place called Grljevac. He would come to visit every week bringing *pagnocca*, little bread rolls, his ration, and coffee. He was very thoughtful and decent, asking nothing from me. And then I began to fall in love with him. I saw that he was serious and devoted to me.

One day he came and said that I was in danger there, that I was no longer safe, and suggested that I return to Split. I didn't know what to do. I was living "j o m b a j o m" (day to day) as my mother used to say. I returned secretly and Valentino hid me in a house on Marjan Hill for a while. Every evening after work he would walk over to my place and bring me food. This was in 1941. He saw that the Germans in Split had become too oppressive and were wanting to take everything into their own hands. He decided to return to Italy once he realised that they also wanted to take over his seaplane port. He went to Trieste in a seaplane which made regular flights to Italy. He left me the keys to his apartment. He then told me that he wanted us to marry and that, if it was at all possible, I should make my way to Trieste with the Italians, and he would wait for me there until they transferred him to a new position. After he left I found out that there were seaplanes flying into Split, but that the pilots were Germans. Then I received a note from Trieste in

which Valentino told me to get away any way I could, because he would soon be transferred away.

Split was bombed and I hid in the Diocletian Palace, in the cellars. There was a German officer sitting next to me. He asked me if I had a Croatian-German dictionary. I seized my chance and asked him to get me a pass for Trieste. The next day the air-raid sirens began again and we met there, he with a pass and I with a dictionary.

The next morning I boarded a boat. There was room for twenty or thirty people below, that was as many as the boat would hold. This crossing from Split to Trieste was run by the Germans. We travelled for eight days, only at night from 10.00 p.m. to 6 a.m. and during each day we would hide on the coast of some island. There were a lot of women and children. All the food we had was one small slice of bread and half a glass of water.

Finally we disembarked in Trieste. There was a German guard checking passes. What I didn't know was that my pass said I had volunteered for work in Germany. They told me to wait there. I thought they had discovered that I was Jewish. I was helpless, sitting in the police building on a bench in a corridor, between two doors. The second door was the Italian Women's Fascist Department and it was open. From time to time a woman would come out dressed in the black Italian Fascist uniform. Suddenly it occurred to me to go to them and ask them to save me. And that is what I managed to do. I hugged one of them and asked her to save me. I told her that my fiancé was Italian and this persuaded them, because they hid me when the German police came looking for me. This Italian Fascist woman, a Trieste resident, telephoned the *idroscalo*, the seaplane base, where Valentino was still working. This



*Flora from the days when there was still no trace of life's hardships on her face*



was sheer luck, because he was due to travel to southern Italy that day. They fed me, even gave me chocolate and white bread, saying *Povera creatura sola* (poor lonely creature).

When we finally met, Valentino took me to the *idroscalo* where he showed me what he had bought for me because I didn't have anything to wear. That afternoon we set off for Rome by train. We stayed in Rome for eight days, without money. We got a little money and train tickets from the Vatican, because we had heard that they were giving assistance to refugees. Because there were no passenger trains, we arrived in Arezzo in a cattle wagon. One of Valentino's colleagues was waiting for him there. We stayed there until Italy capitulated. Then we went to the village of Lucignano where we were married in a civil ceremony. The Germans were withdrawing from Lucignano ahead of the Americans, and my husband took photographs of the withdrawal from a window and in the streets. The Germans were carrying everything in their trucks: cows, pigs, poultry, furniture. When the American tanks appeared, everyone was in the streets. We were hugging one another and kissing. I hugged a woman, shouting at her that my name was not Fedora, but Flora. The thought of my mother, my father, my brothers and sisters, has followed me always.

A senior American officer came by in a jeep. When he saw Valentino photographing everything, with me beside him, he put us in the jeep and took us to prison. He thought that we were spies. On the fifth day they came for us and took us for questioning. It was very hot. Across from me an officer unbuttoned his shirt a little and I spotted a chain with a Star of David on his neck. I couldn't believe it, I stood up and said to him three times: "Shalom!" He just raised his hands and said: "Stop! Spies? Trial? Can't you see these are victims of Fascism!" Briefly I explained who I was. We were given food and taken by jeep to the station where we continued on. I remember my husband saying to me: "Now we're one all. I saved your life before and now you've saved mine." We went to Catanzaro, to his family. We were there until they moved us to Reggio Calabria, in Calabria, on the toe of Italy where an airport had been built. Our first son, Jakob-Marko (named after my father and his father) was born in Catanzaro. Our second son, Luigi, and our daughter Irena (after my mother, Rene) were born in Reggio.

Later we moved from Reggio to Florence, where my husband was transferred as airport director.

After the war I had a growing desire to visit Yugoslavia to learn something about my family, my many relatives.

It was not until 1953 that I finally reached Yugoslavia. After that first visit I came back several times. The family of my cousin, Judita Albahari-Krivokuća, exhumed the bodies of my parents and moved them to Sarajevo. As for all the other graves of my brothers and sisters, we have no idea where they are.

Florence, a city with a population of 600,000, has a large Jewish Community. It supports itself from taxes, contributions to the community and the voluntary work of its members.

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*Pavle MINH*

## FOUR YEARS IN THE SHADOW OF DEATH



**P**avle Minh was born in Vienna, Austria, in 1924. Several years later the family moved to Belgrade where he completed primary school and seven years of secondary school, until the German occupation began in 1941. After the liberation he studied for two years in the Mechanical Engineering Faculty of Belgrade University and then spent two years studying shipbuilding in Zagreb.

In the spring of 1951 he moved to Israel and worked in the electrical power plant in Haifa. From 1953 to 1955 he continued his education in Genoa (Italy), finishing at the end of 1955 with a doctorate in naval architecture. From 1956 to 1958 he worked in the navy in Haifa and then in the Traffic Ministry in the Port Authority as a naval construction engineer – a position which developed into that of chief naval construction engineer with responsibility for international relations. In the course of this 32 years work for the Ministry he coordinated state supervision of naval construction for the Israeli flag, beginning with German war reparation ships and ending with modern ships for the transportation of vehicles and containers. He represented Israel at many conferences within the International Maritime Organisation.

He retired in 1989, continuing for several more years as technical advisor to the Port Authority in Hadera and the Ministry of the Environment. He has also translated several books, including a book about Haj-Amin el-Husseini by Jennie Lebel which he translated from

*Serbian into English, and the technical documentation of the Elit chocolate factory from German into Hebrew.*

*He is married with two sons, a granddaughter in New Zealand, a grandson in South Africa and two grandsons in Israel.*

In the spring of 1941, I turned 17. I lived in Dedinje with my parents, my father Aleksandar and my mother Alisa, and attended the Second Boys' Secondary School in Poenkareova Street. Dragiša Cvetković, the prime minister, travelled to Vienna on March 24 to add Yugoslavia's signature to the Tripartite Pact (Germany, Italy, Japan). That evening, Radio Belgrade played Schubert's Symphony in B minor, the "Unfinished", which I had heard for the first time three years earlier when Hitler annexed Austria.

The next day Yugoslavia joined the Tripartite Pact. Riots began in Belgrade. Special editions of newspapers were burnt. Yugoslav and British flags were being flown along with pictures of Hitler on a gallows. On the afternoon of March 26, a large group from my secondary school set off to the Second Girls' Secondary School, passing through Terazije. Because we were joined by several hundred more students from other secondary schools, we returned to our own singing the anthem and cheering the king, Yugoslavia, and the army. Many residents joined us and so this long procession arrived in the centre of the city. Awaiting us there were gendarmes with batons and they finally dispersed the whole mass demonstration.

On the following day, General Simonović took over power in a military coup. We then all began to prepare for the war which would inevitably follow these events. We exchanged addresses in case of evacuation, because some of my friends were planning to take refuge in villages, while our fathers faced the dilemma of whether or not to join the army. My father decided to go despite not having received a notice for mobilisation.

On the morning of April 6, the bombing of Belgrade began. We were sitting in the basement looking from time to time at the city in flames and smoke in the distance. The bombing went on for two days; we had no water or electricity. Large numbers of people began a stampede from the city towards the outskirts and our house filled up. A few days later, all our illusions of any kind of front vanished – the Germans entered the city. Some German officers came and occupied a room in

our building, and attached a notice to the door which read that the whole building had been requisitioned for the *Wehrwirtschaftsstab* (War Economy Staff).

On April 16, the notorious order for all Jews to report to Tašmajdan appeared on the streets of Belgrade, along with the warning that was to become routine: anyone not reporting would be shot. My family and I responded to the call and were in Tašmajdan by 7.30 a.m. After long hours of waiting they distributed yellow armbands with the sign *JUDE-JEVREJIN* (Jew) and told us to return the following day, when we were given identification papers with various stamps in them. They divided us into groups of forty. Labour began on April 21. Each group was led by a fireman. We were clearing rubble, taking out the dead, digging toilets and doing other kinds of work. A few days after this my father returned from the army which had fallen apart in the face of the German invasion.

One day I was part of a German "show". They had caught us, dozens of us, Jews returning from compulsory labour. Pursuing us with dogs, shouting and threats they took us to an old palace in the centre of the city and forced us to climb over the fence. In the garden of the palace we carried bricks from one pile to another, in double time, while four or five soldiers swore at us and beat us and a crowd of citizens gathered on the footpath across the road and watched this "performance" in silence. They dismissed us late. It was close to curfew, so I spent the night in the city with a friend, Bubiša Simić, because I didn't have time to return home. When I did reach home the next day, I heard that my Uncle Adolf had committed suicide - from the beginning he had seen the future as dark and hopeless and when we were in Tašmajdan he would say that he would like the Germans to kill him.

At the beginning of May, we had an unexpected visit from Prince Đorđe, the elder brother of King Aleksandar, who had spent a number of years in a mental hospital near Niš. He was now free and they brought him to our place with two valets, two cooks, two chauffeurs and a gendarme. The five of us were crammed into four rooms and the whole house was at the disposal of the prince. I continued to go to compulsory labour until the middle of June when I was exempted on health grounds.

In July the prince and his entourage moved to another building nearby and we moved to an apartment in the city, in Birčaninova Street. And so, after ten years, we left the house in Dedinje which, for my par-

ents, had been the pinnacle of success in life. From this point on everything began to go downhill for them and they both lived in a small one-room apartment until they died, my mother in 1967 and my father ten years later.

And so August came. I was mainly staying at home. Sometimes my friends came to visit (they had finished the seventh year of secondary school while I, of course, had not), but I rarely went out, for fear that they would take my "sick leave" away from me and force me back to labour. We had planned to go to Rtanj in Eastern Serbia, the greater part of which was owned by the Minh family, but this did not eventuate: after an attack by the Partisans, the Germans took over the mine.

On September 14, they caught Father in the street and took him to the camp at Topovske Šupe with another five hundred or so Jews. Mother visited him the following day, taking him a blanket and food. Twenty-four hours later they allowed him to go home. On October 8, there was a general review of all "sick leave" and my father and I were given "jobs". From that time on we worked until 6.00 p.m. every day. One day we again found ourselves in Topovske Šupe. They took us there directly from labour.

Along the way the guard treated us with two litres of wine and, at about two p.m., we arrived in the camp. All Jewish labourers were brought in during the course of the day so there were about twelve or fourteen hundred of us. I found my father immediately. We slept in stables and in soldiers' apartments on a thin layer of straw on the ground, pushed up against one another. We went to labour from the camp. After a few very exhausting and unpleasant assignments, I managed to get myself into Father's group, near the railway station where the work was easier. Each day, from midday to one p.m., women came to visit us at work. In the camp we were allowed visits on Wednesdays and Sundays, from nine to eleven a.m. and from two to four p.m. We were given food in the camp: in the morning some hot and bitter barley substitute, at midday in the evening a warm meal (two or three spoons of beans, potato and cabbage) and, in the later afternoon, 100 grams of bread. Because of this, Mother brought us food from home. People were accommodated in two large buildings, in which there were stables downstairs and soldiers' apartments upstairs. There were also offices, a storage building, a kitchen, a watchmaker's shop, a barber shop and a woodwork shop, all incredibly primitive of course. We got up at six, usually even earlier, and went to bed at eight in the evening. From the



very first day inmates were prone to the psychosis of fear and desperation and there were several cases of suicide. Every few days one or two hundred people would be taken off in a transport, but we did not know where. From October 39, we no longer went to labour.

About ten days later, about a thousand Gypsies were brought in. These were gradually taken away from the camp over the following few days. Many of them came with musical instruments; the day after they arrived they organised a band and, in the yard of the barracks, they played their farewell concert which included, among other things, the overture to the opera *The Barber of Seville* by Rossini. After the concert the Germans smashed their instruments and burnt them on a huge bonfire while the trucks drove a large group off to an unknown destination.

*From the report of Oberlieutenant Walter to his superiors, I learnt after the war that groups of Jews and Gypsies were shot dead somewhere north of Pančevo on October 27 and 30, 1941. The report contains a number of interesting facts. The execution was carried out very rapidly, about a hundred people in forty minutes; the Jews went to their death calmly and collectedly, while the Gypsies were whining and shouting; the German officer, at the end, noted that the execution itself does not cause immediate psychological problems for soldiers but that these emerge later, in the evening, when they are thinking calmly about everything.*

I arrived at the camp quite calmly, a little dizzy from the wine. I soon became accustomed to the lice and the lack of space, to sleeping on the hard floor, to coffee made of barley and to the cabbage. In the early days I was in a bad mood because of the hard work and exhaustion. The reading out of names for transport tore at my nerves in the beginning, as did the shouting and screaming of the SS soldiers. I got used to the transports and the soldiers. When we no longer worked we would sit in the carpentry shop where we would be warm and could heat our lunch on the stove. After we were released from the camp at the beginning of November, Father and I travelled by wagon to arrive home about half past one, and we washed and changed our clothes.

I have never known with certainty who freed us from the camp. There is one version according to which it was Ljilja Podkaminer, through Egon Zabukošek, but I also heard another version – that the German commissioner who had been appointed to manage the Minh brothers' Rtanj mine had asked that my father be set free temporarily so that he could "hand over" the mine to him. The third version, which my

father confirmed through an official statement after the war, was that his old friends, the Roš brothers, had intervened.

While we were sitting in the camp, my late Aunt Liza – Adolf's widow – interceded with a general in the City of Belgrade Command, who told her that he could not confirm whether we had been shot. This caused my mother a serious nervous breakdown from which she never recovered.

After the camp there were three attempts to flee: first my father paid an enormous sum of money to some gang who were smuggling people out of Serbia, but either they were caught or they reported this to the police themselves.

Serbian police, including a Jewish agent, came on November 13. They searched our apartment, arrested all three of us and took us to the prison at the top of Aleksandrova Street. After several days of interrogation they allowed us to go home.

On November 18, there was another unsuccessful attempt to flee. Another gang: we were sitting in the waiting area of the railway station with our luggage, and then they told us that they could not take us across the border that evening because the German guards they had bribed were not on duty. We returned to our apartment in a taxi, during the curfew, but the Tuvi family, who were also waiting, were caught by the Germans and all perished.

The third attempt succeeded: some school friend of my father's interceded with the Germans and the Italians and got us genuine passes with Italian visas. And so, on the evening of November 27, 1941, we set off by train, in a sleeping car, for Sušak, via Zagreb.

We arrived in Sušak in the evening and were met by a baggage handler who took our suitcases to a hotel near the post office. We went to bed soon after dinner and fell asleep. The following day Father tried to obtain permission to cross the bridge into Italian territory, but they refused him at the *questura*. We were afraid that they would expel us into the Independent State of Croatia and certain death, because we didn't believe that our special documents would guarantee our safety there. A few days later we were given the address of the Medved family, an apartment which was reached by stairs under the footpath. After we hid there for a day or two, they put us on a bus for Kraljevica, which was in the Independent State of Croatia but under Italian military administration. We didn't know what awaited us there, but we were in fear of the Ustaša and the home guards. Instead we were met by local women who



carried our baggage on their heads to the Praha Hotel on the Oštro Peninsula. At that time there were only refugees staying in the hotel: two women from Vienna, the Poper family who were also from Vienna, the Karfunkel family, an innkeeper from Lika with his wife and two sons. All of them had fled to Kraljevica through Zagreb. From our room there was a wonderful view of the sea and the coastline – first the lighthouse then, further on, Bakar, Rijeka, Učka and the whole of Istria, while the circle was completed by the islands of Cres, Krk and St Marko. Here we spent the winter and the spring: during the winter I went to Branko Polić, a refugee from Zagreb who lived in the city with his parents and had a piano. Branko was later best man at my wedding and now lives in Zagreb. In the spring, we began to swim and this took up more and more of my day.

In June, 1942, we managed to move to Villa Capponi, right beside the sea. Time passed very quickly during the summer, with swimming; many of the Kraljevica locals would come to our beach, especially the young people. As the days grew shorter with the coming of autumn and winter, I filled them with household chores, going into the city, playing the piano at Branko's place and in Grabrovo and especially by studying, reading and thinking about life's problems. In November the Italians took all Jews to a newly established camp. Because we had arrived in Kraljevica later and were not registered anywhere as Jews, we managed to stay out of the camp.

And so another winter passed and 1943 began. The year was like the previous one, at least until the autumn. On September 8, Italy capitulated and, from that point, everything changed completely. The Italian Army left and the Partisans came. I responded to the call for general mobilisation and, a few days later, found myself in the woods, that is the hills above Kraljevica, in an Italian uniform with a red star on my cap and a rifle from which I never fired a single bullet. While we fresh Partisans gathered in the hills, the Germans dropped leaflets which read that "SS divisions are coming over the hill with a torch of freedom to expel the communist gangs." For the first time in my life I felt that I too had a rifle and, around me, an army which would either repulse them or at least inflict great losses on them. This feeling was completely different from the silent and passive fear in which we had awaited the Germans in the spring of 1941.

My unit entered Sušak and moved into a school when the Germans were already close to Rijeka, all night a procession of refugees was

passing heading southeast. In the morning, the Germans crossed the bridge over the Rečina, which separated Rijeka from Sušak. While my unit was coming down the Krimeja, there was a column with dead and wounded Partisans coming uphill towards us. We took up a position at Piramida – five or six of us with machine guns and heavy metal ammunition boxes. When the slow-moving German motorcyclists came near to us, with armoured units following them, we withdrew up the stairs to a shelter beneath the school. This shelter, a long tunnel dug into rock, was already full of Partisans from various units. We stayed there a long time, blocked by German fire outside the entrance to the tunnel. Finally the command came for a rush exit from the trap. All of us from the shelter went forward, up the school stairs, through the fire of the German rocket launchers. A few of us carrying heavy loads fell behind and hid in a house to catch our breath, while the unit continued on. At the top of the stairs they fell into the hands of the Germans who were already moving along the Boulevard and mowed them all down. When we realised that we were completely surrounded, the six of us decided to wait for the evening then try to get through to the front lines in civilian clothes and join the Partisans somewhere near Bakar. One girl, an experienced Partisan, went first and disappeared among the houses. Our friend, Princ, from Kraljevica went out after her. A hidden German sniper immediately spotted him and killed him after he had taken a few steps down the meadow. This left four of us: three Kraljevica locals and me. In the evening we took to the empty streets, walking along the coast to Martinšćica and beyond, but we were kept back by shooting from both the sea and the land. It was now dark and we spent the night in some shallow caves near the sea, across from Martinšćica. During the night a small Partisan boat tried to break through to Sušak from the south. The Germans opened fire and circled the rocks with their floodlights, but they didn't discover us.

It was not until dawn broke the following morning that Germans in a bunker at the end of the Pečina settlement discovered us, pointed their machine gun at us and signalled to us to start walking towards them. It was impossible to run, so we set off. They signalled us to go down to the shipyard and wait there. There we spent most of the day, always covered by their machine guns, until they picked us up late in the afternoon, together with their other "prisoners" and took us back to Sušak on foot. There were a lot of us and we were escorted by a small number of German soldiers or non-commissioned officers. My colleagues from

Kraljevica, who knew the layout of the town, decided that on the way we should jump over the wall which separated the Park Hotel from the street. And so the five of us found ourselves outside the hotel, on the other side of the wall. We immediately went down to the changing booths on the beach, hid, and spent the night there, again to the sound of gunfire from the sea. The convoy of "prisoners" had long gone and the streets were empty. The next day some girls from the neighbourhood came and brought us something to eat.

The five of us were looking for work, and we found it: the city gardener was organising the first clean-up of the streets and the clearing of debris, and fed the volunteers from a large cauldron of beans which stood on a fire in the city plant nursery. We slept for a few nights in an apartment belonging to the uncle of one of my wartime friends and after a few more days we split up. The younger ones stayed in the apartment while another Kraljevica local and I slept for a few days in the railway tunnel which, at that time, served as a shelter for many people. My parents stayed behind in Kraljevica, cut off from Sušak by the front which was slowly advancing down the coast. They had heard from someone the "authentic news" that I had been killed in battles around Klana, north of Sušak, and they were in mourning for their dead son. About ten days later the front passed Kraljevica and I contacted them through an acquaintance. I returned to Kraljevica at the beginning of October once they knew that I had survived.

It was clear to me that I could not continue my refugee life with my parents in Kraljevica, partly for financial reasons but mostly because, after the turbulent events I had passed through, I could not return to the vicious circle of nostalgia, idleness and daydreaming. I returned to Sušak where I did some temporary work and found a friend from the Partisans, Luj Margetić, a law student who had fled Zagreb, fled the Ustaša. Together we moved into a loft apartment below the promenade. Because I didn't have the "proper" personal documents, I appealed for help (on someone's recommendation, I suppose) to a civil servant at the police who, without asking too many questions, issued me with a personal identification document with information I dictated to her: I kept my real name and surname, but became a Serb, born in Belgrade. And so I had a new identity and a new friend with whom I lived throughout the war and, later, my whole life. After several temporary positions I was given a job with the city doctor, Dr Vojnović, who had come to Sušak in a cart, hidden in a barrel, fleeing from the Ustaša because he

was Orthodox. The municipality and the local institutions in general consisted of local politicians. Mayor Kolacio was at the helm of the municipal council and the German military administration's input was limited to appointing what they called a counsellor, who was subordinate to the supreme counsellor, whose office was in Rijeka in the building of the former *questura*.

At the end of 1943, the municipal doctor was mainly concerned with former internees released from camps in southern Italy after the capitulation of Mussolini. These were returning to their homes in Dalmatia and Montenegro on foot, first north to Trieste and then via Istria, Rijeka and Sušak. Officially we had two main problems: temporary accommodation and food for hundreds and thousands of former internees. Unofficially we were concerned with getting as many young men as possible "into the woods", in other words to the Partisans, instead of them returning to their homes in occupied Dalmatia and Montenegro. The whole municipal apparatus knew about this unofficial goal, as did the police, the food department, the city doctors and others. We only concealed it from the German and Italian administration so that, ignorant of this, they fed the Partisans, because food supplies could be obtained only with the permission of these authorities. And so my future wife, Tina, and I worked on this together for weeks: deep in our hearts we both sympathised with the masses of former internees and did everything possible and impossible, with the full knowledge of the local authorities, to accommodate them, feed them and send some of them "into the woods". My duties with the city doctor also included care for the institutions, such as the home for the elderly in Orehovica, the city children's centre, the soup kitchens and welfare in general. This was a constant battle to obtain rationed supplies and against the directive of the German occupying force aimed at denying aid to the families of Partisans, living or dead.

The winter of 1943-44 came and went. We knew about the news from Stalingrad. In June 1944 came the Normandy invasion and we believed that the war would end soon. However it lasted for almost another year and in this last year the Allied forces bombed Rijeka, Sušak and the surrounding area on a regular basis. There were days of constant air-raid sirens when we all had to go to the shelters, although there was no major damage. I still managed sometimes to visit my parents, who had stayed behind in Kraljevica and for whom life was hard, with little food. They had to spend entire days outside "shelters"

between Kraljevica and Bakarac, because the English were constantly bombing the shipyard. Then I arrived at the fatal idea of trying to get my parents to Sušak. I looked for an apartment for them, but I had to file a request with the city police. In the meantime, there was a major change among the Germans. Previously they had only been elderly Austrians, who were only concerned with surviving the war. Now *Obersturmbannführer* Vindakijević appeared as head of the Gestapo, a Bosnian, a butcher. the like of which Sušak had not seen until now. He began to carry out various operations against Partisans and their sympathisers, who were everywhere. One morning he personally shot thirteen captive Partisans, on the steps near the Piramida, and drove the bodies in an open cart through the city.

*After the war I learnt that Vindakijević had managed to flee to Trieste and, from there, to Venice, where Tito's "long arm" caught up with him. His body was found one night, floating in a canal, riddled with knife wounds.*

A Russian refugee from Belgrade named Bilouz, turned up in the local Croatian police. My request for the relocation of my parents happened to come under his nose and he immediately noticed their surname. And so he had an opportunity to prove his vigilance and to seize me, and possibly also my parents in far-off Kraljevica. He gave an order to two agents to arrest me – but my friend Tina overheard this order, by coincidence, from the adjacent room. She immediately called the office boy, Steva, and sent him to me (my office was at the Villa Marija, not far from the police) with a note in which there was just one word: "Run!" That was all that was needed; I didn't ask questions and I didn't hesitate. I phoned a friend of ours in Rijeka and asked if I could hide at her place for a while. Without hesitating she assented. This was a very brave decision because, in Rijeka, she lived with her mother and four sisters. I immediately left everything, I didn't go home, but went straight to Rijeka and stayed with them for a few days. While I was sitting and waiting, my faithful friend and flatmate Lujo prepared for me the most essential things for my flight: accommodation and a job. I was to hide in the house of a friend of ours in Krasica, above Bakar Bay, whose husband we had once hidden in our apartment when he was running from the Germans to the liberated islands. As for a job – there was to be physical labour in the Todt Organisation, some kind of a work service to which they usually sent those who weren't suitable for military service. I tore up all my documents and, during an air-raid alert, I

set off from Rijeka over the bridge and then uphill via Trsat with no problems. In the afternoon I arrived in Krasica, where I was welcomed in the manner customary for underground people and refugees at the time: warmly and without a single question. This was April 11, 1945. Later I really did go to Bakarac for a couple of days and did some digging for the Todt Organisation. From April 18, every defeated army possible was withdrawing through Krasica – home guards, Ustaša, Chetniks and even Germans. Some were making threats, some were just asking for food and water. After a restless night, full of the sound of gunfire, the Partisans arrived on April 19.

I went to visit my parents in Kraljevica, returned to Sušak to Tina and, on May 1, joined the army. After a few more very close encounters with the war, I saw May 8 and the capitulation of Germany somewhere in Slovenia, tired and blistered from the long march, but secure at least in the knowledge that I had survived the deadly danger which had hung over my head in one form or another for four long years.

Of my immediate family, the following perished in the Holocaust: Aunt Grete Steger and her husband Gustav, who had lived in Vienna, perished in Auschwitz. (Their son, Georg, survived the war by hiding on Mt Rtanj); my father's nephew Alfred Herman (he lived at the Rtanj mine and was shot there by the Germans in 1944); my father's brother, Adolf Minh, committed suicide during the first days of the German occupation in Belgrade, 1941.



# IV

## UNDER HUNGARIAN RULE



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*Magda SIMIN*

## FROM PRISONS TO CAMPS



*Magda Bošan Simin was born in Senta on February 27, 1922, to father Dr Aleksandar Bošan and mother Paula, née Šrajer. Her father was first a judge in Subotica and later a lawyer in various places in Bačka. He was the kind of lawyer who defended the poor and just causes, and so was persecuted by the authorities. He moved constantly from town to town, from village to village. Finally he perished in the Čurug Raid, in January 1942. Her mother Paula was a*

*housewife. She bore three children, a daughter Magda, and sons Đorđe and Pavle. She was deported to Auschwitz together with her sons. The elder son, Đorđe, survived the war while she and her younger son, Pavle, perished in Auschwitz.*

*Magda Simin is one of the founders of Radio Novi Sad and a long-time editor and editor-in-chief of this radio station in which she worked until her retirement in 1980. She performed many and varied social functions and was, on several occasions, elected to the highest state bodies. She published about ten books which place her among well-known authors in literature and publicity writing.*

*From her marriage to Živko Simin, she had a son, Nebojša, a daughter, Nevena, and three grandchildren.*

*She died in July, 2004.*



I was arrested as a member of the National Liberation Movement on September 27, 1931, in Čurug, where my family lived at that time. In the years that preceded this, as well as being active in progressive movements at school and university, I also took part in the organisation of Hashomer Hatzair in Novi Sad. I was a member of the *kvuca* led by Cipora Vera (Nađa?) Levinger. At the time I was in the fifth and sixth year of secondary school. During those years, 1937-38, the Novi Sad *ken* was very lively. There was constant socialising and studying in groups and also various social activities and games: chess, table tennis and others. From early spring to late autumn we would go on outings to Fruška Gora. People also used to go to *hasharah* but I never went there. In February, 1941, Cipora and her husband Jakov Levinger Ben Mihael, with a rather larger group of young people, managed to move to Palestine and were among the founders of the Gat kibbutz there. I opted for the anti-Fascist battle in Yugoslavia. Many young people from the Novi Sad and Subotica *ken*, as well as from organisations in other towns in Vojvodina, made the same choice, partly because they no longer had the opportunity to move to Palestine, or because they believed that Yugoslavia was their homeland and that it was their duty to fight against the Fascist incursions.

When Hitler's army attacked Czechoslovakia, many Czechs, already well known anti-Fascists, were fleeing together with their families and withdrawing towards the east before the German troops. They included both active officers and civilians. One major transport went first by train towards the east and then turned south, so that it arrived at the Yugoslav border through Romania and crossed the border near Kikinda. I was living in Kikinda at that time with my uncle, Jakob Bošan, an extraordinary mathematician and astronomer who, later during the occupation, perished together with his entire family. I was in the seventh year of secondary school. The local illegal organisations of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and the League of Communist Youth (SKOJ), organised a mass gala welcome for them at the railway station in Kikinda. They were given a similar welcome a day or two later in Subotica. It was not possible for any of this to be done in secrecy, so people were talking about the welcome all over the town. We students at Kikinda secondary school were forbidden in advance to take part in it. A written order and a ban from the very conservative school principal was read out in all classes in the school. However a large group of students from the higher years went to the station and mixed with the

people. And not only that! We also organised giving food to these refugees. This included warm milk for the children and warm tea and sandwiches. Several of us girls carried the food and distributed it inside the wagons. At the request of the weary passengers, we also brought them some warm water to wash their hands and their children's faces. Many of them came out of the wagons and sang together. They were shouting out "*Češka budet!*" This was a magnificent event which also included men and women from the surrounding villages carrying great baskets of food.

Following this, our school principal said that he would not allow the organisers of the event to matriculate. And so, the following year, I was arrested with a large group of eighth-year students a month before matriculation. However, when the police searched the houses of those arrested, in most of them they found no compromising materials, so they were questioned and released the same day. At my place, and in the



*Magda Simin-Bošan from her young days in Subotica*

homes of two friends of mine, they found some minor things, books that weren't actually banned, so they kept the three of us in the Kikinda prison for more thorough "questioning", but after a week they let us go too. At the insistence of the school principal, we were expelled, but with the right to take private examinations. The Education Ministry prescribed that I was to take the examination before a commission of teachers from the Subotica secondary school and my two friends before commissions in Petrovgrad and Vršac respectively. We were good students, excellent even, and so we passed this very difficult matriculation examination.

In the first year of occupation I was arrested for a second time, in Čurug, where I was also involved in the work of the National Liberation Movement. I was not arrested as a Jew. Nevertheless, my path through the war and through life was also marked by Jewish fate. This began in

the autumn of 1940 when I wanted to enrol in the Engineering Faculty at Belgrade University (school of mechanics).

I filled in all the forms and bought a student registration booklet. I thought I had enrolled, however my student registration booklet was never verified. In the meantime, the first anti-Semitic law in Yugoslavia came into effect, the *Numerus Clausus*. High schools and universities were allowed to enrol only 0.5% of new Jewish students because this was the percentage of Jews in the Yugoslav population. Some people were enrolled, but I wasn't accepted. I stayed on, working on things for the illegal movement in Belgrade and Pančevo. Just before the occupation I returned home to Čurug and then had myself transferred to do underground work in Subotica. In the end I was arrested in Čurug during a short stay in my parents' house. I was escorted to the Occupying Force Counter-Intelligence Centre in Subotica, already by then notorious as the "Yellow House".

The pre-war police had put themselves in the service of the occupying force. They turned over to them complete lists: communists known to have been arrested before the war, workers' movement leaders, and even lists of striking union members. When I arrived at the Yellow House, there were already more than a hundred prisoners there. They were torturing old, seasoned fighters there as well as those who had carried out the most recent sabotage operations, people who had strewn nails on roads, poured sugar into the engines of enemy vehicles, set fire to stacks of corn so that the enemy would get as little of the bounteous harvest as possible, people who printed and distributed pamphlets and other illegal political material, who were hoarding weapons for the coming uprising and so on. They beat people twice a day, very systematically and cruelly and this included me. They tortured me for about a week.

They beat people by stretching them across a bench, hitting them on the soles of their feet and their bodies. They beat the men by hitting them in their genitals, they would put bags of horseradish over people's heads, threatening to blind them and so on. They tortured Jews, respectable people, particularly cruelly. For example they literally dragged a doctor, Adolf Singer, wounded and exhausted, through all the rooms because he was no longer able to stand on his feet. They also broke his glasses and later had to carry him to the site of his execution.

My body, too, was black and blue, it had turned as hard as stone and my legs were covered in wounds.

Later, before the court-martial and then before the military court in Subotica, the occupying force took a particularly harsh and cruel attitude to Jews, members of the National Liberation Movement. Of the eighteen soldiers who were hanged in November, 1941, the number of Jews was disproportionate to the number of them involved in the movement in northern Bačka. The following year, in the spring, the military court in Subotica behaved the same way, so that Jolanka Haiman, a doctor of chemistry, was sentenced to five years of hard labour, because of a lecture she gave at a first-aid course. So, too, was Boriška Malušev, the owner of a tailor shop in Subotica. Others got much less for the same or similar "guilt", which was significant because it meant they were set free before the deportation of political prisoners from Hungary to German death camps. (The deportation of prisoners was carried out in October and November, 1944.) I was sentenced to thirteen years of maximum security prison. The agents of the counter-intelligence services and the judges of the occupying force wanted to give the impression to the Hungarian public that in occupied Bačka, Jews and Serbs were the only ones who wandered around inciting rebellion.

After questioning in the Yellow House, they moved a whole group of women, twenty-four of us, to the court prison in Subotica. They did the same with our comrades, the men. However as we were sentenced to maximum security prisons, they moved all of us who had been sentenced to more than a year further on, to maximum security military prisons in Hungary. In October, 1942, they took ten of us women to the Márianosztra women's prison which was supervised by nuns. The prison was located north of Pest. This is where other female political convicts from Bačka were also taken. Before that they had slaved in the Pest prison known as Konti, in the Csillag prison in Szeged and in the Novi Sad court prison. This was where political convicts from Hungary were also brought, members of the local resistance movement and the Peace Party.

In March, 1944, when Hitler's army also occupied their ally, Hungary, the prison administration received orders from Pest to form a ghetto inside the prison for us Jewish women political prisoners. A prison inside a prison! With special food and a special walk. Up to then we had been together with all our comrades, regardless of religion. In solitary cells, it is true, but on the same floor of the prison wing with the possibility of seeing one another every day during walks and on Sunday, sometimes, at some performance. Now they separated us, put

us on a separate floor, planning to turn us over immediately to the Germans and deport us to death camps. There were fifteen of us Jewish women from Yugoslavia assembled then and about fifty from Hungary, most of them from Pest. However Horthy's government was stalling about handing political convicts who were its citizens over to the SS troops, so we stayed in Nostri until the summer of 1944. They then moved us to a Pest prison called Gyujtofogház. In my novel *Dok višnje procvetaju* (By the Time the Cherries Bloom), this incident is described as follows:

*"... an order comes for the nuns to prepare us for transport. We will be turned over to the Germans. That's common knowledge.*

*June 22, 1944...*

*We are lined up in the yard, fifteen of us Yugoslav women and about fifty Jewish women from Hungary.*

*The nuns are weeping. Sincerely. The deputy head, this pretty middle-aged woman who has softened rather a lot in dealing, for quite a long time, with political convicts, is also wiping her tears. The criminals are also weeping and waving to us for a long time. Up in the solitary cells echoes the irresistible song "East and West are Waking", in stormy waves the song spreads around the old prison and heartens us. We are grateful to our comrades, but our thoughts are already running ahead: what is waiting for us? The Soviet Army is at the entrance to the Carpathian Mountains and we are heading for an unknown destination, towards the German death camps."*

We then arrived in a Pest prison in the suburb of Köbnya. Horthy's authorities were still stalling with the handover of the remaining Jews to the Germans because, at the time, they had already begun secret negotiations with the Soviets for a separate peace. And so we, and the convicts, the Jewish women who constantly kept arriving after new arrests in Bačka, were also there for the heavy bombing of Budapest. During the bombing the guards would lock us in solitary cells with double locks and then withdraw to the bunkers. However we were convinced that the Allied pilots had marked prisons and camps accurately on their maps and would not bomb us. We would climb up to the high windows and watch the huge fires in the suburbs of this great city

where the oil reservoirs were on fire. This is the way things were until October 15, 1944. Then the extreme right Arrow Cross Party took over power in Hungary. The new government decided to turn all political prisoners over to the Germans, not only Jews but Christians as well. Transports set off from all prisons in Hungary, heading west, towards the border. The cattle wagons were crammed with Jews, Hungarians, Serbs, and Ukrainians. They first got people to the Komárom military fortress in the tri-border area between Hungary, Austria and Czechoslovakia. There they turned them over to SS officers who took them on to the German death camps. I first arrived with a large group of women in Dachau, that is to the Allach area camp and then, two weeks later, we were transported further to the Bergen-Belsen camp and some of us even further to Fallersleben and Salzwedel on the Elbe, where we were later freed by the American Army.

In all the prisons in Hungary we formed strong communities for mutual support. The community was obliged to protect and defend each and every one of its members. The food that we received in parcels from our homes was shared within the community in order to preserve, if possible, the physical strength and fitness of every individual. We shared not only the food, but also the clothing we received. This is where political life developed, and this kept up the good mood, the feeling of belonging to the community, the faith in victory. Anyone who has been in prison knows just how important these factors are in survival. In the underground prison of the Komáron fortress, before the transport to Germany, there was a strict and fair distribution of underwear and clothing so that in the coming winter, in the cruel conditions of the German camps, each person would have something warm to wear. We were no longer able to get anything from our homes, we were completely cut off from our parents and our relatives. There were no longer any Jewish families.

We took care of one another in camps, with good organisation we ensured that each of us got at least the miserable meal of mangel-wurzel which was distributed. There was already chaos in the camps.

*“Lunch is not distributed to the inmates (there are tens of thousands of them) as rations. Each barracks gets its own buckets of beets and shares them any way they know how.*

*But the inmates of Bergen-Belsen are no longer human, they don't know how to share beets. The buckets usually don't make it into the barracks. Creatures with wild expressions on*

*their faces are wandering through the camp with only one thing on their mind: to grab, to steal a bit more than the official ration. Packs of wild women attack the beet buckets at the spot where the cooks hand them out. There, at the end of our row of barracks, there are physical fights day after day. Unfortunate women who have lost their minds tip the buckets over, lie on the ground around the pools of spilt slop and lap it up voraciously. And then the SS women arrive and beat them with whips, flailing them over and over. We drew up a schedule, designating women who would go and get the buckets and the same number of women again as personal guards who would escort and protect them.*

Later, when we were being taken to work, we worked instead of the sick. In mid-January in the Bergen-Belsen camp, at a morning roll-call they took a hundred of us out for work in the arms factory in Fallersleben. There we attempted to sabotage production and were successful, as all our Bačka women from the other groups who were arriving in Ravensbrück and from there going to various munitions and arms factories were also sabotaging production, damaging machinery. We exposed ourselves to the risk of being shot, but they didn't shoot us, perhaps because they could already see that the war was lost for them. Soon they threw the hundred of us out of the factory in Fallersleben and put us to work clearing rubble. This was a very hard job, but we were relieved! We didn't have to work on the production of arms! And there, clearing rubble, we were replacing those who were sick, because there were women among us who had heart or lung problems. They all survived the war, we brought all the sick ones to their homes. And so we also took a woman from Pest home, Agica, who had a stomach ulcer and was near the end, in a very poor state. Three months after her return to Pest she died in hospital, and it was certainly because of inadequate care.

Other groups of our women who stayed behind in Bergen-Belsen, in Ravensbrück and other camps, also watched over and took care of one another in this way, until the typhoid epidemic began to rage. They were powerless in the face of this illness and there was no medical treatment in the camps. Younger and middle-aged women somehow recovered from one kind of typhoid and then fell ill with another and then again recovered and took care of one another. But the older women, especially the village women, the mothers of our fighters, mostly succumbed to this illness.

In my group, in Bergen-Belsen, with more than two hundred women, there was a critical moment in the life of the community.

When we arrived in the camp, during a harsh winter, they took us for “bathing” several times. I suppose the command wanted to defend the camp against lice and against the typhoid epidemic which was just beginning at the time, although we had not brought those vermin in with us. We were still completely clean. However, during the baths, without asking us, the kapos collected all our clothing and underwear from the benches and took them into the steam for disinfection. When we came out from the hot showers, happy to have bathed and washed our heads, they forced us out into a freezing hallway to stand there for hours, naked and barefoot on the stone of the hallway, and wait for our clothes to be returned to us so we could dress. This was truly a terrible ordeal. At the beginning it didn’t seem so bad. Steam was gushing from every pore of our heated bodies, our hair was steaming, the breath from our mouths was warm. Then, very quickly, everything cooled down. Skin and flesh, bones and the blood in our veins froze and, as if it had lost weight, the body began to disappear, to dissolve.

No one could move any more. We felt that our frozen, disembodied bodies would fall apart at the slightest move, from the slightest touch, as a crystallised apple shatters into splinters when immersed in liquid air. Everything disappeared. What remained were only the horrified eyes lined up along the concrete hall outside the bathhouse of the Bergen-Belsen camp.

After a few such “baths”, the women began to fall ill, to get sick and lie all day, day after day, on their bunks. Except, of course, during roll-calls. And that’s when the gossip began among the older women. What needs to be done is to go to the camp authorities, they were whispering, horrified. Ask that the Serbian women from Yugoslavia be separated from the Jewish women, because this camp is meant for Jews. That is what they thought. However it wasn’t true. In the camp there were inmates from all parts and all nations of Europe. Besides, there were Jewish women from Yugoslavia and Hungary among us also, and they would probably also have been separated and they too would have perished. One young girl, Vida Stojkov from Bečej, warned me especially about this talk going around. At first I was speechless. How could our women think like this, I was wondering. However, after discussing it with the most responsible women among us, we decided that we really would come forward and speak to the camp commandant. But not



with this idea. We would ask to see the commandant and request that he treat us political convicts, fighters of the National Liberation Movement, as prisoners of war, and that he give us separate, healthier barracks where basic hygiene could be maintained.

The camp commandant came during roll-call. He was very surprised by this impudent request which was delivered in good German by our comrade, Marta Husar, a medical student from Novi Sad, stepping out from among the lines of prisoners.

He relented. In order to cover his weakness he made a fuss about communists. But just three days later they took us to a large, newly-built, healthy barracks which didn't leak and wasn't damp. In the very middle of the barracks was an iron furnace which we could fire up if we had some fuel for it. Then a long table and benches. Everything was brighter and more comfortable, so it seemed to us that we could manage like this until the end of the war. However not long after this they took us younger and stronger women to labour and the women who stayed behind were to suffer through a typhoid epidemic. In Bergen, with an epidemic raging, not even a strong community could survive. Only some of the women helped one another as long as they had the strength to do so.

After my liberation from the Salzwedel camp, as soon as I had recovered to some extent, I set off for home with a large group of comrades. We travelled through Germany, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, some by train and some on foot because the railway tracks, demolished by the Germans as they were withdrawing, had still not been repaired. We arrived home in Subotica on June 4, 1945.

To my greatest joy, right there in the town, I found my brother, Đorđe Bošan, alive. But only him.

As I have already mentioned, before the war my parents lived in Čurug, a village beside the Tisa. This is where, in January 1942, my father, lawyer Dr Aleksandar Bošan, was killed during the notorious Čurug raid. Along with the other victims he was thrown under the ice of the Tisa. About 2,000 Serbs and Jews perished in this raid but, by some miracle, my mother and my two brothers survived. Mother then sold the furniture from our apartment, and almost everything else, and she and her two sons moved in with her parents in Stara Moravica. At that time I was already in prison. I learnt from a prison guard about my father's death. I was horrified and fell ill. Days passed before I was myself again but, in fact, I never fully recovered from hearing this information. My

mother and my two brothers spent the war years in Stara Moravica until the time of the mass deportation of Jews from Bačka. In the meantime her father, my grandfather, veterinary surgeon Aleksandar Šrajer, died and her two brothers, my uncles, Imre and Istvan, were taken to compulsory labour. So that at the beginning of May, 1944, my mother Paula Bošan (known as Pirika), my grandmother Tereza and my two brothers, Đorđe and Pavle were all deported from Moravica. Also deported with them, loaded onto a horse and cart, were the wife and son of my uncle, Mirko-Imre, who at that time was far away at compulsory labour. They were first taken to a new ghetto in Subotica and, from there, to the Baja camp in southern Hungary. One morning during roll-call, a group of German officers appeared and selected ten young men, each of whom knew some trade. Among them was my brother Đorđe. They took them to their unit for compulsory labour so they could repair everything for them, from radios to bicycles, and also do hard physical labour. And so my nearest and dearest from Moravica stayed in Baja for a few days longer and were then transported by train to Auschwitz.

I have been troubled a great deal throughout my life by the question of how they died. I imagined that even if the notorious Dr Mengele had wanted to select my young and pretty mother for labour – she was only 41 at the time – and if he sent her to the right from the line of new arrivals, and if he sent my little, asthmatic brother Pavle – who had not yet turned 13 – to the left, it is quite certain that my mother would not have been willing to be separated from her son! She would have held him firmly by the hand, looking Dr Mengele straight in the eye, and then, cynical as he was, he would probably have signalled her, with his whip, that she too was to go to the left! Let her go to death as well, together with her son, what did it matter to him! This vision kept forcing itself onto me because I had heard, in my extended family, of a case of a young woman who was so confused and beside herself that she let go of a child's hand and went to the right, leaving the child to go to the left!

My brother Đorđe was working in a mobile German unit and almost went to Auschwitz with them. However, at that time, the withdrawal of the German army had already happened and the Wehrmacht unit previously mentioned, which was carrying out special tasks in occupied Europe, was also in retreat. So at one point, when they were already on the territory of Czechoslovakia, his group of ten young men learned that the unit would retreat further the following morning. They

hid in a cemetery, waited for the Wermacht unit to withdraw and then set off for home, for Yugoslavia, on foot.

That was how my brother Đorđe came to arrive home before me. Finding no one from the family alive in Moravica, he went to Subotica, to make himself available to the new local authorities to do various kinds of work. And that's where I found him, on June 4, 1945. We first went together to Moravica and then to Novi Sad. In Novi Sad he finished the seventh and eighth years of secondary school, because he had not had the right to an education under the occupation. He then graduated in physics from the Science Faculty of Belgrade University. Over time he won a great reputation in his profession and also completed a doctorate.

The only relative on my mother's side to survive the war was my elder uncle, Mirko-Imre Šrajer. He escaped from compulsory labour and came home to Moravica on foot. He also found none of his family members there, so he volunteered in Subotica to join a unit of the National Liberation Army. With this unit he chased the enemy all the way to Vienna. He was demobilised soon after the end of the war and worked in Moravica until he died, putting the village in his debt with his knowledge and skill. He was the president of the village farming cooperative for fifteen years and then he also established a textile factory of which he was director.

My relatives on my father's side also perished. I have already mentioned that my father's brother, Jakov Bošan, a mathematician and astronomer who lived in Kikinda, died with his family, his wife and daughter, in 1941. They were deported with the Kikinda Jews to Belgrade and then executed at one of the Belgrade execution sites. Father's eldest brother, Dr Samuel Bošan, who was a lawyer in Subotica and Bačka Topola, stayed alive. He had enough money to obtain false papers early enough and survived by hiding in Budapest. His two sons also survived: Ladislav Bošan, an engineer, worked in Zagreb after the war and Đorđe Bošan became an academic painter and a senior lecturer at the Academy of Art in Belgrade. Two of father's sisters, Berta and Aranka, moved to Palestine before the war, while his other two sisters, Rozika and Giza perished in the camps. I have never managed to find out which camps, whether in Austria or in Auschwitz. Their families also perished – their husbands and many children and grandchildren.

When I returned from the camp it was very difficult to face so many deaths in the family, as well as the deaths of many friends and acquaintances. I settled down in Novi Sad with my brother. I worked for the longest time as editor and editor-in-chief of Radio Novi Sad. I was one of the founders of this station and worked there until I retired. However, in the meantime, I also worked as a public servant. My posts included being an member of Novi Sad's first elected City Council. I was an MP in the Federal People's Parliament, in the Cultural and Educational Board for one term of office. I was a member of the Council of the Serbian National Theatre and a member of the Main Board of the Sterijino Pozorje theatre festival. I have written about ten books.

Just after the war I married Živko Simin, a technician from Srbo-bran who had also been through the Calvary of prisons and camps. He was interned in Mauthausen in Austria. This is the notorious camp where inmates carried huge blocks of stone from the quarry on the Danube uphill to the camp. He came home sick and very weak. He recovered with great difficulty but died before his time, of cancer. I bore two children, Nebojša and Nevena. Nebojša completed training as a physics teacher and Nevena graduated from the university in Serbo-Croatian language and literature. Together with their regular positions, they are both involved in literature. They write poetry and prose. From them I have three grandsons who are all now adults.

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*Irena VAJNMAN*

## TO HELL AND BACK



*Irena Vajnman was born on August 28, 1924, in Novi Sad, where she attended school. She was a member of the Zionist youth movement Hashomer Hatzair and, from 1941, a member of the League of Communist Youth. She was arrested on September 9, 1942, and sentenced to two years in prison but, as a Jew, she spent another year in various camps.*

*After the liberation she returned to Novi Sad in 1945 and married Robert Vajnman. In 1964 she moved with her family to Vienna.*

I was born Irena Lustig. The occupation caught me in Novi Sad, at the age of seventeen. Like all of Bačka, the city was occupied by Hungary.

My activities as a SKOJ member were in a group led by Marta Husar, in which were also Mara Kolarski, Gerta Kadelburg, Mara Dudvarski and Nada Velicki. We met under the patronage of the Mikeš and Kolarski families, both of whom approved of our meetings.

They arrested me as a member of SKOJ less than two weeks after I turned eighteen. Immediately after the arrest they took me to the notorious Army building, which had this name because before the war it had been the seat of some army command and this was where the Hungarian authorities set up their counter-intelligence and secret police

(*Kémelhrító*). When they took me there I found many acquaintances already there.

I knew about the Army building because in autumn 1941 my cousin, Andrija-Bandi Lederer had been taken there. They beat him really badly. Despite that, despite the beating, he did not denounce anyone, only telling the agents the names of people who had already been arrested. They sentenced him to death and hanged him that autumn. They shipped his family off to Auschwitz. Only one of his sisters survived.

In the Army building they beat us endlessly, until some even lost consciousness. They beat me on the soles of my feet, on my palms. My soles were so blue and swollen that I couldn't put my shoes on. And my hands were the same way. All day long we would stand facing the wall. If anyone attempted to speak or move they would be beaten heavily. We were constantly in fear of who they would take for "questioning". This meant only beating. When the "investigation" was finished they took us to court. I was sentenced to two years in prison, my "guilt" being that I had helped the Partisans, written slogans on walls, delivered leaflets and strewn nails on the roads so that the tyres of army vehicles would be punctured.

After the trial we were taken to prison in Konti Street in Budapest. We had a very difficult time there, but at least they didn't beat us. The cells were overcrowded. There were ten of us in each cell, sometimes even more, although they were meant for only a few people. We slept on straw mattresses. During the day we had to pile the mattresses on top of one another, we weren't allowed to lie down. We could only sit on the floor. It was far too hot in summer and very cold in winter. Once every three months we were allowed to receive a parcel and a letter. Before my family were deported they used to visit me regularly. Later, only my sister would come. She was not deported because her husband wasn't a Jew. We made knitting needles from pieces of broken glass from the windows and from wooden spoons which we were allowed to buy. We would unravel pullovers and knit new ones. We walked for half an hour every day in a small yard without any greenery, without a single tree.

It was easiest for me when I was in a cell with two women from Pest. One was called Eva Lakos and the other Ilika Blaszc. Both survived the war. Eva was intelligent and well-read, she recited Heine to us and many Hungarian poets. After the war she graduated in economy

and taught at the university. Because her parents were communists they spent more time in prisons than with her so, as a child, she spent most of the time with relatives.

Ilika married Astalosz, a man who was killed as a communist during the uprising in 1956, and she was left alone with four children. She lives in Pest. I am still occasionally in touch with her by letter.

One of our fellow-sufferers in the prison was Olga Szentgyörgyi Braun. She was earlier a teacher in Subotica but now lives in Szeged in a nice home for old people. Her husband died in 2004. Her son also lives in Szeged and takes care of her, while her daughter lives in Budapest. She is an English language teacher and is in an important position. Another is Eva Gyenes Arsenić, a prominent physician in Belgrade. And the third is a graduate technologist, a doctor of technical sciences, Eva Zucker Čavčić, from Sombor. We are all today in our old age, but the days we spent together in the conditions that we lived in cannot be forgotten. Of the Jewish women who were also with us I shall also mention Gerta Kadelburg, who began coughing while in the prison and I was told after the war that she had died of tuberculosis in Bergen-Belsen, in the worst possible conditions. Dusi Senes took care of her as much as was possible under such circumstances. Dusi left her ten-year-old daughter with her parents and she would always tell me that, if she did not survive and I did, I should take care of her child. She was ten years older than me and so thought that I was more likely than her to survive. Fortunately she did survive the war and now lives in Subotica.

After a year they moved us to the Márianosztra prison. This was a really large prison, run by nuns, in which many criminals were serving sentences. Quite a few of them were sentenced to hard labour for life for grave crimes such as murder, robbery and similar.

The Catholic nuns were intelligent and pretty. Every morning and evening they would pass saying the same prayer. Nevertheless they would sometimes punish us in various ways for no reason at all. For example, they would deny us the right to receive parcels, letters or visits. The Catholic and Orthodox inmates went to the Catholic church while the Jewish women went to the Evangelical church. At first we boycotted church visits, but later decided to go because this was the only opportunity for all of us from different cells to meet. The priest, who was an elderly man, didn't care much about what we did. For example, we could even sit when we were required to stand. And while he was holding the service we would talk and giggle. He saw how we

were behaving but did not use this against us. Sometimes I felt sorry for him because of his powerlessness to have us form any sort of bond with his church.



*Political prisoners from Bačka and Međumurje, territories occupied by the Hungarians in 1941, in the Marija Nostra prison in August 1943: last row, second from (L), Irena Vajnman; fifth from (L), Marta Husar-Doder; and sixth, Magda Simin; third row, first from (L), Eva Čavčić*

During summer we were allowed to go out into the yard, which was full of greenery. We sat around a big table and sewed dolls for poor children or pulled up weeds. There were also a number of Jehova's Witnesses among us. Under these conditions I particularly admired them because they were unswerving in their religious beliefs. I remember that they sang really beautifully. The nuns hated them, I suppose, more than they hated the rest of us. They often put them in solitary, in dark rooms, giving them only bread and water, but even this harassment did not force them to abandon their faith.

Fascist Germany occupied Hungary on March 19, 1944. In the prison at this time they isolated us Jews from the other convicts and we



had to wear yellow stars. In June they moved us to Budapest where there was a prison – a ghetto for all Jewish convicts from the territory of Hungary. The conditions were very bad.

When my two-year sentence was finished, I bade farewell to my friends, thinking I was going to freedom. However there were gendarmes waiting for me outside and they immediately handed me over to German soldiers. They put me into a larger group they already had in custody. This was September 1944, the soldiers were older people, they didn't want to pay any special attention to us. They were escorting us through Pest. If someone had wanted to escape they could have done it. There were young people standing along the road and shouting to us that we should join them and go off with them. After two years in prison I didn't know what this was supposed to be, whether it was perhaps some provocation. However I did step out at one point, but I didn't go with them. I had been given an address in Pest and I went there. The man was decent, but the woman kept arguing with him because she didn't want to hide me. I even think she reported me because soon the police came and asked for my documents. Of course I didn't have any. I began telling them a story about how my documents had gone missing during one of the earlier bombing raids. It was obvious to them that I was lying. They took me to the police where I saw one of the agents who used to beat us back in the Army building. He recognised me immediately, so they moved me to what they called the Tolonchaz, a kind of prison in which prisoners were held only temporarily until they decided where to take them. This happened at exactly the time when the Hungarian Nazis, the Nyilas, took over power in the state. It was horrifying. Through the windows we saw people with legs and arms cut off, a lot of blood, many dead people. Of course we were afraid that the same would happen to us. With us there were also criminals and prostitutes, as well as Jehova's Witnesses. As an inmate with two years of "experience" I tried to calm my fellow-sufferers down, to comfort them. What calmed them the most was when the Jehova's Witnesses sang their hymns.

After a few months in prison in Konti Street we stopped menstruating and they told us that we had lost our femininity. Fortunately this wasn't so. After the war, when we returned to normal conditions, we married, bore children and lived as normal women.

When the Nyilas from the prison turned us over to the SS men there were a large number of us. Men and women were mixed together

on a barren piece of land. I met my friends there and it was easier for me now that we were together again. We stayed there on this barren piece of land for perhaps a day and then they put us into wagons. We travelled for days with no food or water. Finally, after this ride, we arrived at the Dachau camp.

Dachau was a men's camp so we didn't stay there long either. They again crammed us into wagons. Some of us were taken to Ravensbrück, but I was among those who were taken to Bergen-Belsen.

The situation in Bergen-Belsen was awful. After the war we heard that it was the same in the other camps. What we were given to survive could not be called food: in the morning there was warm water called coffee, perhaps 150 or 200 grams of bread for a whole day, at noon there was soup which was in fact more warm water. The best was when we would get a whole loaf of bread and eat it all at once. When we arrived, some who had already been in the camp for years were completely mentally deranged. We tried to calm them down so that everyone would get at least a few spoons of "food", but they would rush at the cauldron and spill it so that, in the end, no one would get anything. They put us in large barracks with bunk beds. It was cold, November, and the worst thing was when they would force us out of the barracks to stand for hours in the so-called roll-call – an assembly at which they called out names.

Once I heard that there were women from Novi Sad in one barracks. I went to look for them. I found one acquaintance, I think it was Agi Rajter. She was on the upper bed so I took off my clogs and went up to her. When I got down, the clogs were no longer there. Not having at least some kind of footwear in such cold and in such conditions meant death. Luckily they were soon found. A young girl who was on the edge of insanity had taken them and hidden them under the head of her bed.

Later I also encountered my cousin, Etuška Ajsman. She was covered in boils, all skin and bones, in the cold, in a thin dress. I don't know how I had managed to keep my underwear, I was wearing several items. I took them off and gave them to her. Just before the end of the war the Swedish Red Cross took her with other very sick patients to Sweden. There she recovered and returned home, got married and moved to Israel, where she died of leukaemia.

Still engraved in my memory is something that was perhaps the most terrifying – those moments when they separated mothers from

their children. These most terrifying, most shattering partings resulted in screaming and crying which tore at the hearts of all who happened to be there. We also wept. In Bergen-Belsen, the children were in barracks, at least fifty of them, from the ages of two to twelve. The children were crying all the time. They would let us take care of them during the day but we were unable to comfort them. I looked after a girl of twelve and her four-year-old brother. She was completely lost, and her little brother even more so. I didn't manage to calm them. The girl was pretty, with curly hair and beautiful blue eyes, and the boy was remarkably beautiful. The children were from Amsterdam. It was obvious from their clothes that they were from well-to-do families. We heard that the Germans wanted to exchange them for money from the Americans. I don't know how much truth there was in that. Unfortunately they didn't get the money and they gassed all the children to death.

One day some civilians arrived and selected young girls for labour. I was not among those who were chosen. One elderly woman was crying because they had selected her daughter and she would be left alone. I changed places with the girl, not knowing where this would take me.

We reached Fallersleben, not far from Braunschweig (Brunswick). There we learnt that we would be working in an arms factory. This irked us, because we did not want to be the ones working on manufacturing weapons for the Germans. We were working on the night shift. We slept during the day and were exempt from roll-call. We resolved to sabotage as much as possible. The German workers were standing in a corner, apathetic and doing nothing. They looked completely uninterested as they explained to us what we were to do. We heard that we were working on the production of what they called the V-2 weapons. We shorter women were given two bins. Bad metal parts were to be thrown into one and good ones into the other. We very frequently did the opposite. Marta Husar, who became a professor of gynaecology at Belgrade University Medical Faculty after the war, was tall, so she had to work on the metal stamping machines and cut out bigger parts. She had no opportunity for sabotage there. Perhaps it was because of this that she became depressed: she put her thumb in the machine and cut it off. We had a doctor there, a prisoner from Italy. He was short. He skilfully stopped the bleeding, sutured the wound and bandaged it. Marta had to continue working despite this. The food was better. On Sundays we were also given potatoes with a piece of meat and some sauce on top.

By now it was 1945. The Germans were aware that they would lose the war. Nevertheless they took us to a camp, in Salzwedel. We were outdoors for days on end, with no roof over our heads. However the coldest winter months had passed with the coming of March, so we overcame all these difficulties with no problems.

One day we noticed that the camp gates were wide open. The German guards had disappeared and we were able to leave. Salzwedel was a small place. Several of my friends and I saw some bicycles nearby, so we went for a ride and then returned them to where we had taken them from. We then went into a house whose door was open. The people who lived there had probably seen us coming and hidden in fear of us, perhaps in the basement. We didn't look for them. We came to the dining room where there was a table set for breakfast, with beautiful china, soft bread and pastries and coffee which was still hot. We ate heartily, but took nothing else. We left everything the way it was.

Then we returned to the camp. That day the Americans arrived. Their arrival changed everything. They kept us quite well supplied. One day, during that period, a man in civilian clothes arrived. He told us he had come from a camp but I think he was lying. He asked us if he could stay the night. Of course we let him. However, while we were still asleep, he disappeared. Later we came to the conclusion that he was probably an SS man who was fleeing.

The River Elbe flowed close by our camp. The Russians were already on the other side of the river. We, still full of idealism, crossed over to them after a while. However they took no care of us at all. We had to find food ourselves and weren't allowed to help them. We were surprised by the fact that the Russian women didn't want to go home. They were weeping. They knew they'd be returned to their country and then sent to Siberia because they had allowed themselves to be captured! We were also surprised to see that they were dragging along with them everything they could get their hands on.

We waited for days for approval to return to our homes. Finally we decided to take the trains going east. The fact that Marta Husar and Magda Bošan were with us meant a great deal to us. They were some kind of leaders for us and they really took care of us, they gave us advice and looked after us. We fed ourselves with potatoes we found in the earth, we'd put them under hot ashes and bake them. We passed through Prague. The women there welcomed us with hot tea, coffee and bread. We were also given bread in Bucharest.

It was a very long journey. Many prisoners had already returned to their homes. My sister was afraid that I would not come. She had stayed in Novi Sad with her husband and two small children. We hoped that our parents and brother would return. Unfortunately they had killed them all. They killed my mother and many of our relatives, together with their children, in Auschwitz, and they killed my father in Buchenwald, where he died in suffering. My brother defected and joined the Russians somewhere on the front near Voronezh. They called them over a megaphone to cross over to their side. Many believed them, including my brother. However, once they were there they threw them into a camp together with the Germans and others who had fought against the Russians. My brother contracted typhoid in this camp and died at the end of January, 1942. My grandmother née Hefter was eighty at the time and was very ill. Her youngest son, Dežo, and my nephew, Tibi Hefter, were already in the labour squads where they were often tortured. Many of these people were either killed or died from the torture. Grandmother would ask: "Where is Marci? Where is Jene?" They would tell her that her sons were unable to come. They killed her son Moric with his wife, his seventeen-year-old daughter and six-year-old son on the bank of the Danube, in a massacre known as the Raid, in January 1942. Jene was shot dead in his house, together with his wife. They also shot my niece, married name Rotštajn, her husband and their small children. I lost 24 members of my immediate family.

On my return to Novi Sad I married my pre-war friend from the *ken*, Robert "Robi" Vajnman. He too had been locked up in the Army building and then in Szeged, in the notorious Csillag. He was then taken with the convict labour company to the Eastern Front where he got frostbite on his legs, from which he suffered for years after the war. In the first years following his return, he kept dreaming that they were persecuting him and would shout in his sleep. At the front, before his very eyes, they had decimated his comrades because one member of their company had defected to the Russians. After the convict company returned to Hungary he was locked up again. He was released in October, 1944. He joined the Partisans and, when the war ended, he was reassigned to Smederevska Palanka as captain first class. It was there that a military doctor, Rajko Đurišić, managed to cure him. Unfortunately, Dr Đurišić died of a heart attack at an early age. We still keep in touch with his widow who now lives in Cetinje. She is from Osijek where her parents had a match factory.

We lived modestly in Smederevska Palanka. All the furniture we had was one iron bed, but we were satisfied because we were together, because we had survived the war after so much suffering. The householder they forced to take us in behaved like a mother to us. She was about the same age as my mother. It was from her that I learnt a lot of necessary information about housekeeping, mainly about cooking. Even now we are still in touch with her daughter. From Smederevska Palanka, my husband was transferred to Niš, where our son and daughter were born. Then they moved my husband to Skopje and there, after great effort, he managed to be demobilised and we then returned to Novi Sad. Before the war, in 1941, my husband had graduated from a commercial academy and after the war he graduated from the university faculty of economy. After his demobilisation he obtained a position in the business sector. He was a successful businessman and this provoked the envy of many people. They created a lot of difficulties for him but this merely hastened our decision to leave the country. In 1964 we moved to Vienna, which is where we still live. My son is an architect. He finished primary school and technical secondary school in Novi Sad before graduating from the Faculty of Architecture at Ljubljana University. My daughter, four years younger than her brother, finished secondary school in Vienna and after that the famous Vienna Reinhardt Seminar before beginning a career as an actor, but she is no longer involved in that.

From my son I have two grandsons and one granddaughter and from my daughter I have a grandson. All of them have either finished or are finishing school and, to our joy, all are healthy.

The war stole our youth and killed our families, our friends and our acquaintances. I have great faith that our children and our grandchildren will know about the kind of things that my generation and I lived through only from stories and books.

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*Lajčo KLAJN*

SAVED BY BRAVE EČIKA HAUER



**L**ajčo Klajn was born in Subotica on June 7, 1925, to father David and mother Debora, née Gutman. He spent his childhood in Subotica, finished primary school there and worked in textile sales until the beginning of the Hungarian Fascist occupation. His father, David Klein, was the shamas for the Jewish religious community in Subotica from the beginning. His mother, Debora Gutman, was a housewife and took care of the pleasant life of the family. His older brother, Josip, was a rabbi in Vrbas, educated in Sarajevo. He established a family and he and his wife Anuška had two children. His younger brother, Israel, devoted himself to the study of the Talmud and later found employment in a sugar factory. He was not married. Both brothers came from his father's first marriage and their mother had died. His twin sister Ana was learning the tailoring trade. He also had a younger sister, Šarika, who died at the age of seven. At the time of the persecution of Jews in Subotica, in the first days of the German-Hungarian occupation, on April 11, 1941, they lived at 22 Jugovićeva (Erdo) Street.

*Lajčo Klajn, a doctor of law, performed various important duties. Among his other posts he was also a professor at the Novi Sad University Faculty of Law and a judge of the Constitutional Court of Vojvodina. He is the author of a number of academic and professional works in the fields of criminal, international and constitutional law and*

*the author of the book "Genocide and Punishment in the North of Occupied Yugoslavia, 1941-1945".*

*He lives in Subotica with his wife, Margita Rogić-Klajn.*

After the German troops arrived, in 1944, the forcible removal of Jews to the ghetto began. This was located next to the railway station in Subotica, from which my parents and my sister Ana were packed into wagons and taken to Auschwitz. My brothers and I had already been taken to compulsory labour. In Auschwitz, my sister Ana was separated, with a rifle butt, from our parents, who ended in the gas chamber. My sister Ana was overcome by this. They hid her, so she would not suffer the same fate. It was in an extreme psychological state that she and I met again in Subotica in 1945. She married and bore two daughters, Darinka and Verica, who both started their own families, but Ana did not live to see this happiness. She died from the consequences of the horrors she had lived through. Under her pillow, a family picture was found. My two brothers perished in places unknown. Josip's family also ended up in Auschwitz. My father, David, used his prayer book in Auschwitz up to the very last minute.

People born in the same year as me (1925) began with compulsory labour in Subotica – the woods at Veliki Radanovac and then, after Hódmezővásárhely, we were taken under guard to Budapest and nearby places (May 1944 to January 1945): Buda, Pest, Buda Kalas (Pest Budakalász, Kápolnásnyk) and several others.

Andrija Liht, a tailor from Subotica, had earned credit in the first world war on the Hungarian side. He was in Budapest in the second half of 1944, as was I with others of my generation. My childhood friend, his son Josip, was also with him. He took it upon himself to lead a large group of Jews from the occupied northern territories of Yugoslavia as a special labour company which allegedly did work for the benefit of Germany and Hungary. At the time it was still known that we were Jews. We went from one place to another, wherever Liht felt that it was less dangerous.

We slept in abandoned schools and other buildings and avoided raids. We would be stopped by German and Hungarian army and police forces. Instead of verifying our identification papers and confirming our presence in Hungarian areas, Liht settled the matter with the German and Hungarian forces on his own. He was well stocked with documents



testifying to the great recognition accorded to him from the time of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Of course none of this happened without bribes. That was how they would allow us through to continue our stay unregistered.

Andrija was an extraordinary representative and advocate of our vital interests. On one occasion we thought the end of our lives had come. During the night a large armed group of German soldiers with machine guns, led by an SS officer, burst into an abandoned room in which we were sleeping, in other words we were staying there illegally. They shouted *Auf!* We soon realised they were going to shoot us. We had been discovered. At that moment Andrija Liht appeared and approached the officer, bravely and, seemingly, calm. They spoke in German. The conversation ended with him telling the soldiers in German *Alles ist gut* (Everything's fine), and then he told us *Schlafen Sie!* (Get to sleep.) Later, Andrija Liht revealed to us the secret that had saved us. He had taken a diamond ring from his pocket and handed it to the SS officer without anyone else seeing.

Liht's group changed, both in the number and the kind of people included. We were abandoned by those who did not believe that we could survive this way, in such numbers, with the explanation prepared. We managed to hold out throughout this period of our life together and for this Andrija Liht deserves the highest recognition. Both he and his son survived the Holocaust with us.

This group of Jews gathered from compulsory labour companies included Jovan Horović, Ladislav Silaši, Ladislav Brajer and others) as well as me. We did extremely hard work, mostly under the supervision of the German Todt military formation, without any shelter or protection from the carpet bombing of Budapest by the Allied forces. Huge buildings and institutions, along with other facilities, were virtually razed to the ground. Many people could not cope with this psychologically. Sometimes, after hiding in the basement of some building, we would come out into the street and see many buildings had been demolished. It was incredible the way we worked with the bombing going on.

The most difficult and life-threatening work our group did was clearing bombed and demolished bridges on the Danube. We were assigned to the large marshalling yard (*Rakosrendezoe pályaudvar*) and then to clear the bombed bridges at Hatvan. We were to haul metal constructions and heavy metal objects from the river and then carry them on our backs to designated places. Here there weren't only Todt super-

visors, but also Hungarian gendarmes and SS soldiers. Many of us worked under beatings and threats and fell unconscious. They would pour water on us. When they thought that someone could no longer be of any use, they would be taken aside and shot. In Budakalász, with the help and collaboration of the German forces, the Hungarian gendarmerie collected five hundred Jews. I was among them. They shot every tenth person, allegedly in retaliation for the activities of the anti-Fascists. From Budakalász we were taken to Kápolnásnyék under Hungarian military guard. There we dug trenches for the battle against the Allies. With no food or water, with no rest, we worked day and night, in a hurry because of the penetration and approach of the Allied forces. Those who could not endure this were shot.

The most fateful moment for my life and for the life of the group of Jews was capture and the threat of being shot in October, 1944, at Kápolnásnyék. We were close to the line of fire between German-Hungarian and Soviet forces. A few hundred metres away we saw Soviet soldiers. Liberation was coming down the road. Because of the crossfire, we took temporary shelter in a large basement where we found almost a hundred people. There were Hungarians among them, probably also Hungarian Army deserters. On behalf of our group, I negotiated with the people from the Hungarian group. We quickly agreed on the possible outcomes of the war in this area. I offered to save them if the Soviet troops arrived. In return they promised not to expose us if the Hungarian-German Army should retain the territory. However, very soon after this the fighting stopped and Hungarian soldiers appeared outside the basement. They called into the basement, asking: "Hungarian brothers and sisters, who is in the basement?" Instead of answering, the people from the Hungarian group ran out. We didn't expect them to give us up, but they did. They were joyful, hugging one another. And then, betrayal: "There are Jews from Yugoslavia here who have been hiding all over Hungary."

They immediately captured us. One of our group, Ladislav Silaši, who was completely depressed, failed to take his hands out of his pockets. They wanted to shoot him immediately. I took his hands out of his pockets and they didn't shoot. We were taken from the basement. There were eleven of us. We heard the command *Vonalbo sorakozo!* (Line up!). So we were not to be taken away, this was the preparation for execution. Before long a crowd of onlookers gathered. They were enthusiastically waiting for the execution. Our group, starving, with no will to

live, were calm. We were convinced that our end had come. I was third in the line. Then a Hungarian officer with an Arrow Cross (Nyilas) armband appeared.

Everything was ready for our execution. We waited for the command. I closed my eyes. I waited for the shot. Nothing happened in those moments. Dead silence. Slowly I opened my eyes. I saw an unbelievable sight. The Nyilas commanding officer was hugging one of the men lined up for execution! They were good friends at the university in Szeged. The Nyilas officer asks, confused: "Ečika, what are you doing here? You shouldn't be here, come out of the line so that I can save you." This was Ečika Hauer, the son of a timber merchant from Senta. We members of the group hadn't known one another well. With no hesitation, Eči Hauer replied to the Nyilas officer "It's all of us or no one!" I'm not sure what the rest of us would have done in that moment. Eči Hauer could have been saved from certain death and no one would ever learn of our execution in Hungary, far from our homeland. The officer was confused. Suddenly: "All right. I'm going to the commandant to get approval for the execution." (There was no need for him to ask for it). He told everyone present: "In the meantime, take them to the barn!" He chose an elderly soldier to escort us there. Discreetly he said to Hauer: "You've got time. Anyone found in the barn will be shot."

We seized the opportunity and fled. They found only one of our compatriots, a religious Jew from Hungary who didn't want to run. They shot him. The Hauers emigrated to Israel and that is where our Ečika died.

I have already mentioned the role of Ladislav Brajer, a Hungarian-born resident of Sombor, in securing food for us and passing on information, because he had special approval to move around and to drive a truck. Brajer, who was a friend from earlier, had good knowledge of the terrain in Budapest and beyond. In December, 1944, the Soviet troops encircled Budapest or, rather, Pest. But they were at a considerable distance, about 100 or 120 kilometres. On the other side, the Soviet troops were close to Buda and the liberation of Buda was believed to be imminent. Ladislav Brajer directed us towards Buda. He was in touch with a German officer who escorted us from Pest to Buda and put us up in a hospital 6 Foldvari Street, which had earlier been a school, but a hospital from Kecskemét had been moved into the premises.

Our ever-changing group included Josip, the son of Andrija Liht, the tailor, Josip and me. Josip introduced himself as a medical intern.

He knew a few basic things and Latin words he had heard from his cousin, Dr Antun Liht (of whom there is a bust in front of the Public Health Institute). I introduced myself as his assistant. Josip was wearing a white coat with a red cross on his chest and rubber gloves, which he wore in front of the patients. The surgical officer, I think his name was Abraham, was aware he was providing a cover for us. We were given tasks, carried patients and went to the battlefield to collect the dead and wounded.



*The Klajn family in Subotica in 1937 (L to R): son Lajčo, father David, shamas of the Jewish religious community in Subotica from 1923 to 1944 when he perished in Auschwitz; son Izrael, killed in battle with the Germans in 1941 as a member of the Yugoslav Royal Army; daughter Ana, survived Auschwitz; mother Debora, David's wife, perished in Auschwitz with her husband in 1944; son Jozef, a rabbi in Vrbas, survived the Holocaust but died from typhoid on his way home*

The Nyilas found out about us and made enquiries with Abraham. He signalled to us and we evaded arrest and escaped.

From the end of 1944, the armed forces of the Red Army held the front close to Buda. We hid there, constantly expecting to be liberated soon. In the meantime, we were given the job of moving, on foot, a mobile army kitchen from Buda to Pest. This meant we were moving

further from liberation, because the Red Army units were about 120 kilometres from Pest. It was night.

We were crossing a bridge. Pushing the army kitchen. Some others and I were wearing Hungarian army caps. In the still silence the iron wheels of the kitchen were clattering. Hungarian forces were waiting for street fights with the enemy. We decided to abandon the mobile army kitchen because we believed that we too would be targets. Less than a minute after we left it, the army kitchen was blown up in no time by heavy tanks.

We continued on foot, at night, in silence. Suddenly a German command: "Halt!" We were stopped by the driver of a German tank. And now something incredible happened. There was young Jewish man from Subotica called Tibor Štajn (he had worked in a hosiery factory, a very quiet and passive man). Now he approached, cool and seemingly calm and, putting his leg up on the tank, he asked "*Sagen sie, wo sind die Russen?*" (Tell me, where are the Russians?). The tank driver, certain we were allies, said, warning us: "*Dort.*" He pointed in the direction we needed in the silence of the night to be able to locate where we were and in which direction we should head for the Red Army.

And that's how it was. We hid in a damaged, abandoned residential building, in the basement, which is where we were when the city was liberated.

It was the end of January, 1945. But that was not the end of the story. The Red Army soldiers in Budapest were taking prisoners under guard, with machine guns. Ladislav Silaši and I fell into a trap. We would say: "Well, we're not going to let ourselves be caught now, are we?" There could no longer be any intervention. I remember that I had forgotten about the Hungarian Army cap. I immediately removed it. We waited for the crowd to arrive and we fled.

The Soviets couldn't shoot at us, instead they seized two other men from the street to make up the number of captives.

In the worst cold, in cattle wagons, very slowly and with many problems, and freezing, we got to Subotica railway station. To our great joy, Đorđe Hajzler was there, in the army uniform of the Yugoslav Partisans, in the capacity of political commissar. He welcomed us and took care of us. We were sick and exhausted. We were surprised at how we had survived. Later I married Margita Rogić who contributed to my creative development.

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*Lea LJUBIBRATIĆ*

## ONLY THE NAME REMAINS



*L*ea Ljubibratić was born in Novi Sad in 1929. Her parents, Mirko and Micika Fuks, née Sivak, moved to Israel after the second world war. There Mirko was secretary of the Association of Yugoslav Jews for a number of years.

*Lea Ljubibratić worked in Novi Sad as an English language teacher. After her retirement, together with her husband Edo, she was active in the life of the Novi Sad Jewish community.*

*Her daughter Milja and son Ivo live with their families in America.*

The Fuks family of Novi Sad consisted of four very close nuclear families. There were a total of fifteen of us. Grandfather Robert died before the war and eight people were killed in the war.

By marrying, my mother opted for the Jewish community, converting to the faith of Moses before I was even born. Together with her gradual adoption of Jewish customs, she also brought into the home some traditions with which she had been brought up. And so, before I began primary school, I knew about Christmas trees and Easter eggs.

I attended the Jewish primary school which was officially a public school. Because it had a good reputation there were also non-Jewish children attending. It was only here that I learnt the traditions from my religious teacher, Boroš, and heard the biblical stories which always

brought tears to my eyes. On Saturdays we had no classes, but we went to the school which was next door to the synagogue. At that time we called the synagogue temple. On Saturdays and major festivals, our teacher Boroš would recite prayers to us which we didn't understand because they were in Hebrew. We were happy to walk around in the yard while some of the adults were in the temple.

At that time I moved from Sokol to the Maccabi sports club. I practised gymnastics. We were led by Aleksandar Gutman who did not survive the war.

In the autumn of 1940, I enrolled in the first grade of the Girls' General Program Secondary School. Up to then I had heard adult conversations about what was happening in countries where Hitler had already planted his foot but, when I began secondary school, the war had not yet begun in our country. I felt the Fascist propaganda and its repercussions on my own skin.

One day a student from a higher year invited us to sign up for the scouts. We would spend time together and go on excursions. The idea appealed to me because I was an only child and much younger than the others in the family. Immediately after school I went to sign up. When I returned home I told my father about this. Without much explanation he told me that I must withdraw immediately the next day. When I appeared the following day I was still at the door when they told me not to come any more. I didn't need to withdraw.

Not long after that, my father told me one evening that I would be asked to go to the school headmaster who would ask me to sign something and that after that I should come home. The next day we Jews were called in to see the headmaster, one by one. As each girl returned to the classroom she would take her school bag and leave without a word. The principal gave us a document to sign and said nothing except that we were to leave the school. This was the implementation of the *Numerus Clausus*. It supplied the basis for determining the percentage of Jewish children who were permitted to enrol in the first year of secondary schools and universities.

That autumn, in October, my father was called up for a military exercise as a reserve officer. He did not return from the exercise because war broke out and he was taken into captivity. However, while on the exercise he resigned his commission as reserve second lieutenant with the following explanation: "I have been, by decision of the education minister, classified as a second class, or perhaps even lower, citi-

zen, despite the fact that according to the Constitution all citizens are equal regardless of national and religious affiliation. Therefore, because of this decision I find myself unworthy of a reserve officer rank. Before submitting this petition I thought long about this act of mine. I know that if my resignation is accepted, I will have harmed myself, however I believe that I can also make a contribution to the state as a private, working on digging trenches or something similar. However, the actions of the responsible authorities in expelling my daughter from school constitute such a great insult that I believe that, by taking such an action against my family, the authorities do not see me as worthy of being a citizen of this state." I would also like to mention that, in a letter sent to me from captivity, my father advised me to learn foreign languages because, on his return, we would have to look for another country in which to live because they did not like us in this one.

It was just before the end of the school year on April 1, 1941, that a reply came, together with a recommendation to the school to enrol me again.

Novi Sad very soon fell under Hungarian occupation. Within the first few days there was a hand grenade thrown at Father's garage and the automobile spare parts store was robbed. Mother and I were left with no means of support.

Trouble followed. Already, in 1941, all who had not lived in Novi Sad before 1918 were required to leave the city. And so two of our families set off for the Independent State of Croatia and two stayed behind. This first decision of my mother not to obey the order saved me from the camp in Croatia in which my grandmother Sofija and my uncle's wife Vali perished. My grandmother was unable to walk and, when my father, who was in captivity, asked the camp commandant why he was no longer getting any letters from his mother, he replied that she had been finished off with a rifle butt. My uncle, Nikola-Niki fled to Italy and thus saved his life. Father's two nieces, Mira (born 1920) and Ljerka (born 1923), returned illegally. After Ljerka was harassed in the Novi Sad prison known as the Army building in January 1924, they were both thrown under the ice of the Danube in a massacre called the Raid. Their parents, Feliks and Ana, crossed over to Budapest illegally. It wasn't easy to live under Hungarian occupation. My Aunt Jelka's son Đorđe Barta (born 1921), was taken to a labour battalion. He never returned. Allegedly he was killed. (There were *appell* – roll-calls every



now and then and if something wasn't to the liking of the Fascists they would shoot every tenth person in the line).

I continued my education. At first I socialised with the girls from my class. More and more I was compelled to socialise only with young Jewish women and men. We managed to read many books, those that were considered progressive. In the summer a "No entry for dogs and Jews" sign appeared at the entrance to the Strand beach. We young people who by some miracle had escaped the Raid went to Ribarsko Island.



*Lea, before her expulsion from secondary school, 1940, and her father Mirko Fuks, December 1948, before emigration to Israel*

And so came 1944. In March, the German occupation, in October the Nyilas. This was when the first sweep of the Fascist dragon's tail started. They began deporting Jews. Mother saved me a third time (the second time had been during the Raid when she showed the gendarmes who burst into our house some old birth certificate of hers) by hiding me under the staircase of a building in a neighbouring street. As soon as they stopped rounding up Jews to take them to concentration camps, she took me to Pecs, to a distant cousin of hers whom she hadn't seen or heard from for some time. I stayed there for a month. Most of the time I pretended to sleep on the sofa in the kitchen so that I wouldn't have to talk to her or her husband, a railway worker. After a month, my mother came to get me and took me to Budapest. We changed apart-

ments every month and most often lived in the outskirts of the city, in Sashalom, Mátyásföld or Rakosfalva.

By this time I was no longer a little girl whom a mother could easily keep at home. I couldn't just hide passively. I would take the little Hév train and go to Budapest. At first I would get cigarettes for Uncle Feliks and then I would go to their *Csillagos ház* (house with a yellow star) and visit him and Aunt Ana. I would talk for a while. One day he told me that he would give me pocket money while my father was in captivity. This was touching, because he no longer had his two daughters to give it to. So I was able to buy a ticket for the train every day, while in the trams I would get in at the back door and push my way through to the front door so I could get off without being caught without a ticket by the inspector. Then I would wait for the next tram and do the same thing, all the way to Teréz Körút, where I would go to another house with a star, to my school friend Vera Pik. Often, on my way there, I would have to go into basements with people I didn't know because of air raid alerts, until I finally reached Vera's place. We both daydreamed about a future life, especially because she read literature which fired her imagination.

One day, outside Vera's building, an old lady wearing the star stopped me and asked me if there was a bench nearby where she could sit and rest. I took her by the arm and began leading her towards a bench when some woman with an umbrella attacked me. She began waving the umbrella in the air and saying "How can you help a Jew?" The old woman told me to run away, so I pointed her towards the place where the bench was. A number of people had gathered around the woman who was shouting. I ran, zig-zagging from one side street to another until I was tired and dared to turn around to see my pursuers. There was no one there.

Just a few days later I went in through the wide open gate of the building. I saw all the members of the household, including Vera, standing lined up, with bundles, and next to them gendarmes with bayonets out. They wouldn't let me near them. Vera shouted to me to go to the Swiss Embassy in Vadász Street and ask for written confirmation that she was under their protection. I began running at once. When I reached Vadász Street it was packed with people who had come for the same reason. I could do nothing but push my way through that crowd like an awl and shout that I had to get in because she was already lined up to be taken away. When I rushed into the Embassy, a young man was coming

down the stairs. I told him what I needed. He immediately went back to the first floor and appeared with the document I had asked for.

Still running, I returned to Vera's gate. They were still there. I folded the document and rushed into the wide hall, as the bayonets turned towards me, but I pushed the paper into Vera's hand. Again I rushed out and, running, went to the corner and then across to the other side of the street. I hid behind a news stand and watched to see whether there would be any commotion after I had fled. They didn't chase me, probably because they saw that I was a little girl.

Vera and other children who had the document were taken to a building which was under protection. I visited her there. She told me that it was rumoured that they would not be able to keep them there much longer. I gave her my new address. Less than two days later, Vera appeared with Helena, a girl from the same building. I was to hide them. The man who had given me accommodation was very angry because he had only agreed to shelter me, but he allowed them to stay the night. All three of us lay in a narrow bed. For myself, I know that I didn't get a wink of sleep, thinking about what I could do with the two of them, while they had completely placed themselves in my care and may even have fallen asleep. Early in the morning I began preparing them to go out into the street. I had come up with the idea of dressing them as village girls and setting off by train with them to Sashalom. I knew a German woman and her daughter there. Her husband was Jewish and they belonged to some sect. I could speak freely to her and she took both girls in. They both survived the war. Vera emigrated to Israel and was always sorry that I didn't go there as well. I don't know what happened to Helena. All my life, in my thoughts, I continued to thank the woman from Sashalom for her kindness but, after the war, I could not find the strength to visit her.

I often visited my Aunt Jelka, who had come to Pest with her husband Joži and her daughter Vera. They also lived in a building with a star and this always meant that there were too many people crammed into all the apartments. It was never possible to keep the apartment tidy, so in their room there were a lot of saucepans on the floor to catch the water dripping through the ceiling in the autumn rain. In Feliks and Ana's place the walls were full of insects which fell on people at night. My dear Aunt Jelka, my father's sister, was very concerned about me travelling freely around Pest without a star. She was also worried because I had no clothes and shoes for rainy and wintery days.

Tragedy struck them too. They were visiting the parents of Vera's husband, Andrija Mikeš. While they were there the Nyilas came into the apartment, tied them up in pairs and took them to the bank of the Danube. They were turned facing the river. They fired bursts of shots at their feet, making them fall into the river and they began to drown. On the way there, while they were being taken to the Danube, Vera told the young man she was tied to that he should try to loosen the ties. They managed to do that and so, when she fell into the river, Vera was able to swim to the river bank once the Nyilas left. Among the drowning people she found her mother, who still showed some signs of life. She bit through the ropes with which her mother was tied and dragged her ashore. Then, crawling because her injuries left her unable to move any other way, she went from one house to another asking for assistance. But no one was willing to help her. With the last of her strength she managed to crawl to the Yugoslav Embassy. There they were both given first aid and then put in two different hospitals. However Aunt Jelka had no strength left to fight for recovery and that was how we lost her.

In February, 2001, exactly 56 years later, I was with my husband in the garden of the big synagogue in Budapest to honour the souls of the Jews who had perished, among them my dear Aunt Jelka. On that occasion I wrote: "The garden is shady and, at this time of the year, damp and cold. The footpaths are strewn with gravel, there are no grave mounds, only flatly harrowed soil, framed with bricks into large rectangles and on them plaques, simple, grey, squares of granite, filled with names, dates of birth and death. For some there is not even a plaque because they had no family to do that, or because some of those still alive felt there was not point in it, because there is no small number of those whose remains lie in some unknown place. But perhaps this is wrong because a name, even if only written on a stone, is the only sign that a person once lived."

Every year, remembering the days of the Raid on the Danube bank, I would say to myself and to my family just how different and more meaningful my life could have been had my closest family members and my school friends survived the war.

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*Aleksandar KERENJI*

OBSESSION



*Aleksandar Kerenji was born in Novi Sad on June 6, 1940, to father Stevan Santo, born 1910, and mother Piroška, née Singer, born 1911.*

*He was a year and a half old when he lost both his parents. Together with another 27 members of their immediate and extended family they were shot on January 23, 1942, in a pogrom carried out by the Hungarian Fascist forces, known as the Novi Sad Raid<sup>1</sup>.*

*He finished secondary school in Novi Sad and graduated from the Medical Faculty of Novi Sad University. He works in the Institute for Oncology in Sremska Kamenica as an internist-immunologist in the Laboratory for Immuno-Biology of Tumours. He is an assistant professor in the Oncology Department of the Novi Sad Medical School.*

The events about which I am writing began to obsess me more and more, only after the age of 40, but so strongly that I relive them even in my sleep. Finally I realised that it is my duty to write about everything that happened and also to find sources which speak of it. Because, if I don't write about this, it will be as though none of the thirty or so of my

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<sup>1</sup> In this incident, 1,246 people, 809 of whom were Jews and 375 Serbs, were shot dead and their bodies thrown into the frozen Danube.

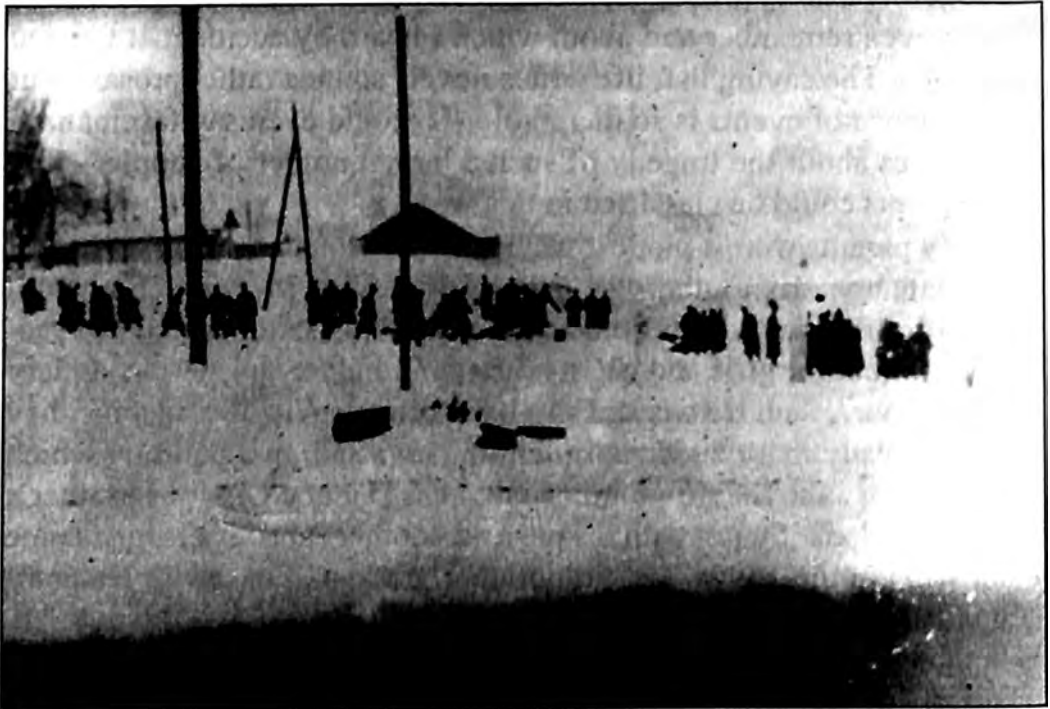
1

direct ancestors ever existed. To my regret, while the witnesses to these events were still alive and I could have found something out from them, I didn't know that anything like this had happened.

Now, after years and years of searching, of touring museums, registry offices, of reading records of births and deaths, and discussions with people who could tell me a little more about all this, I have tried to put together a story which should be reliable. A story of horrors which I don't even remember and about which I heard by accident at the age of sixteen. The saying that life writes novels sounds rather prosaic, but the sequence of events is so incredible – I would even say fascinating, were it not about the tragedy of such a large number of people – that these events could be classified in this way.

My parents were a modest young couple who had a child at a relatively late age: my mother was 26 and my father 36. Mother's health was frail, she reportedly suffered from tuberculosis. She completed secondary school for girls and was a housewife. Father finished secondary school in Novi Sad. He worked as a bank officer. With that income they lived modestly in a rented apartment in Novi Sad, in a building which is still called Jakovljević's Sanitorium, near Danube Quay. My father's father, Dr Aladar Santo, with his parents, brothers and sisters, had come from Kula in the 1890s. My grandfather graduated in law in Hungary and was, until 1918, the deputy public notary of the City of Novi Sad. Whether he changed his name from Steinbach before or after taking this position I do not know, although it would not be surprising at that time if pressure had been put on him to change his surname in order to advance in the service. His name and surname, together with his rank in the first world war, during which he was decorated for war service as were many members of my family, are documented in the gold book of Hungarian Jewish military veterans published in Hungary before the second world war. Unfortunately none of this saved him from being shot. I can only imagine the horror, the surprise and the disbelief when my father, my uncles and my grandfather realised that, in spite of all their civic loyalty and honourable contribution to the society, insane people had decided to dispose of them summarily. My grandfather had five brothers and a sister. After the war, in 1918, Grandfather was retired. (I still have a photocopy of the pension cheque with his signature and the signature of his sister, my great aunt, as one of the few pieces of material evidence that they ever existed.)

The story begins in 1941 when, following the capitulation of Yugoslavia and the entry of Fascist forces into Novi Sad, they banned Jews from working. My parents moved in with my grandfather, Aladar Santo, at 63 Miletićeva Street, partly in order to save money and partly so that the family would be together. My aunt and her family also lived at the same address in Miletićeva Street.



*Twenty-seven members of Aleksandar Kerenji's family were killed in the infamous Novi Sad Raid on January 23, 1942. The photograph shows Hungarian soldiers throwing bodies into the frozen Danube*

Through a combination of unfortunate circumstances, Miletićeva Street was the main focus of Fascist crimes and their rampage during the “cold days” of 1942. In the well-known Novi Sad Raid on January 23, at 8.30 in the morning, my entire family (my great grandmother Fani Steinbach, grandmother and grandfather Aladar and Emilija Santo, my father and mother Stevan and Piroška Santo, my Aunt Klara and her husband Endre Goldstein – a total of 27 members of my family) were taken into the street and shot, some of them thrown into the Danube. My father's body was allegedly found in the Uspensko Cemetery.

By a great miracle, my aunt's son and I remained alive. Some say that our parents hid us under pillows (this was the morning and people

were caught in their beds), others say that we were hidden behind the heating stove. I have never discovered which of these is the true version. I was a year and a half old and my cousin two and a half. We were found by Hungarian soldiers when the order to stop shooting had already been given so, wet, in nappies, half naked, we were taken to the City Administration Office where we were recognised by relatives and friends who had remained alive. I learned from eyewitnesses that a Hungarian soldier gave me water and bread in the City Administration building because we had been waiting there all morning. This is where the paths of my cousin and I separated for life. I ended up with the Kerenji family (my mother's sister was married to Dr Kerenji, who was saved by a patient of his who was a member of the Arrow Cross – the Nyilas) and my cousin went to relatives in Budapest. There, after the death of our aunt who had taken him in, he went to another family. Many years later, in 1956 he fled the revolution in Hungary and settled in Venezuela. He died there in the street, suddenly, in 1976. He left a wife and two children with whom even now I have been unable to get in touch, despite my constantly searching for them. To my regret it was only after my cousin's death that I learnt he had existed.

On my mother's side, my grandfather and grandmother perished in Auschwitz. My grandfather's brother remained alive in Budapest, but his son, whom he had hidden in a hospital, was shot on the very last day by a member of the Arrow Cross, in a street which was being liberated by the Russians.

Having lost my parents, I came to the Kerenji family, my closest relatives on my mother's side. I don't think anyone could have welcomed me with more warmth, goodwill and kindness than did the Kerenjis. Dr Stevan Kerenji deserves even more credit for my general education and upbringing than my aunt. I have him to thank for everything I know and am able to do today. The day after my parents were shot, the Hungarian authorities immediately issued an order to Dr Stevan Kerenji that he was to manage the property of my parents – the late Stevan and Piroška Santo – with “neutral” supervision of this management. There was, of course, no mention of me. Because of this the Kerenji family was justifiably concerned that I, as an orphan, would be taken at the first opportunity to a collective centre and the procedure which would follow that was common knowledge. For this reason, they took great care to keep me hidden. In the spring of 1942, Dr Stevan Kerenji, as a physician with a Hungarian diploma, received orders to



travel to Hungary to do compulsory labour as a doctor (Hungarians were going to the front because the doctors who were in compulsory labour were defecting to the Russians). He took me with him. Of course he took me without documents. There was always the danger of him being stopped for a document check, with all the potential consequences for his family and for me. Because of this I seldom went out into the street or the light of day.

In Hungary, Dr Kerenji worked in a little village called Igar, close to Székesfehérvár. Word spread in the village that he was a good doctor and a good man, so the locals accepted him fondly. The local policeman (*csendő*r) protected him whenever possible. Unfortunately, in 1944, by order of the then government, all Jews had to go into concentration camps. Dr Kerenji was interned with his family in Budapest (in a ghetto according to some stories), from which he managed to escape with his family by bribing people. He returned to Igar and again worked with the knowledge of the local people, until the Russians arrived. However, just as the Russians entered the village, the front moved again and the Germans returned to the village. The policeman I mentioned earlier was hiding us in a basement right next to the SS headquarters and military court. Dr Kerenji had syringes with morphine ready in case the Germans burst into our hideout. Fortunately this didn't happen and the Germans finally left the village. It was by chance that Dr Kerenji happened to be the first witness for the local policeman when the Russian units entered the village and this saved both the policeman's life and the lives of his family.

The world sometimes really is a small place. During the 1956 revolution in Hungary, the son of the Igar policeman fled across the border to Yugoslavia and was sent to the refugee centre at the Bor Mine. I remember well on this occasion that Dr Stevan Kerenji packed two suitcases full of clothing and footwear and a suitcase of food which he sent to the Bor Mine. Not long after that the son emigrated to Australia.

And so, when I look back, I do not have even the most basic facts about at least three families of my ancestors – my father's, my mother's and the Kerenji family. (This is not any problem at all in other families – you go to the registry and get a certificate from the register of births and deaths and you make a family tree). There's only a monument beside the Danube where the names of the members of my immediate family are engraved. The problem is that until 1895 registers were kept in religious communities and these books were systematically burnt and

destroyed along with the Jews during the war and even after it. I am trying to find this information because this is the only thing I can leave to my children about their ancestors. I tour museums, registries, archives. I look for documents, certificates from registers of deaths and births. I am trying to save from oblivion what can be saved, to find pictures and piece by piece to put together a story. With a little luck, perhaps I will be able to repay my ancestors, at least to some extent. Until then, every January 23, when everyone leaves the commemoration which is traditionally held on this day, and when there are no longer any people on the Danube Quay, I visit the monument to the victims of the Raid and I remember my nearest and dearest.

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*Henrijeta KAHAN-ORSINI*

NAMELESS CHILDHOOD



**H**enrijeta Kahan-Orsini was born in 1932, in Slavonski Brod into a rabbinical family, to father Samuilo and mother Regina, née Šmukler. She had a brother, Damir, who was born in 1934, in Lipik (Croatia), where her father was working as a doctor in a health spa. Her brother Damir, from whom she parted at the end of 1941, did not survive Auschwitz.

Following the birth of his son Damir, her father decided to move the family to Belgrade, believing it would be safer for them there. However only Henrijeta and

her mother survived the war. Part of their large family who stayed behind in Croatia perished in Jasenovac and Nova Gradiška, while a smaller part of them moved to Vojvodina, mostly to Novi Sad.

Her parents were denounced and arrested while attempting to join the Partisans. Her father Samuilo was taken to Jajinci, near Belgrade, where he was shot in 1942, and her mother Regina first to the camp in Banjica, where she was tortured and then deported to Auschwitz. She survived the horrors of this camp and Mengele's in vivo experiments and returned to Belgrade with scars which she did not succeed in healing until her death in 1975.

After returning to Belgrade at the end of the war Henrijeta completed dentistry studies in the city. She then completed the requirements for a licence to practise dentistry in Switzerland, where she lived and worked for forty years.

My memories of my earliest childhood are mainly linked to life in Belgrade. My brother and I were raised there in a very Spartan manner, something that my father particularly insisted on. He always said that days would come when we would be very much in need of courage and endurance. As if he knew what awaited us. Times were very difficult in Belgrade after the outbreak of war. Everything was banned for Jews and Gypsies.

I remember those times very vividly because of the yellow armbands and occasional harsh and abusive remarks addressed to us by children and adults. However this atmosphere and those remarks were only a foretaste of what would come with the Holocaust.

At the time my father and mother were preparing to join the Partisans. They set off to Kruševac, from where they were to join Partisan units. Unfortunately they never arrived there. They were denounced by people they believed were friends. My parents were arrested. They took my father, Samuilo, to Jajinci, where he was shot in 1942, and my mother to Banjica, where she was tortured before being deported to Auschwitz. There she fell victim to Mengele's *in vivo* experiments, because of which she later developed tumours of which she eventually died.

It was terrible for my brother Damir and me to be separated from our real parents, at the end of 1941. When we parted, the family stood silent, with no tears or words. We each went our own way, knowing that we were parting forever, that we were going on a journey of no return, that each of us had only a one-way ticket. In order to at least save us children, Father paid a woman he knew a hundred thousand gold dinars to obtain false documents in the names of Olga and Damjan Kosić and to get my brother and me to Novi Sad where we were to be handed over to relatives. This woman was a Serb named Vida Petrović. Her daughter was married to the notorious criminal Bećarević, a member of the Special Police. Instead of taking us to our family, she took us, on December 31, 1941, to Petrovaradin and left us there in the cold night, two small children, to cross the frozen Danube ourselves, alone and barefoot. We never discovered why she acted this way.

Our aunt was waiting for us on the other side and she took us, frozen as we were, to her home.

We arrived in Novi Sad exactly when the Raid was happening. This horrendous operation was mounted on January 21 to 23. It was carried out by members of the regular Hungarian Army and police.

They were searching houses and ripping beds and sheets with bayonets. The two of us were hidden under one of these beds. To this day I don't know how we managed to survive.

From that day our documents were no longer any use because it was difficult for Serbs as well. We became nameless, we no longer existed.

When we had recovered somewhat from the consequences of frostbite they had to separate us, because no one could, or dared, hide two children. So our uncle took my brother in and I was taken in by a Serb-Hungarian family.

My uncle and his wife had a newborn baby, which the Hungarian police impaled like a ball on a bayonet before the very eyes of my aunt and my brother. This sight drove my aunt completely out of her mind and they then killed her. This was the atmosphere in which my brother Damir was living.

The family with whom I was accommodated ran a brothel and a restaurant in their house. During the day I was locked in the basement and at night I washed dishes in the restaurant. No one was allowed to see me. My benefactors took a great risk in keeping me there. My only food was scraps. In the basement I could mend socks, for which I would be given one Hungarian pengö, which I would give to my brother for food.



*Henrijeta from her student days*

I always remembered Father saying that days would come when we would be hungry, beaten and persecuted. As though he had foreseen everything. I was stronger in some way, a little older. I coped with all the problems better than my brother, so I both grew up and aged very fast. I took care of us both.

But the day came when we had to part and each go our own way. They did not dare keep me in the family any longer out of fear that someone would see me. They decided that I should go. This was the time in which Germany occupied Hungary. The last transport for deportation to Auschwitz was assembled in the Novi Sad churchyard, which was where my brother and my family had been taken. They got me to

some Hungarians who had a farm near Buda. I worked in a barn. It was a difficult situation in which everyone's life was in danger. The family who took me in were good people and took pity on me. However eventually they could no longer risk their lives so, after a few months, I was turned over to a home for children without parents, nameless orphans. There were about four hundred children of various nationalities accommodated there. This was some kind of ghetto, as far as I remember now.

I know how long I spent there: the end of the war was approaching. The Fascists were withdrawing. The orphanage was near a barracks which had been mined so we were forced to make a dramatic flight through an underground sewer. There were children of various ages there and very few survived. I was one of them.

The Russians had already entered Pest. I was saved by a Russian officer who took me with him. He was stationed in Novi Sad. He lived in a requisitioned apartment in which a *Volksdeutsche* family of four lived. They had a girl who worked for them. She was a Serb named Marica. These were people who did not dirty their hands with any compromising acts during the war. They had two children the same age as me and they accepted me gladly. I learnt later that the Russian officer who brought me to this *Volksdeutsche* family was a Jewish engineer. His whole family had perished during the siege of Leningrad. He always used to say that I reminded him of his little girl. At this time I was allowed for the first time to acknowledge that I was Jewish. I felt like a normal human being, thinking that I had finally found a home somewhere. I loved my new family and gave them all the love a child can give.

But one day my dream of a home and a family turned into a nightmare. My "Russian father" came home one evening completely drunk. In that state he lined the entire *Volksdeutsche* family up against the wall and shot them all in the eyes. He killed all four, ruthlessly. He then hugged me and Marica and begged us to forgive him, saying that he could not get over the loss of his family. Then he killed himself, shooting himself in the mouth.

Marica and I were paralysed. When we came to ourselves we were surrounded by death and blood! All the corpses in the world were floating through my mind; I have looked death in the face many times, but this was a horror which cast a pall over the whole of my later life. After this experience I could not sleep for years. I have seen many deaths, and they were part of everyday life, but I have never been able to forget this. I could not even take any joy in liberation when it finally came. I was indifferent to anything happening around me.

Again fate determined my path. Marica took care of me for a while, but unfortunately not for long, because she herself was very poor. Because she was unable to look after me, she registered me with the Red Cross as a war orphan, hoping that survivors from my family would be found. She planned to put me into the orphanage if no one contacted the Red Cross. At the time my health was very poor. The two of us were given a room in which we lived and in which Marica took care of me.

After some time, two cousins of mine returned to Novi Sad and took me in. I was with them until my mother returned from Auschwitz and found me. She returned alone because my brother Damir had perished in the camp. I didn't recognise my mother and so my cousins, who were rather older than me, had a lot of trouble trying to persuade me that she really was my mother.



*Henrijeta with mother Regina and stepfather Dragutin Zloković,  
Switzerland, 1965 or 1966.*

I don't remember the period just after the end of the war very well. I know that Mother and I stayed for some time with our cousins. After that we were given a room in our former house in Belgrade. We had lived in that house before the war as the Kahan family. Now my mother and I lived in one tiny room until 1947, usually hungry. Mother found a position as a worker in a state stamp shop. Every day she was given a portion of lentils which we shared when she came home from work in the evening.

I had to work in order to survive. I took in laundry, sometimes for only a slice of bread and lard. This was a difficult life, and Mother's health was deteriorating.

At around this time a pre-war friend of my parents, Dragutin Zloković, returned from captivity, also in a very poor state. After some time he married my mother, mostly wanting to help me, to adopt me and raise me. However he was unable to adopt me, but he stayed with us until the end. He was a Serb and a great friend of Jews, and he loved me as though I were his own child.

I was thirteen when the war ended. My stepfather taught me that "my brother is my brother whatever his religion", that a person should not be judged by who or what he is but by the kind of person he is, that there is no shame in being poor and that honesty is the greatest virtue.

After I completed my education, my stepfather suggested to me that I move to Switzerland so that, as he put it, I would never again experience anything like the war. He advised me not to declare myself as a Jew anywhere. He was also afraid of the Cold War. I always followed his advice, although there was no need for that in Switzerland.

After my mother's death, my stepfather lived in Belgrade. When he fell ill I brought him to Switzerland to live with me. I cared for him until the end of his life, looking after him as a devoted, grateful daughter.

A few members of my extended family emigrated to Israel, which is where they still live.

I have strong emotional ties to Belgrade. Basically I have never left it. I am bound to this little remaining part of my country, to the graves I can still call "mine".

Some survived, some did not. One must forgive, but one must not forget.



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## Vilma JOVANOVIĆ

### HIDING IN BUDAPEST



Vilma Jovanović was born in Osijek on June 5, 1923, to father Julije Šternberg and mother Irma, née Papai, a housewife. Her father Julije, who was born in Pakrac in 1892, was the director of Paromlin and the Croatian Savings Bank in Osijek. Her mother Irma was born in 1897 into a large family in Barcs, Hungary.

Up to the war and the occupation of Yugoslavia in 1941, the family lived in Osijek. In April that year Vilma matriculated from the Osijek Secondary School. At the time her elder brother Zdenko, also born in Osijek, was a student of chemistry.

Her father and mother did not survive the horrors of the Auschwitz camp. Her brother Zdenko survived the war. She lost a large number of relatives from both sides of her family in the Holocaust.

After Yugoslavia was liberated she graduated from the Economics Faculty of Belgrade University and still lives in the city as a pensioner. From her marriage to Borivoje Jovanović, who died in 1993, she has one daughter, Svetlana. She also has a granddaughter, Irma, who lives with her mother in the USA.

Following the proclamation of the Independent State of Croatia in April 1941, and the entry of the Germans into Osijek, our life changed considerably. Measures of discrimination and persecution of Jews were introduced. Also imposed was the obligation to wear a yellow armband

with the sign "Jew", then time limitations on leaving the house and a ban on using main city streets, a ban on sitting in trams, limitation of times for buying goods in shops, dismissal from employment and the confiscation of shops. At the same time a hostile attitude to Jews developed among part of the population. Many people changed, including those we had once considered friends, even my school friends with whom I had shared a bench for eight years and kept close company with. On top of this, Jews and even Serbs were faced with the threat of night raids, taking young men away to compulsory labour. New repression could be expected every day.

I grew more and more convinced that survival in this environment was no longer possible and that we must flee as soon as possible in order to save our lives. My brother Zdenko did this in August 1941. He left Osijek with a travel permit he had bought and went to Sušak, planning to escape to Italy. I chose to take refuge in Hungary because my mother had a brother in Budapest. However my parents had no intention of leaving Osijek. They could not see the danger approaching and believed that they could cope with the problems of life there. All attempts by my brother and me to persuade them were in vain.

It was not easy to organise flight from Osijek and the border crossing. My father somehow managed to get in touch with an Ustaša commissioner appointed to a furrier shop by the new authorities. He had a friend, a clerk at the railway station. For a lot of money the railway worker agreed that, when an opportunity arose, he would put me on a German Army transport to Hungary.

I finally succeeded at the fifth or sixth attempt. In the meantime I would pack each time, bid farewell to my parents once more and go to the apartment of a friend opposite the railway station, where I was to wait for someone to take me to the train. During one such attempt I was taken to the office of the railway clerk. However, when he went out to check the situation with the train, an Ustaša from the police who knew me came into the office. This Ustaša, whose surname was Đurić, sat across the table from me. He put his revolver down on the table and asked me why I was not wearing the yellow star, what I was doing at the station and similar questions. In the end he threatened me, saying that I was never to attempt anything like this again and sent me away from the station. I later found out that Đurić also blackmailed my parents, asking them for money because they had allowed me to escape.

One evening, at the end of December 1941, I managed to leave Osijek. The railway clerk got me into a car with German soldiers, asking them to take me only as far as Pécs in Hungary. Aware of the danger of being handed over on the journey and of the surroundings I was in, I was afraid and stayed awake all night. When we got to Pécs, a German soldier took my suitcase and led me to the ticket counter. The station was packed with police but, thanks to my escort, they did not suspect anything. Because I spoke Hungarian I bought a ticket without any problem and soon continued my journey to Budapest. However the police boarded the train to check documents. I had only the ticket and was very frightened. Not knowing what to do, I pretended to be asleep. Fortunately they didn't wake me and I reached Budapest without any problem.

My relatives in Budapest received me rather coldly, which was a great disappointment to me. My uncle and his family were well-off, but at the time they had still not grasped what was going on, so they failed to understand the gravity of my situation or the conditions in which Jews were already living in Croatia. At this time, Jews in Hungary were not yet being persecuted, so everything I said seemed unreal to them. After a few days they said that I could not stay with them and that I must find a job.

With the money I had brought from home, I bought an address registration with false personal information. With the help of this document I could get a job. A month later, on the recommendation of my uncle, I found a job as a governess with a Hungarian family who had two children. After staying with them for seven months, I received, in August 1942, a postcard. It had been written by my mother during the transport of Jews to Auschwitz. While the train had been standing in the station in Zagreb, she managed to send this card with someone. She was saying farewell, writing that I should not worry, that she was happy even though she was going to her death, because she knew that her children had been saved in some way. My employer, Ana Silasi, helped me a great deal in overcoming the crisis I was in because of this card from my mother. She was a good woman and she was the only one in the house who knew the truth about me.

That same year, 1942, because of the persecution of Jews in Austria, my other uncle, Jene Papai, managed to escape with his family from Vienna to Budapest. They fled with nothing and led a very difficult life. They spoke no Hungarian and so aroused the suspicion of

their neighbours. Because of this they frequently changed their place of residence, but they were caught in 1944 and taken to a camp from which they never returned.

I had many relatives in Hungary. As well as these two uncles, three of my mother's cousins also lived there with their families. However they lived outside Budapest, so I would never see them. My grandmother also lived in Hungary, in Barcs, with her eldest daughter.

I spent 1943 with the family for whom I worked. In order to avoid the raids and dangers which lurked at every step, I tried to go out of the house as little as possible. The Allies had also begun sporadic bombing of Budapest. We were at the same time happy about this bombing and in fear of it because of the danger of being killed.

That year I managed to discover, through the Red Cross, that my brother Zdenko was alive, and that he was in Italy, interned in a place called Gravedona, on Lake Como. He had no money and was in a difficult situation, hungry a lot, but his life was in no immediate danger. We even found a way somehow to write to each other. This correspondence lasted until the end of 1943 when he fled to Switzerland. With great difficulty he crossed the Alps on foot and managed to get into Switzerland, thus escaping the danger of being caught at the border and being returned to Italy.

In March, 1944, when the Germans came to Hungary and the Hungarian Fascists came to power, the persecution of Jews who were Hungarian citizens began. This changed the position of the family for whom I worked. I had discovered in the meantime that they, too, were of Jewish origin but had changed their name and their religion. Because their household staff and many of their neighbours were aware of this, I saw the danger and began preparing to leave them. I felt obliged to warn them of the dangers they would probably be exposed to. I advised them to hide somewhere and save their lives. Probably having learnt from my experience, they soon left the house and managed to survive the war. The husband hid for almost a year in the basement of a friend's house and the wife and children found shelter in a convent.

This began a very difficult period for me. The carpet bombing of Budapest began, almost every second night. However it was not the bombing itself that was so disturbing for those of us living there illegally. We even took a certain kind of satisfaction in knowing that the end was approaching for the Germans and that better times were coming. A much greater problem for me was that of obtaining better documents

and a job. Good documents and employment were the safest way of dispelling the suspicions of the police and the people who collaborated with them. Most people who were there illegally drew attention to themselves by hiding and not working.

After I left my job as a governess, I lived with Lilika Blum, a friend of mine from Osijek who was living in Budapest under an assumed name. We lived in the abandoned apartment of a cousin of hers. We didn't stay there more than a couple of months, because the building supervisor reported to the police that there were suspicious people coming to our apartment speaking, they thought, Russian and who did not go down to the shelter during the bombing. Not long after that a police officer arrived and took us in for questioning, at which point he discovered that we were refugees from Croatia. The war was drawing to a close and the Russians were already on Hungarian territory so, that same day, we managed to call some friends. They immediately found money and offered it to the police officer. He accepted the money, but set another condition. He asked that, when the Russians arrive, we testify to the new authorities that he had behaved decently and set us free. Our friends agreed to this and the two of us were released. However, we did not keep their promise. Later we discovered that the police officer, whose name was Desaknai was one of the main participants in the bloodshed in Novi Sad in 1942. When we were released from prison, Lilika and I moved away and, by so doing, covered our tracks.

There were great difficulties involved in obtaining documents. I was without anything for almost four months, changing my name a number of times depending on the situation I found myself in. Finally, with the help of some immigrant friends from Croatia, I obtained an original birth certificate issued somewhere in Vojvodina and an address registration. These were in the name of Aranka Višošević, a Catholic. Using these documents I was able to get an employment booklet. I lived under this new name until the liberation of Budapest. With the employment booklet I was able to get a job and survive the frequent raids more easily. On several occasions when they checked my identification, they checked to see if I knew the prayers of the religion I supposedly belonged to, but I was prepared for this kind of test and had learnt them by heart in advance.

When I obtained my employment booklet and address registration, I found a job in a can factory. The factory manager, a Vojvodina

Hungarian, helped me a great deal when I was getting the job and during the time I worked there. His surname was Bogdanfi. After the war he returned to Yugoslavia where he worked as a journalist and writer. He is famous, among other things, for translating Tito's biography into Hungarian.

The job in the factory was extremely hard and the work was done under very difficult conditions. We often worked with cold water and carried crates weighing about twenty kilograms up the stairs from the basement. There was a lot of overtime work, even during the bombing. At that time I was living in Buda, quite a long way from the factory in Pest. It took me more than an hour to get to work and the same time to return. We started work in the factory at six in the morning which further exhausted me.

At that time, beginning April 1944, fourteen of my cousins, that is my mother's cousins, were taken to camp. What most affected me was hearing that they had simply thrown my 85-year-old grandmother out of bed and carried her outside. She died that same night because it was very cold outside. I never heard anything more of my aunt who lived with her and who was over sixty at the time. I only know that she did not return. Nor did my other aunts return, nor any members of their families. I found it very difficult to deal with my occasional encounters with the daughter of my landlord, who was the secretary of a minister in the Fascist government. Among the things she talked about with the greatest of pleasure were the heinous crimes committed against Jews. Unfortunately I had to listen to her stories without saying a word.

The uncle to whom I had first gone when I arrived in Budapest and his family were the only ones who managed to escape death in the camp, although he died in an accident sometime before the end of the war. I was not in contact with them in 1944, but I discovered that they lived in what were known as "protected" houses. From November, there were houses like this in Pest in which Jews with passports from Sweden, Switzerland and other countries were concentrated and protected. The consulates of certain neutral countries kept them safe and this was tolerated by the Germans and the authorities of the day. This was put into operation after October 15, 1944, when the Nyilas, the most cruel Hungarian Fascists, came to power.

In December 1944, along with the frequent bombing, Budapest was seized. The Russians surrounded the city and were slowly advancing into Pest, where battles were fought for each and every building.

Aircraft flew over the Danube and prevented anyone crossing the bridges between the two parts of the city so that Buda, where I lived, was cut off. Later about ten thousand SS men encircled Buda and those who survived were taken into captivity. Because it was virtually impossible to get to Pest, I stopped going to work. Soon hunger took over. About ten days after the beginning of the siege, all the food shops were plundered so there was nothing to buy. In the meantime there were soup kitchens opened which somehow helped feed the population.

At that time I became friends with Gabrijela Verner, a journalist from Romania. She was Jewish and was living illegally in Budapest. She lived very close to me so we would go every day together to look for food, ignoring the bombing, street fights and other dangers. Several times we also went to some distant parts of Buda, running to cross the steep streets with Russians firing non-stop from the top.

One day Gabrijela and I decided to go to Pest. We planned to discover whether our friends were alive and how they were surviving. We were also carrying food which Gabrijela's neighbours had prepared for their child in Pest. Somehow we managed to get close to the Erzsébet Bridge. But when we got to the bridge itself, we saw that Russian aircraft were constantly flying over the bridges and machine-gunning them. We waited quite a long time then, between two flights, we ran across the bridge and managed to get to the other side and hide before the aircraft again flew overhead.

In Pest we visited Lilika who was living in the basement of her building. At that time everyone was living in basements and shelters. When we headed back, Gabrijela and I decided to take the shorter way, over the Chain bridge, even though we knew this was the scene of the worst battles. As we approached the bridge, heavy bombing began. We stood beside the police building near the bridge, looking for somewhere to shelter. However at that moment the police building came under machine-gun fire and both of us were badly wounded. Gabrijela died soon afterwards. I was wounded in the legs and arms, and I had also been hit in the collar bone.

When the situation calmed down they carried us into the police building. A doctor who had been arrested as a Jew immediately examined us. He established that Gabrijela was dead. They carried me on a stretcher to the underground German military hospital near the Chain Bridge. After waiting for quite a long time, I found myself on a table where German doctors examined me. They were undecided as to

whether they should amputate my left leg, on which there was a deep wound, in order to prevent infection. Because I understood them, I refused to let them amputate my leg. They then put both my legs in a cast and tied my arm behind my back because of the broken collar bone.

Pest was mostly liberated. The Russians reached the bridges. The next night there was a loud explosion in the hospital. We patients immediately assumed the Germans had blown up the Chain Bridge. We thought this because of the force of the explosion and also because all the German doctors had left, leaving us without any supervision. They had joined their remaining compatriots in Buda, who were still defending themselves there.

The Russians soon came into the hospital and began identifying and questioning people. They didn't understand me very well, but they realised that I was Yugoslav and that I had been captured there. Because of this they were very lenient with me, even kind. Sometimes they even gave me a little food. They treated the others rather harshly, especially the men, because there were many Hungarian police officers and German soldiers among the patients.

After a week I managed to send a message to my friend Lilika and to other friends. After a few days, when I was feeling better, they carried me to an apartment in which a large number of our Yugoslav friends lived. Most of them were living in Hungary illegally. There were about ten of us in the apartment. They took care of me and found a doctor, a Jew, who would come and replace my dressings. They even found me a bed in a clinic from which I was discharged after three or four days because it had neither heating nor food. There was general hunger. People were trying to find ways in which they could feed themselves somehow. The Russians would sometimes drive by in trucks and throw bread out into the streets which would be grabbed by the starving people. We managed in various ways, one of them being to exchange the few things we still had for small amounts of staples.

In January 1945, when the whole city was liberated, we saw that the Germans had killed the Jews in the ghetto before they withdrew. Passing by the synagogue, I could see through the open door that it was full of piled-up bodies and that it was not possible to go inside.

Immediately after the liberation of Budapest, a group of people who had been living illegally there set up a Yugoslav Committee which issued documents proving that we were Yugoslavs. These documents were sometimes helpful, because the Russians were in an enemy city



and behaving accordingly. The Committee also provided other kinds of assistance, mainly in the form of food, just enabling one to survive until the next meal.

In the meantime, repatriation began. It proceeded with great difficulty. In May, 1945, trains began arriving from Czechoslovakia, Poland and Germany, packed with repatriates, mainly Yugoslavs. They reported to the Committee, asking for permits to return, money and other assistance, before continuing their journey in overcrowded freight wagons. My health wasn't up to this kind of stress, so I waited to recuperate. Then, accidentally, I met a boatman who was returning to Yugoslavia from Vienna and I set off to Osijek on this boat. This mode of travel suited me better, because I could travel to the confluence of the Drava and the Danube, which was just a few kilometres from Osijek. I wanted to go to Osijek because my brother was there, having returned from Switzerland in the meantime.

Travelling by boat I met a lawyer. His surname was Štajn and he was returning from Auschwitz where he had been taken with my parents. He was one of the few who had stayed alive for two and a half years in Auschwitz and returned. He told me that when they had arrived in Auschwitz on August 30, 1942, my mother was put into a group which was sent immediately to the gas chamber. When he spoke about this he added that she certainly would not have survived the atrocities which were practised there. He told me that my father had lived for another three months and that he had died a natural death. This natural death was death from starvation.

When I arrived in Osijek, because I had no documents, I had to prove to the authorities who I was, where I was from and why I had come. In order to get an identification card and sort out the other documents, I needed the help of people who had known me and my parents, which was not a problem. I found nothing of what my parents had left behind for me, but I was not concerned about this, because I found my brother Zdenko. The meeting with him was one of the happiest moments of my life but, at the same time it was sad because of our lost parents and relatives.



V

IN OCCUPIED SERBIA



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*Benjamin VINTER*

A BOY HIDDEN IN BELGRADE



**B**enjamin Vinter, known as Benja, was born in 1934 in Belgrade, to father Samuel and mother Jozefina (known as Finka) Vinterštajn. His father, Samuel Vinter, was born in 1897 in Bijeljina and perished in November 1941 at the Topovske Šupe camp in Belgrade. His mother Jozefina was born in Šabac in Serbia and perished in May 1942 in the Sajmište camp near Belgrade.

After the war, in 1946, Benja's uncle, Pavle Vinterštajn, managed to bring Benja to live with him in exile in Switzerland. He moved to New York with the Vinterštajns in 1950. He worked his way through secondary school and mathematical studies. After being awarded a doctorate, and having full command of both English and French, he was appointed to a teaching position at the University of Ottawa, the Canadian capital. He retired in 1995 as a full professor. He has two daughters and a son from his first marriage.

*Father's ancestors and family*

My father's parents were Vilim Vinter and Regina, née Alkalaj. Their surviving descendants know very little about them. It seems that Vilim was born and grew up in Slovakia, but was expelled from medical school there because he took an examination for another student. Apparently he then somehow settled in Bijeljina, at the other end of the

Austro-Hungarian Empire. It also appears that Ladino was spoken in Regina's family and the old Sephardic romances were an integral part of her culture. They nurtured friendly relations with Muslim families and were, in a way, under the influence of the culture of their environment.

In Bijeljina, Vilim was a businessman. For many years his business bought poultry from local farmers. He processed the poultry into various delicatessen items which were successfully exported to Vienna. His youngest son remembered him as a tall, slim man with a white beard, kind and polite, who had command of four or more languages. He was about 75 when he died, probably in 1931.

Vilim and Regina had twelve children. Four died in early childhood. The others, five boys and three girls, grew up in Bijeljina. After Vilim's death, in 1932, the family moved to Zagreb. After a time some moved on to Belgrade while the others remained in Zagreb.

In 1942 the Ustaša, the Croatian Fascists, caught my grandmother Regina and pushed her into a truck with other Jews. They were driven off in an unknown direction and never returned. The fate of her children was as follows:

The youngest, Gabor (1917–2002) was sent to the Jasenovac concentration camp in May, 1942. He managed to escape and join the Partisans. He was wounded in battle but survived. He married Vera Barišić. Two sons were born of this marriage: Goran and Darko.

Berta (? –1955) joined the Partisans and survived.

Reza (1914 –1996) fled Zagreb to part of Yugoslavia which belonged to Hungary. When the Germans seized power in this country, in 1944, she was sent to concentration camps, including Theresienstadt, but remained alive. She married Đorđe Zelmanović, with whom she had two sons, Đurđ and Andrija.

Izidor (? –1942) was taken away at the same time as his mother.

Laza (? – probably 1943) lived in Belgrade where he registered as a Jew as ordered by the Germans. Later he obtained false documents and changed his surname to Zimić. After some time he disappeared, probably executed for treason.

Laura (1908–2000) married Leo Polak before the war. After an attack on an Ustaša, a large group of hostages was shot. Leo was among them, having being arrested because of his communist connections. Soon afterwards, Laura gave birth to Vesna. She gave Vesna to a Catholic family to take care of her and joined the Partisans. She survived the war and took Vesna back after she returned to Zagreb.

Žak (? –1955) was captured during the war. He survived the war but his health was so impaired that he did not live long after he returned to Belgrade.

Samuel (1897–1941), the eldest, did not survive.



*From the family album: Regina Vinter with her children, 1934. Standing (L to R): Gabor, Laza, Berta, Izidor, Žak; sitting: Laura, Regina, Reza and Samuel*

### *My mother's family*

My mother's parents were Ignjat Vinterštajn (? –1938) and Irena, née Štuks (1869–1942) from Slovakia. For many years they lived in Budapest. Ignjat had a successful company, working with plum products from Serbia which he exported as delicacies into Western Europe. In 1898 Ignjat moved with his family to Šabac in order to be closer to the source of his product. After World War I he moved to Belgrade.

Ignjat and Irena had three children: my Uncle Pavle (1891–1960), my Aunt Ruža (1892–1976) and my mother Jozefina (1901–1942) whose nickname was Finka. Ignjat died before the second world war. With his family, Pavle fled occupied Yugoslavia and survived the war. My uncle's daughter, Nada Neumann, described her salvation in the book "We Survived 2". Irena and Finka did not survive, but Ruža did.

## *Before the war*

Sam and Finka were married in Belgrade in 1932. I was born in Belgrade in February 1934, their only child. I was given the name Benja as a child but am now know as Ben.

While Finka was young she worked in a bank and then in a tourist agency. Because she was fluent in several languages she read information on the radio in various languages. Sam was owner of the Jugopapir wholesale company. Working diligently, he developed the business. He was doing so well that Sam and Finka bought a beautiful house with a large garden in Osmana Đikića Street. There were lots of books and a piano in the house. I began school and learnt French at home. On Saturdays they lit candles and festivals were celebrated, although the family wasn't particularly religious, so *kashrut* wasn't observed. It was a pleasant and decent middle class family in which life was peaceful and comfortable.



(L) *Benja's father and mother, Samuel and Jozefina Vinter, 1932,*  
(R) *Benja, 1938*

## *1941–1942*

Although everyone was concerned at the developments at the end of March 1941, when Yugoslavia broke its pact with Germany, the unheralded bombing on April 6 was a surprise and a shock. We took shelter in the basement, beside a pile of coal. One bomb fell close to our house, making a crater whose edge reached to our garden, but no one was hurt. We survived.

When the mobilisation of the Yugoslav Army was proclaimed in 1941, Sam reported for duty as a reserve lieutenant. When Yugoslavia collapsed, Sam fell into captivity. After some time, probably a month or two, he was released and returned home. At the time we little suspected what a misery this was. Had he remained as a prisoner of war, in all likelihood he would have survived the war.

But Sam didn't survive. Soon after his return from captivity, he did what all Jewish men were ordered to do. On a certain day he went to a designated place. From there, the German occupiers took them to a concentration camp and used them as compulsory labourers. In a letter from 1959, the Jewish Community in Belgrade reported his fate: "The Gestapo took Sam to the Topovske Šupe concentration camp in the first half of October 1941, and from there, in November that same year, to an unknown destination. Historic research has revealed that a *Wermacht* firing squad killed men from this camp at the end of October and the beginning of November, 1941." (According to *Fateful Months*, by Christopher Browning, revised edition 1991, pp. 48–55)

I vaguely remember an occasion when Mother and I briefly saw Sam at compulsory labour – I think the group was unloading river boats – and another occasion when Mother and I paid him a brief visit in the camp. I cannot describe the horror, the fear, the pain and the sorrow I feel when I try in vain to imagine what Sam and Finka thought and felt during this period.

Finka did not survive. The same letter from the Jewish Community describes the bare facts: "The Gestapo took Jozefina to the concentration camp at Sajmište on December 10, 1941, and from there, in May 1942, together with other Jewish women to an unknown destination." When the German occupying force ordered that Jewish women, children and the elderly were to report on a certain day at a designated place, my mother Finka and her mother Irena obeyed. According to the German orders I was also supposed to be there, but I wasn't. They were killed and I survived.

My Aunt Ruža had married Radiša Jovanović in 1920 and converted to the Serbian Orthodox religion. Radiša died in 1928. Their daughters, Vera and Ivanka, were born in 1921 and 1922 respectively. It seems that, according to the criteria applied by the Germans in Serbia, Vera and Ivanka – "half-Jews" with only two Jewish grandparents – were not required to register as Jews. Ruža, however, was. With four

Jewish grandparents, she was regarded as a pure Jew, despite her religious conversion.

However, because their father was not alive, Vera and Ivanka, as minors, would have been left without parents if anything were to happen to their mother. For this reason, Ruža's name did not appear on the list of women who were required to assemble and who were then taken to Sajmište.

Although no one could imagine the horror which lay ahead, it was clear that these were dangerous times and that the brutal treatment of Jews could easily become worse. Everyone was uneasy and concerned. Finka was very burdened. Fear of misery was weighing down on her. Her husband was no longer there. The money was melting away. Her mother - whose nerves were extremely fragile, even in times of peace - lived with Finka in a joint household. And I was there too, a quite impossible child who drove her to distraction. In order to ease her burden a little, Finka and Ruža decided that I should live with Ruža for some time. And so it happened that when Finka and Irena were taken to Sajmište, I was not with them. I was at Ruža's house, which is where I remained until 1946.

### 1942-1943

Finka was killed on May 10, 1942. Irena died, or was killed, before that.

In her memoir, written many years after the war, Ruža describes two meetings which brought her news from the camp at Sajmište. An old and sick woman who was released in February 1942, brought information to Ruža which she described in the following words: "Despite the horrors of the camp, Irena was holding up well. The former inmate spoke of Finka with great admiration, about how she organised her own labour group, taught them to maintain strict personal hygiene and how, whenever she could, she would steal a few potatoes or onions for them." She also describes the second meeting. "On May 12, a young Romanian woman visited me. She had been released from the camp that day as the last inmate, because it had finally emerged that she had been arrested by mistake... On May 10, all the women with their belongings had been pushed into trucks and driven off to an unknown destination."

Historical research has shown that the women and children were asphyxiated in the *dušegupka*, a special truck with a hermetically sealed



cargo chamber into which the exhaust gases from the engine was introduced. In this way the victims were put to death while being transported to the final destination. The victims would be told they were being moved to another camp. The Germans would order the victim to put their things in another truck before getting into the *dušegupka*, to lend credence to the lie. The *dušegupka* made many trips from Sajmište, through the heart of Belgrade, to a clearing in a forest near Mt Avala. On arrival at the execution site, the asphyxiated victims would be dumped in mass graves. The last journey was on May 10, 1942. During the systematic destruction of mass graves in Russia and other countries, the remains of inmates were exhumed and burnt in December, 1943. (See pp. 70–83 of the monograph by Christopher Browning mentioned earlier).



*Benja with Vera, Ruža and Ivanka (L to R), 1944*

Had the Germans discovered that Ruža, Vera and Ivanka were hiding a Jewish boy, all three of them would probably have been shot. And they must have know that, without me in their home, they would have been almost certain to survive the occupation. Despite this they took me in without hesitation. In a memoir written for her daughters, Ruža says: “Fortunately Benja was still at our place when Irena and Finka were taken. When they proclaimed the death sentence for any person har-

bouring a Jew, I was not long troubled by my responsibility for you. I saw this as something which was the least I could do and, fortunately, you agreed with it.”

The Jovanović family lived on the third floor of an elegant building at 26 Krunska Street, directly opposite the German Embassy. Aleksandar Cincar-Marković lived on the first and second floors. As foreign affairs minister of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia it had been he who, in March 1941, signed the pact which made the country dependent on the Nazis. Along with other members of the royal government he believed that Yugoslavia had two options: to sign the pact or to face defeat in a war with Nazi Germany. Unfortunately, he was right.

Throughout the occupation Cincar-Marković lived in this apartment. I don't know why, but there was always a police officer there. They were most certainly aware of my presence. Ivanka told me that they even knew who and what I was. They told no one. I survived.

At first I would only leave the apartment to go to the big garden behind the house. There was a high wall around the garden and one could not be seen inside the garden from the street. In time I was allowed to leave the house, to go into the city for visits to family friends, to stand in queues for bread, even to spend time with a group of children who used to gather in a neighbouring street. They used to call me Bane, a common Serb name which they thought was less dangerous than Benja. I didn't attend school and, legally, I didn't exist. It is rather strange, but true, that no one asked: who is this child, who are his parents, where did he come from, why isn't he going to school? I was in great danger of being exposed, but nothing happened. I survived.

Ruža would give me piano lessons. Vera and Ivanka taught me school subjects. They shared the work. For example, one was my Serbian language and history teacher and the other taught me mathematics and geography. They did a good job. After the liberation when I should have been in the fourth grade, I went back to the school where I had been a first grade student when the war began. I found my first-grade teacher and explained my situation to her. She asked me a few questions to test me and, satisfied with my answers, she gave me a report card showing that I had really reached fourth grade level. After that I continued my schooling normally.

During the war, while Vera and Ivanka were my teachers, I was a good student. But I wasn't a good child. In fact I was an awful brat. I lied and stole and engaged in various stupid and mischievous activities.

No, I won't go into details! Ruža and her daughters had put themselves in danger to protect a real monster! As I grew up my stupid and bad behaviour became less frequent and less obvious. However it took a long time for me to become civilised.

Food, clothing and toys required improvised solutions. It was already difficult to find food, but Ruža and her daughters would always find a way. They even managed to make cakes and sweets for festivals, and even sweet wheat with walnuts for the family's saint's day, St Toma on October 19. They remodelled clothes, new jumpers were knitted using wool from unravelling old ones. Old toys which had been put in the attic long ago would be taken out and made into new ones. For example, I loved anything to do with Walt Disney characters and jigsaw puzzles. So Ivanka made an extraordinary birthday present for me. She drew and coloured a picture with Disney characters on a piece of plywood, then cut it up with a fretsaw into little pieces which I had to put together to make a whole.



*A bench, in fact a trunk with a seat, similar to the one in this photo, saved Vinter's life*

ting on the seat in her nightgown, trying to look nonchalant and calm. The Gestapo left. We survived.

1944

There were air raids in the spring of 1944. The sirens wailed and the American and British bombers flew in and continued on their way, not attacking Belgrade. It was commonly believed that they were flying

to Romania to bomb the oil fields at Ploesti. On Easter Monday, in beautiful sunny weather, the sirens sounded, the bombers came, but this time they did not continue on. From very high up they carpet bombed, causing great damage and many casualties, both wounded and dead. The building next to ours was hit, but ours wasn't. I survived.

The Allied bombing of Belgrade continued. There were rumours that it would soon be even heavier. People were frightened and began fleeing. Ruža, her daughters and I went to Jajinci, a village on the way to Mt Avala. The four of us, together with other people, slept on the earth floor in the basement of a village house. Vera or Ivanka would sometimes go to Belgrade by bicycle to bring supplies from home. When the bombing stopped at the end of summer and rumours began that the Russians were close, we returned to the city.

One night, in mid-October, at about three or four in the morning, we were awoken by an unusual loud noise and found ourselves wrapped in a thick cloud of red dust. We soon realised that our building had been hit by an artillery shell or rocket from a Russian *katyusha*. The red dust came from the pulverised bricks. The hit had been right above the room in which we slept, but the force of the explosion had gone upwards and part of the roof had been destroyed. However there was no damage under the attic. We survived, and immediately went to the basement.

A few days later, the Partisans and the Soviets entered Belgrade, pushing back the Germans who put up a strong defence and withdrew slowly. Our neighbourhood was liberated on October 19, the day of the Jovanović family's saint's day. The following day I went out into the street, outside the house, together with several people and soldiers. Our street and those surrounding it were free, but the Germans were still holding out in the king's palace, a few blocks down at the other end of Krunska Street. Suddenly a whistling sound was heard and a Partisan standing next to me fell to the ground. The bullet had come from somewhere, probably fired by Germans from inside the palace. Just a small deviation from its path and it would have hit me. But it didn't. The Partisan was killed. I survived.

### *After the war*

Somehow, using their good connections, my Uncle Pavle in Geneva and Ruža in Belgrade managed to get me a passport and permission to leave the country, as well as a visa for a three-month visit to Switzerland. In September 1946, twelve years old, I set off by train

from Belgrade, through occupied Austria, to Switzerland. A few months later, with Pavle's family, I left Geneva to continue my schooling, first in the German part of Switzerland and later in Montreux and Lausanne. My Swiss residence permit was extended a couple of times and a charitable organisation was covering the costs of my stay while I was in boarding schools, which is where I lived while I was educated by the state. I was too young to understand what was happening to me. Everything was being taken care of by the adults around me.

I became Bar Mitzvah in a synagogue in Geneva.

Pavle and his family emigrated to New York in 1948. They applied for an immigrant visa for me as well. I received it two years later so, in October 1950, I too disembarked in New York. I worked during the day and at night went to secondary school and began studying. In 1952 I moved to the University of California at Berkley, where I worked and studied at the same time.

I lived in various American cities, always working to support my family and studying at the university part time. From 1972, when I was



*Benja in 1966 with his children Kler, Toni and Džesika*

awarded a doctorate in mathematics, I taught in both English and French and did research work in Canada, at the University of Ottawa. Life in the academic jungle was sometimes very difficult, but I survived. I retired in 1995 as a full professor.

In 1956 I married Frances Solnit, the daughter of a Jewish immigrant from Russia. Although neither she nor I were religious, the fact that we were Jewish played an important role in our lives. For this reason we chose to be married before a rabbi. We had three children: Kler Jozefina, Anton Samuel and Džesika Lorejn. We used to call our son Toni, but he now calls himself Tristan. The marriage fell apart after twelve years. The breakup of the family was very painful for me, but I survived.

I was married again, in 1972, to Meridi Alen, an agnostic humanitarian with English and Irish ancestry. We have no children, but Meridi has proved a good stepmother to my children from my first marriage. We now live in Victoria, a Canadian province in which the winters aren't as cold nor the summers as hot as those in Belgrade.

Kler lives in California, Džesika lives with my two granddaughters in Scotland and Tristan also lives in Europe, fighting for affirmation and establishing a reputation as a painter.

Although we feel clearly and strongly that we are Jewish, neither Tristan nor I nurture Jewish traditions or religious customs. However my daughters, somewhat informally, do celebrate some Jewish festivals. My Scottish granddaughters will probably do the same.

Some family memorabilia were preserved throughout the war. Among them was my father's *tallit*. It served as a *hupa* for Džesika's wedding. It was held by Tristan and three cousins from their mother's side.

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*Olga ADAM*

## SAVED BY GOOD PEOPLE



**O**lga Adam was born on May 25, 1925, in Banatsko Aranđelovo, to father Marcel and mother Margita, née Blau. Her father, Marcel Ungar, born in 1897 in Banatsko Aranđelovo, a trader, was killed in Belgrade in October 1941, while her mother Margita, born in 1905, died in 1971. In addition to her father, nine members of her immediate and extended family also perished in the Holocaust. She has a brother, Tihomir Ungar, who holds a master of science degree in mathematics.

*After the war she completed State Acting School in the class of the well-known teacher Juri Rakitin. She worked as a presenter at Radio Novi Sad in Serbia, then as an actress at the Serbian National Theatre in Novi Sad and as a member of the Radio Novi Sad acting company.*

*She is married to Tibor Adam. She has a son, Mirko and a grandson, David.*

April 1941. We lived in Novi Kneževac, right beside the main road. Night. The thudding of soldiers' footsteps is heard, cars are clattering, truck engines rumbling. The Yugoslav Army is withdrawing. I was sixteen but was aware of the tragedy that awaited us. I also cried the whole of the next day. Some neighbours strongly resented this. They were expecting the Hungarian Army. They had even raised a triumphal arch with *isten hozott* (God has brought you) written on it. Had the

Hungarians come we would have been slightly better off but, as it was, the Germans entered the city on April 16. For us this was the beginning of the end. Local Germans, members of the *Kulturbund*, came rushing into Novi Kneževac from Kikinda and the surrounding places. The terror began. They toured Jewish houses and took anything they felt like.

In the meantime notices appeared with the order to hand over radios and weapons. My father was a hunter and had a hunting rifle. When the girl who worked at our house and I took that rifle to the Municipal Council, I saw tears in my father's eyes. Soon a curfew was introduced. Jews were allowed to go out between 5.00 a.m. and 6.00 p.m. Within the first few days of the occupation we were required to wear yellow armbands and to go to compulsory labour. I washed floors in Sokol House which was converted into barracks, and I also cut grass by hand at the tennis courts. Our parents, and more or less all adults, found being marked and humiliated very difficult. I wasn't ashamed of the yellow armband, I even told the Germans that I wasn't ashamed of being Jewish. This situation lasted until August 14. That day, at about 7.00 p.m., a neighbour of ours ran over and told us that they were rounding up Jews in the main street of the city. We knew what lay in store and began to pack our essentials. At about 10.00 p.m. a member of the *Kulturbund* came to our house. He was one of the more well-intentioned people there. I had known him earlier, from compulsory labour. He didn't shout at me, didn't insult me the way most of them did. He took us to a building next to the synagogue. Most of the Jews from the town were already there.

At midnight they took us to the railway station. They put us in a train and took us to Novi Bečej. At the same time a train arrived from Kikinda with Jews from there. It was only then that we realised we had been lucky up to that point. What we saw was terrible. We saw not people but monsters coming out of the train. Beaten, covered in bruises and swellings, some were even being carried because they could not stand on their feet. The local Germans had beaten and tortured the Kikinda Jews, their fellow-citizens, in a beastly manner. Fortunately for us there were no Germans in Novi Kneževac. From the railway station they took us to the yard of the synagogue. It was summer, it was hot and there was no shade in the yard. This was a form of torture in itself. One of the Kikinda people was deranged and shouted all day. This had a very negative effect on the exhausted and terrified people. We were demoralised. We were given no food. Some had a little with them but the



majority were hungry. Darkness fell. What would happen to us? No one was telling us anything. Most of the people lay on the ground. One old and lame man whom they caught passing something to someone across the fence was punished by being made to run around the synagogue a hundred times, constantly repeating the Kaddish. This really got under our skin. Our torturers were very skilful at destroying people.

At about 11.00 p.m., the camp commandant came with soldiers. They took us to a school. There we lay on the bare floor. Tired, exhausted and hungry, we fell asleep. However this inhuman gang had no intention of letting us rest. They would wake us once an hour, shouting like beasts: "Piss!" We weren't allowed to go to the toilet alone. This was a treacherous way to torture people who were sentenced to death. At six in the morning they again woke us and took us back to the synagogue yard to fry there in the sun all day. And so this went on for about a week. What kind of people were these? Where did such hatred come from? What had we done wrong? In the first days, such thoughts would still come to my mind, but later I became apathetic. I did everything automatically. Perhaps it was lucky that they used to take us to various kinds of work. Otherwise, many would have died of sunstroke.

The men did field work while the women and girls worked in the barracks, tidied up, washed the floors and things like that. At the end of August the days were still warm, but the nights became cold. They moved us to some large warehouse. There we froze at night. Very poorly fed and always hungry, it was very difficult for us. The district head from Kneževac came. He questioned all of us, but mostly the wealthy men, about where they had hidden their money. I personally knew this German, the district head. Karolj Vagner, my good friend, despite his German origins did not like the Nazis. We had still not been taken from Kneževac when his birthday came. On this occasion he organised a large party and invited all his friends. In Kneževac, everyone socialised together, Serbs, Hungarians, Germans and Jews. And this was also the make-up of the crowd Vagner invited. The celebration began in the early afternoon, so that the Jews could stay longer, because their curfew began at 6.00 p.m. The party was a slap in the face for the German district head. He was forced to sit at the same table as Jews. Now, of course, this man recognised me. He came to me, put his gun against my forehead and threatened to kill me if I didn't tell him where my wealthy uncle had hidden his money. I didn't know, but I would not have told him even if I did. Unbelievable it may be, but I was not afraid of

anything at the time. I was young and probably not properly aware of the danger.

On September 23 we moved again. They drove us to the Tisa river and put us on a boat. I suppose they hoped that, under the weight of the load, this small ship would sink. There were about seven hundred of us. The believers, and there were quite a few among us, said that God saved us. But, unfortunately, His concern for us did not last long. In the early morning hours the boat sailed into the Belgrade port. Here they separated men over-fourteen out of the group. We had one big loaf of bread we had brought from Bečej, and we gave that to Father. My brother was only eleven and stayed with me and Mother. We later learnt that they had taken the men to Topovske Šupe. They released the women and children who had somewhere to go in Belgrade and took the others to the synagogue in Kosmajaska Street. Mother, my brother, my grandmother, my aunt and I went to 45a Jevremova Street, to my mother's sister who lived there with her non-Jewish husband. We found out that we could visit Father on Thursdays and Sundays. Of course we availed ourselves of this. We visited him regularly and took him food. We were relatively free until the curfew and moved freely around the city. As well as the yellow armband we wore yellow stars on our chests and backs. The Jewish Community was close to where we were living. I would go there often and socialise with the young people. Food was in very short supply. We never had enough to eat. My father's sister-in-law, with her two daughters, fifteen-year-old Lilika and six-year-old Marika were accommodated in the synagogue in Kosmajaska Street. Her sister, who lived in Subotica, sent a message that a woman would come, first to take Marika and that the next time she would come for Lilika and her. The woman came for Marika (who survived the Holocaust and now lives in Chicago, but never returned to get my aunt and Lilika, so they lost their lives in Sajmište.

During a visit to my father in mid-October, he told us that they were taking them to labour and that they would take his belongings to the Council. When I think about it today I find it incredible that we were unable to see the real situation, how we were unable to believe that they would kill people who were guilty of nothing except being Jewish. And we should have wondered why, if people were going off to labour, they were taking their belongings from them. What would they eat from if they didn't even leave them their mess kits. I had a bad feeling. I stood there for a long time, watching my father wave to me from

the window. I left only when a soldier hit me with a rifle butt. I never saw Father again. He was killed either in Jajinci or in Jabuka. As well as my father Marcel, they also killed there his brother, Eugen Ungar, his sister's husband Josip Vajs and my cousin, Franja Vajs, who was twenty at the time.

At the beginning of December, summonses began arriving ordering women to report to the "police for Jews" next to the Botanical Gardens. We did not receive a summons. However posters appeared ordering anyone who had not received a summons to report, threatening them with death if they did not do so. This order applied to us too.



*Olga with her mother Margita and Dragoljub Trajković, who saved their lives, on a pleasant walk immediately after the war*

One day during that period, a gentleman appeared at our door. He brought us a letter from Barbara Vajs who was writing to her mother, Irma Vajs, my mother's cousin. The name of the gentleman who brought the letter was Dragoljub Trajković. He was an employee of the railways and could travel to Kanjiža via Szeged. His wife, a Jew, had fled Belgrade and gone to Kanjiža, and he used to visit her there from Belgrade, where he worked. When Mr Trajković had given us the letter, he turned around and left. I walked after him and asked him to tell us what it was like in Kanjiža. We became friends. He lived alone in Belgrade and he needed company, someone to talk to. He would visit often. The final

deadline for Jewish women to report to the German police was December 12. The first group had already left on December 8. We had already prepared ourselves.

In the meantime I became acquainted with a neighbour, Mile Stavrić. He told me that he knew a man who could get us authentic refugee identity papers with false names for 10,000 Nedić dinars. This

was on December 11, a day before our deadline to go to the police, that is to camp. I went home to tell mother what I had heard, the proposal I had been given. Mr Trajković was at the house, as was Čepika Štajner, who had been running late and unable to get to Kosmajška Street before the curfew began. If I were religious I would have said that God himself had sent Trajković to us. When he heard about the possibility of obtaining refugee papers, he suggested to us that we move to his house at 15 Limska Street. Because this was a detached house, we could hide there. We had already packed ready for camp but, having accepted Trajković's offer, at five the next morning when the curfew ended, escorted by him, we set off for his house. Needless to say, mother and I didn't sleep at all that night. It was very difficult to make the decision to flee and to leave my grandmother, my father's sister and sister-in-law and my cousin to go to camp. We decided that we should go to the camp with the others. But Mr Trajković was very persistent. He almost forced us to go with him.

My mother, my little brother and I set off on foot, via Slavija and Autokomanda, to 15 Limska Street. It was a rather long walk, it was cold and we had a heavy load to carry. But we got there. The great adventure began. We settled into the house, but we couldn't heat it because Mr Trajković went to his office and there wasn't supposed to be anyone in the house. The smoke from the chimney would have exposed us. The winter was very harsh and we would freeze until he returned from work. After a few days, Mile Stavrić brought Vlada Katanić to the house. With his help, we invented the following story. Our family lived in Bitola. My father, we named him Dušan Urošević, was a mechanical engineer. He had joined the army and we never saw him again or heard anything about him. My elder sister was married to Vlada Katanić and they lived in Priština, so we moved there. Because Mother spoke Serbian rather badly, we claimed that she was Slovenian. From Priština we came to Belgrade with the Katanić family. The Albanians seized our documents at the border. Of course we changed our names. Mother became Marija, I remained Olga and my brother changed from Tibor to Tihomir. Our new surname was Urošević. We practised our signatures all the time so we would seem as natural as possible at the police when signing anything. Mother and I went to the police on December 23, 1941. We told my brother that if we did not return by noon, he should look for us on a lamp post in Terazije.

The Belgrade City Administration was in Kosmajaska Street. We walked from Voždovac. We froze. In the police, that is the City Administration, Dragoljub Trajković and Vlada Katanić confirmed in writing that they had know us from before the war. They were taking a great risk because, if we had been exposed as Jews, they could have paid for it with their lives. Our story was accepted. We gave them our photographs and were given identification papers, real documents, with false names. My brother didn't need identification papers because he was a minor. With these documents we went to the Refugee Commissariat in Kneza Miloša Street. There we were given refugee identification papers. So now we had documents and felt much safer. We returned home and my brother was overjoyed, he had been frightened for us. Now we could even light a fire during the day and finally warm ourselves up. Still we could not afford to completely drop our guard. We were constantly alert, and not entirely without reason.

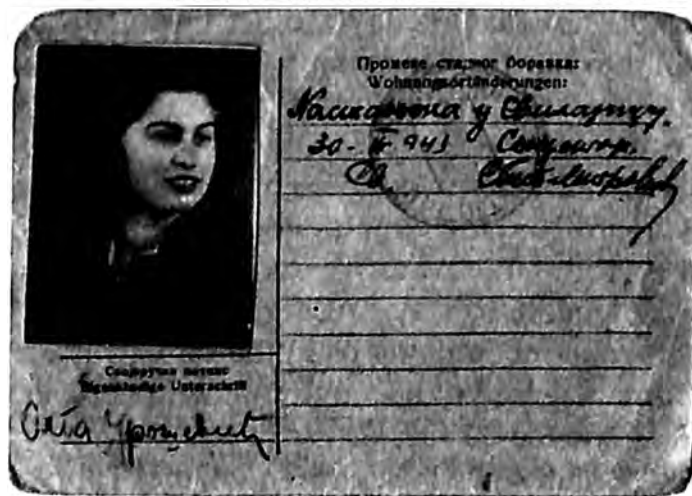
Summer came. There were no more Jews in Belgrade, apart from those who were deep underground, as we were. Mrs Trajković returned from Kanjiža. One day Mother went into town with her and there they ran into our former maid, a German. She recognised Mother and started shouting: "What's this Jewish woman doing still in Belgrade?" Fortunately there were a lot of people on the street and they lost themselves in the crowd. Of course by now we knew the neighbours and a woman from the countryside who brought dairy products to sell. She was from Grabovac. We asked her if we could move to her place. We were unable to stay in Belgrade any longer because of the danger of someone recognising us in the same way as the former maid had. The woman agreed to us moving in with her and we travelled via Svilajnac to Grabovac on July 4.

Banat Jews in a Serbian village. This was a new world for us. The house we had come to was large. The owners had lived in America for years and were quite wealthy. We arrived on a Saturday, late in the afternoon. The following mourning we were woken by loud keening, from an entire choir. We were afraid of course. We couldn't imagine what could be happening. It was not until later that we learnt that it was a village custom for women in houses in which someone had recently died to go into the plum orchard every Sunday for a year, hold onto a tree and wail. This was our first experience of this. I was nauseous from the excitement. I lay down on the ground in the garden and the children gathered around me. They thought it was strange for someone to lie

down during the day. However I managed to make friends with them. I told them stories. I was afraid that the same thing that had happened to me two years earlier would happen again. At that time I vomited for four days and had to go to a sanatorium. Fortunately the nausea passed this time.

After some time we moved to another house. There I met a girl my age, Jovanka. I went to tend sheep with her. She taught me to spin. Gradually I adapted to real village life, and that in a Serbian village which was completely different from life in a Banat village. One great problem for us was the religious customs which we knew almost nothing about. When we arrived it was the fast for the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. We knew nothing about this. We were surprised to see that the locals ate nothing but beans boiled in water. Because of the circumstances we too had to fast. Mr Trajković

came every month and brought us a little money and food from my aunt. It was difficult for him because he had to walk from Svilajnac to Grabovac carrying a rather heavy package. We also went to Svilajnac every Friday, on foot of course, to the market. Mother and my brother would go to the markets in the surrounding villages. They would sell a few things because we were very poor. In September we moved to



*Olga Adam's refugee identification in the name of Olga Urošević, 1942*

Svilajnac. We couldn't stay in Grabovac and wait for the winter because Mr Trajković would not have been able to walk through the snow and snowstorms. We found a room with a man named Duško who made traditional peasant footwear. His business was flourishing because there were no shoes. There was a woman living with her daughter in the same street. They were Jews and no one reported them although everyone knew who they were. I don't think they would have survived the war in our home village. Someone would certainly have reported them, but in Svilajnac they lived to see the liberation.

My brother went to Duško's workshop and learned the trade. There were many refugees from Bosnia in Svilajnac. The locals didn't associate with either them or us. We felt like second-class citizens. However at least we felt relatively secure. We became accustomed to this kind of life, to a kind of isolation. However there was something we could not get used to in any way and that was the constant undernourishment, not to say hunger.

For breakfast we'd share half a litre of milk with a little polenta, for the three of us. For lunch we would have a little soup, some stewed vegetables and cornbread and for dinner a piece of cornbread and a little lard. We almost never ate meat.

We got to know the Jews in our street. We didn't tell them what we were, but they felt that we were close to them. They were from Banat, from Bečkerek. They were very pleasant company. Before the war, Mother had never been interested in politics, but now she was closely following everything which was happening in Europe. She even managed to get a map and took down notes on the situation on the fronts. There were still some Vojvodina people in Svilajnac. Mrs Isaković, from whom we bought milk, was from Sremski Karlovci and was the sister of Pavle Beljanski. She befriended my mother and invited her to help make cakes for her son, who was in captivity. A terrible tragedy faced this family. When Belgrade was being heavily bombed in 1944, Mrs Isaković's nephews came to stay with her. Just one, single bomb fell on Svilajnac, probably by accident. And this bomb hit the house of the Isaković family. Six of them were killed there, including Mrs Isaković.

In the Svilajnac area, power was in the hands of Draža Mihajlović's Chetniks. We were once summoned to the Chetnik command to report to them. I went, because mother was afraid, and also because she did not speak Serbian very well. Nor was I comfortable

going to the command of a pretty notorious para-army. However they received me very politely. They asked me if my Slovenian mother had converted to Orthodoxy when she married my father. I said that my father would never have married her if she hadn't converted to Orthodoxy. They let me go, and apologised for bothering us. That was all, but even small things like this seriously disturbed our peace. In the meantime we moved in with the Jewish women. Some strangers, people in rags, arrived in Svilajnac. They were Jews from Hungary who had fled from the Bor mine where they were doing compulsory labour. The Chetniks would feed them and behaved very decently towards them. Basically, they were free there. They heard about the Jewish women and would come to their place. They spoke Hungarian with them. We pretended not to understand anything. In the summer of 1944, Rahela Ferari came to Svilajnac with her husband. She too came to the Jewish women's house. One morning she came and spoke to Eržika, the daughter.

They were sitting in the kitchen. I was chopping onions, making lunch. And Rahela said in Hungarian: "This girl even chops onions like a Jew." I couldn't control myself, I laughed and said that she'd guessed, that we were Jewish, all three of us. Rahela was pregnant. There were already battles being fought in the area. Explosions and machine-gun fire could be heard. Probably because of her fear, there were some complications, so the fugitives from Bor carried Rahela to the village of Kušiljevo, where a village man delivered her baby.

Liberation was close. We began to believe that we would survive. For even though we had lived relatively peacefully,



*Olga Adam as Madame Parnell in Moliere's Tartuffe in her graduation production of the Theatre School in Novi Sad, 1949*



fear had been our constant companion. We lived in great hardship. The local population did not socialise with us refugees. They tolerated us but didn't like us, so I didn't go out much. Perhaps for a short walk with Mother. I read a lot to pass the time. The Jewish women we lived with had a lot of books. I think that it was also very difficult for my little brother. He would go to take care of the pigs with the children, and he would play with them, but he was never fully accepted. Sometimes we would go to Resava and fish. In the summer we also went swimming. The days passed without excitement. We were only excited by the news from the fronts and the region around us. It is incredible how fast news spreads. We knew everything that was happening, although we didn't have a radio. After Stalingrad, we began to hope that the end of the war would come soon. In one tavern, people were openly listening to Radio London.

At the beginning of October the Red Army soldiers entered the town without a fight. It's hard to describe what we felt at the time. It was only then that we realised the kind of pressure we had lived under for all those years.

After the liberation of Svilajnac, I went to Lapovo, from where railway traffic with Belgrade had already been resumed. I arrived in Belgrade on the first train after the liberation. I went to my father's sister. Reclaiming my real identity was the priority now. I went to the Jewish Community and was given a document confirming that Olga Urošević was really Olga Ungar. I returned to life.

A few weeks later, my mother and brother also came to Belgrade.

At the end of November we returned to our hometown, Novi Kneževac, which was no longer the same as it was when we had left it. The three of us had survived the Holocaust, but our father and nine members of our family no longer existed.

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*Julije KEMENJ*

TIME PASSES, PEOPLE VANISH



*Julije Kemenj was born in 1927 in Kikinda, to father Arnold Kemenj and mother Etelka, née Haas. He is a chemical engineer by occupation. He began studying in Belgrade and completed his education in Haifa. He worked in Israel for two years and then in Germany until his retirement. He is married to Vera, née Fuhr. He lives in Frankfurt.*

My paternal grandfather, Samuel Kohn was a poor villager, a crop farmer in the tiny village of Kvasovo in Moravia which, even today does not have a population of more than three or four hundred people. He and my grandmother Julija, after whom I was named, had five children: three sons and two daughters. The sons were my father Arnold, Ignac and Ede, and the daughters Melita and Irma. Grandfather Samuel was born in 1855 and Grandmother Julija, née Politzer, in 1862. One of my grandmother's cousins went to America and became a famous publisher; the Pulitzer Prize awarded to the best journalists today bears his name. This poor, crop-farming family did everything in its power to make it possible for their sons to go to big cities, to Vienna or Budapest, to study. They married both daughters, with small dowries, in Pest and Bratislava, all part of their effort to send the children to big cities. In order to be admitted into higher education more easily, the boys adopted a Hungarian surname, changing from Kohn to Kemenj. In Vienna, Arnold completed commercial academy, while Ignac became a mechanical

engineer in Budapest and later worked on Hungarian railways, while Ede became a veterinary surgeon in Budapest. This was all happening at the turn of the twentieth century. The language spoken in my grandfather's family was German but the children, who went to Budapest to study, learnt Hungarian.

The situation of my maternal grandfather, Dr Jakob Haas, born in 1858, was quite different. He married my grandmother, Emilia Herzka, who was born in 1866. They lived in Puhovo above the Váh river, somewhere along the border between Moravia and Slovakia. Grandfather Jakob was among the first Jews in this part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire to complete their education and become successful and wealthy doctors. They had three daughters, Irena, my mother Etelka, and Melanija, and a son, Artur, who became a lawyer in Budapest. They married their daughters with good dowries to hard-working young men. This family also spoke only German at home, while the children who spread out into the world learnt Hungarian, Slovakian, Serbian and so on.

My parents, who had been in their new surroundings for just a few weeks, were in Kikinda for the beginning of the first world war. My father was immediately mobilised as an officer in the Austro-Hungarian Army. His brothers in Budapest went straight to the front. Mother stayed in Kikinda, awaiting the birth of their first child, a son who would come into the world in 1915 and be named Aleksandar. My father was on the Italian front at the Soča river, where he was wounded several times but, after four years of fighting, he returned with the rank of captain in an army which no longer existed, to a home, Kikinda, in a country which had been Austria-Hungary when he left and was now a new state – the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.

My parents began a new life, learning a new language, communicating in Hungarian, Serbian and German. Father opened a shop for agricultural machinery which was to be successful on the rich Banat plain. Developing his business and profession, my father was among the first in Vojvodina to introduce mechanisation and automation to agriculture.

In the meantime, in 1920, a second child was born, a son, Paja, while the first, Aleksandar, died of scarlet fever in 1921. Seven years later, in 1927, I came into this world. The serious crisis of 1929 affected my parents as it affected everyone else. Father wrote off the debts of

many farmers and almost reached the brink of bankruptcy. He died suddenly on March 3, 1938.

Following the unexpected death of my father, my mother took over managing the business. Seeing the war coming, she tried to build up the stock of machinery and valuable items. Just before the beginning of the war in Yugoslavia, in December 1940, my mother married a Serb, Dragomir Gašić.

Sunday, April 6, 1941. We turned on the radio in the morning and heard the news that Belgrade was being bombed, that war had begun with no declaration. My brother Paja, who had come home from his job at a textile factory in Novi Sad to spend Sunday with us, got on his motorcycle and left immediately for Novi Sad to report to the army there. This was the last time we saw him. He did reach Novi Sad, but in the general chaos did not manage to be accepted into the army, through which as a prisoner of war he might have been saved.

We watched the German Army calmly enter Kikinda on April 14 and 15 and march through the town welcomed noisily by our neighbours who were suddenly dressed in black uniforms. We did not understand the meaning of this. A group of officers immediately moved into our house. While their army cook was emptying our storage and basement, scrambling thirty or forty eggs at a time, he told us: "Run as fast and as far as you can, because these people will be the death of you!" At that moment we did not understand.

The terrible truth was soon confirmed. The following morning officers burst in, followed by the local fifth columnists, and took our furniture away in trucks along with anything else they could get their hands on. They were also looking for hidden weapons. We didn't have any. However Mother remembered that Father had brought his old revolver with him when he returned from the first world war. Fortunately the Germans didn't find it, but when we found it, hidden among some old linen in a cupboard, we immediately threw it into the septic tank. My stepfather, Dragomir Gašić, was taken to prison as a Chetnik. For a couple of days they beat him. He was tortured together with a Jew, Bela Štajner, who once before the war, in the Lloyd Club, where they played cards, had said that he would give a million dinars to anyone who killed Hitler. The Germans did not forgive him for this.

In the days following their arrival, the Germans took me to the *curia*, the court. There they immediately locked people up, but I was lucky because there was a wagon full of potatoes that had to be peeled.

Compared to the work we would do later this was a good job. Soon all Jewish men and women, regardless of their age, with or without fur coats, would have to march, in the morning, to barracks about three or four kilometres away where, using their bare hands, they would be carrying horse manure from stables to a dump and then further on to another dump. As a child, among a group of other children, I was ordered to clean the barracks toilets. Because of the unpleasant smell, the Germans didn't like to go there so we were able to relax a little more.

Having partly recovered from the beating, my stepfather Dragomir was taken to the first execution site. The Germans killed five local people, saying it was a showdown with the communists. Dragomir returned beside himself. They had killed people before his very eyes and he had to dig graves and bury the victims with his bare hands. After this they locked him up and beat him as a Chetnik. After he was again released from prison we carried him to the sanatorium. Because they had hinted that he would soon be beaten again, he fled at night and managed to reach Belgrade.

Because they were bursting into our house every day and taking away everything they could and because we, through the Jewish Community, were paying enormous contributions, we soon realised that this filthy job at the barracks was quite nice work compared to all our other problems. In our minds we kept repeating the warning given to us by that German soldier in the first days of the occupation.

One day in the summer of 1941, we received an order: we were to go to the synagogue, with whatever few things we could carry. We soon realised that we were not alone there but that all our fellow-Jews from the place were also there. There was also a crowd of *Volksdeutschen*, all quite well known to us, who began looking for gold and other valuables on us. They whipped and beat people bloody, especially women. There was shouting and crying, wailing coming from the synagogue. Late at night all these extremely exhausted and tortured people were ordered to start walking to the railway station, about three or four kilometres away, where they were pushed into freight cars. Almost none of our fellow-citizens even noticed this sad procession as it passed through the dark streets of Kikinda.

We stood in closed wagons, because there was no space to sit. When the train finally set off we were thinking aloud, wondering where we were going and when we would get there. However the train

stopped. They rushed us out of it. Another procession. It's still night. At the station we read that we had arrived in Novi Bečej.

The sad procession moved through the village and eventually we arrived at an abandoned mill. We went in, exhausted, and tried to arrange ourselves on the old wooden boards, so that we would have somewhere to sleep. It was summer. We had no covers. The mill was guarded by an old soldier, probably one of the local Germans, and he allowed people to go out freely and shop in the market. It was also possible to order food from the village taverns, for those who had any money left of course. The children played in the spacious mill yard. Because it was warm, the elderly would sit outdoors, warming themselves up for the night. There were also people among us who were sick, and even crazy. I remember one poor, demented man, Dr Iric, who kept shouting all the time "*Gandi a majom*" (Gandhi is a monkey), which had the children laughing and the adults wondering what would happen the next day. One day, from the other side of the Tisa river, from Bačka where the Hungarians were in power, we heard people calling to us. We went to the Tisa. My brother was across the water, in Stari Bečej. That was the last time I saw my brother. In December 1944, the Nyilas stripped him in the street and, having established that he was a Jew, killed him on the spot. We communicated by shouting.

And that was how it was, day after day. People were discussing ways out of this grave situation. Among other things, there was talk that partners in mixed marriages would be released, which was what happened. Mother thought that perhaps the same thing would happen to her. But then, what would happen to me?

A few weeks later, my stepfather Dragomir came, bringing a note from the Gestapo in Belgrade authorising the release from camp of his wife, my mother, together with their four-year-old son Đorđe - that was supposed to be me. How did he manage to get this note? He went to the Gestapo, cried and begged: "My Etelka, my Etelka, release her!" He got his famous note. It was later that we understood the way in which - at least for the time being - we had been saved. He added a "1" to the note, I became a 14-year-old, which I actually was. The procedure was very simple. We emerged from the mill into freedom and headed for the station, then left for Belgrade by train. A few days after our departure, the other mill "residents" were also taken to Belgrade on barges.

Dragomir's brother Dragi, who lived with his family in a gypsy tent in the shanty town in Franše d'Epera Street, was waiting for us. It

was narrow and filthy, but we were alive and warmly welcomed. We soon became familiar with life in the presence of bedbugs, lice and similar creatures. The other “advantage” of life in Belgrade was hunger. Neither we nor our hosts had any money for food, of which there was less and less. We got some stamps – I didn’t, of course, because I did not have papers – and with these it was possible to buy from the shops some stiff plum jam, which was sold by the piece a few grams at a time. We were near the Topovske Šupe camp and we knew that the men from Banat were there. I was near the gate every day. I saw women from the town who were still free bringing food and warm things for their husbands and sons. I had neither anyone to take things to nor anything to take. However, I waved when I recognised somebody. A few days later I saw that they were loading people into trucks and taking them away. They were waving to me. They learnt immediately, and we learnt later, that this journey was taking them straight to their death.



*Julije Kemenj (back row, second from L) and friends, 1943*

They soon called up all the Jewish women and children who were scattered around the city staying with friends to come to Đorđe Vašingtona Street, from where they were taken to the Sajmište camp across the Sava Bridge.

At the end of 1941, the Germans, having entered the Soviet Union, were approaching Moscow. This only increased the pessimistic mood and people lost hope that things would ever get better. The winter was harsh so that women and children in the Sajmište camp were dying with no direct involvement of their torturers. Those still alive were killed in a *dušegupka*, a truck in which they suffocated them with the exhaust gases.

In the winter we had the opportunity to “live” in the laundry of a building with good people in Gornjačka Street, near the football stadium. There, hungry and freezing, we survived a harsh winter. Dragomir found work as a sanitation worker, actually a pest exterminator. I was allowed to go with him carrying the buckets with cyanide and acids, and cans of Zyklon. After the war we learnt that the Germans used this gas to kill Jews. I worked sealing windows, holes and doors in apartments before this poisonous gas was released to eliminate bedbugs. Later I would open the apartments and air them out. I would be given tips and, more importantly, a little food. One day the company we worked for was given orders to clean some rooms in the Gestapo headquarters of bedbugs. None of the adult workers dared go there, so they sent me. Of course I couldn't say no. I took the buckets with the poisons, walked past the SS guard and worked for a couple of hours sealing and preparing. While standing on a ladder I was talking to SS officers who wanted to know how I spoke such good German. I told them that it was taught in schools. Time went by and millions were killed and died.

I learnt that the Pajić family, parents of my close school friend, had managed to move from Kikinda to Belgrade, as Serbs, and that they had a house at 2 Vojvode Anđelke Street, close to Đeram. We got in touch. Aca and Seka, the son and daughter, gave me a warm, friendly hand and their parents did all in their power to make my life easier. I was living in a constant state of hunger, and they shared their food with me. They had a German officer in the apartment and introduced me to him as their son, as they also did when police patrols arrived.

With Aca, who was going to secondary school, I learnt school material at home. We would read together and study English. I met his school friends and became very close to them. These were Serbs and they soon learnt that I was Jewish, but not one of them said a word about it during the war. Ordinary words cannot express my gratitude to the Pejić family and to those friends. Nor is it possible to forget this way in which those war days were made easier. I tried to express my grati-



tude, at least to some extent, by planting an olive tree in the Forest of the Righteous in Jerusalem, a tree of gratitude in Yad Vashem.

My stepfather, Dragomir, is certainly the one who saved my life in the beginning, but we often had big problems with him because of his drinking. He would come in late, after the curfew, so we would never know whether he had been arrested. He would always bring some German with him, a soldier from the last tavern, also drunk of course, and tell them that his wife was Jewish. Of course, in their state of drunkenness, they didn't take this seriously. Some of these Germans, who understood who we were, later came sober and brought us bread in the times of the worst hunger. After the war I looked for these Germans, who had given us their addresses, but they had not survived the war.

I was living illegally. That meant that I didn't have documents, so just about any patrol could have taken me to Banjica, to death. I knew how to recognise patrols from the distance so, because I knew which houses had double entrances, I would hide. After Dragomir arrived in Belgrade, he managed to get refugee documents, because his birthplace was Travnik. I also managed, early on, to get refugee papers in the name of Đorđe Gašić, but I was unable to extend it in 1942. The old refugee card sometimes helped me: at the refugee kitchen I would get a ration of beans with cabbage or a ration of cabbage with beans.

The people I socialised with, the friends who would save me during police raids, were more or less supporters of Draža Mihajlović and, at the time, it was believed that with the assistance of the Western forces he would bring freedom to the nation. Sometime in mid-1942, we ran into some acquaintances from Kikinda, the Palinkasev family, who offered us an opportunity to live with them, in their kitchen at 12 Vladetina Street. I remember once when they returned from the countryside they brought us a bag of beans which fed us for a couple of days. Their son was a doctor and he gave me medical attention when I needed it. A little later we got a two-room apartment with tinsmith Antonije Anđelić at 5 Kraljice Marije Street (later renamed March 27 Street). There I was hidden in a shed. A multi-story building has been built there, however my coal shed, my wartime hideout, is still there in the yard.

Time passed in an atmosphere of uncertainty, in hunger and privation. But following Stalingrad, we began to hope that we were near the end. Easter 1944. Blue skies. We heard the thunder of aircraft and anti-aircraft artillery. We saw many planes above us, bombs were already

falling on Belgrade. Panic spread in Palilula. People were fleeing in all directions, leaving the city, carrying various things with them.

We also fled. We went to some people we didn't know well in Mali Mokri Lug, where we survived in tents. The next bombing came exactly in the area where we had found shelter. We survived that too. There were many dead. We helped friends dig some of their things up from under the rubble of buildings hit by bombs. Again we returned to 5 Kraljice Marije Street, which was more or less in the city centre.

After June 6, 1944, when the Americans opened the western front, we realised that there would not be a Balkan front. The Germans from the south passed through Belgrade and withdrew across the Sava Bridge. We knew that a wounded animal was very dangerous so we were even more careful and paid close attention to what was happening around us. In those days the situation in Belgrade had improved to such an extent that, after three years, there were again bakeries in which bread could be bought. The news from London was that the front was definitely and rapidly approaching us. The Red Army crossed Romania. Artillery fire could be heard in the distance. We hid in the basement of a house where friends lived. This villa in Đorđe Vašingtona Street is now divided into private apartments. The sound of shooting was becoming stronger from the direction of Eastern Serbia and Banat. On the morning of October 15, at the intersection outside our apartment, we saw Germans ready for battle.

The gunfire was getting louder and louder. Suddenly shouting was heard and the sound of heavy machinery. Russian tanks, coming from the direction of the Danube, covered with people and flags. Although it was extremely dangerous, we climbed out of the basement and ran towards the corner where we saw lying dead the Germans who had been putting up some kind of resistance that morning. We realised what the noise was. The Russian tanks passed by, continuing on towards the Belgrade University Engineering Faculty.

Like a dream it came, something we had hoped for through all the years of Hitlerism, uncertainty, constant mortal danger and hunger, something out of a dream: Liberation. This was something that in that moment we were unable to take in. After so many years of horror and humiliation, a man was suddenly a man again, equal and free.

The Russian command came into the yard of our "villa" with trucks full of milk, cheese and other food we had not seen for years. We were given cans and half a litre each of strangely transparent milk. It

turned out to be vodka. Every morning, before going into battle, the warriors were given this “milk” ration. A small number of them returned in the evening. There were battles fought around the Sava Bridge. Beside the Engineering Faculty we saw a mass of burnt-out German armoured cars and soldiers.



*Julije Kemenj with the Pejić couple in the Forest of the Righteous in Jerusalem, beside a tree in Yad Vashem, planted in gratitude for all that that was done for him in the difficult war years*

The city was liberated on October 20. Alongside the Russians we also saw unevenly trained fighters and children. These were the first Partisans. They took over the political leadership of the city. One of the first things they did was to call on the young people of Belgrade, those born in 1926 and earlier, to join Partisan units. A large number of them, untrained and unprepared for war against a strong enemy, were to perish on the Srem front.

At the Palilula police – the police were known as militia at this time – and not only there, they were arresting people and taking them to

execution sites, from which they would disappear. Among the first to be arrested was our Dragomir, accused of being a collaborator because people had often seen him with the Germans, leaving some tavern, of course, dead drunk. After much begging, skill and weeping, we managed to get him out and save him from almost certain death. Because we had no papers it was very difficult for us to prove who and what we were. Finally we succeeded and, two or three weeks later, we received permission to return to our home town, which was still called Kikinda.

We returned to find our house completely plundered. A German commissioner had lived there until a day before the liberation on October 5. On a heap of old papers we found, as a greeting to those returning, a book entitled *Schuss im leeren Haus* (A shot in an empty house)!

As I was born in 1927, I wasn't required to join the Partisans, so I continued to study. At the same time I was an observer from the top of a building in the city and reported on enemy planes passing nearby. I also took meteorological notes. We had great difficulty getting back some of our furniture which was in various warehouses and youth homes. Russian officers in transit through the city were accommodated in the house. We were permitted to live in two rooms of our house.

Over the next two years, at courses for students whose education had been interrupted by the war, I managed to finish secondary school and matriculated in 1947. I came to realise that this new political system was not for me. I had no intention of joining the government party. They even called me a reactionary. But because I had suffered during the war and was opposed to Hitler, they did not arrest me.

In 1947 I managed to enrol to study technology in the Faculty of Engineering. The political situation was very unstable and soon came the split between Tito and Stalin. After the British left the Near East, there were battles being fought there between the Zionists and the Arabs. Tito allowed a handful of Jews who had survived to emigrate to the new state which had been established.

At the end of my fourth semester I received permission to emigrate. At the beginning of July 1949, before boarding the *Radnik* in Rijeka, we were forced to sign a statement turning all our real estate over to the state and relinquishing our citizenship. A few days later we arrived in Israel.

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*Rahela LEVI*

## IF IT HADN'T BEEN FOR SAVA



*Rahela Levi was born Rahela Ruben on February 26, 1924, in Belgrade, to father Rahamim-Raka, born in Priština in 1903, and mother Flora Ruben, née Koen, born in Sarajevo in 1904. She had a sister Buena-Bojana who was three years younger. Her mother Flora's family was not religious, her grandfather Leon Koen worked as a projectionist and her grandmother Rehela was a housewife. Her father's family was religious, her grandfa-*

*ther Hajim was a rabbi in Priština and her grandmother's name was Bonoza. They used to attend the Bet Izrael Synagogue in Cara Uroša Street.*

*She was educated in Belgrade, where she completed commercial academy. After the war she was head of accounting at the Directorate for the Construction of the Brotherhood and Unity Motorway. She worked as an accountant in various companies in Belgrade until her retirement in the early seventies.*

*Her father, Rahamim Raka Ruben was killed in a plane crash near Zagreb in 1950.*

*From her marriage to Hajim Levi, an electrical engineer from Sarajevo, she bore a son, Raka Levi, a doctor of electrical engineering sciences, and a granddaughter, Mia.*

*Rahela Levi died on December 14, 2004.*

In April 1941 we were living at 23 Gundulićev Venac Street, in Belgrade. On the first day of the war, April 6, a bomb hit the building in which we lived in a two-room apartment. We lost everything. After the bombing my mother Flora, my sister Buena and I fled to the countryside outside Belgrade. We fled to the village of Žarkovo. We travelled there on an ox-cart with other refugees fleeing Belgrade. We spent the night in a school building where we slept on school desks. Before dawn, villagers came carrying axes. They wanted to chase us out because we would bring bad luck – the Germans would come because of us Jews and kill the entire village. We were scared and decided to return to Belgrade. When we arrived and reported to the police, on April 19, we were given yellow armbands and had to go to compulsory labour.



*The Ruben family: Rahela's sister Bojana, mother Flora, Rahela and father Raka Ruben, a photographer with Politika*

My father, Rahamim-Raka Ruben, who at that time worked for Politika, was mobilised on April 6 with the Drina Division and sent towards Šabac, where he was captured. At that time, immediately after the capitulation of Yugoslavia, I went to be vaccinated against typhoid. In Vuka Karadžića Street, quite by chance, I encountered a column of Serbian prisoners of war among whom was my father. I was overcome by joy. When I arrived home and was telling them I

had seen Father, he appeared at the door in a coat and clothes several sizes too small for him. He then told us how he had managed to escape from the convoy of prisoners.

The Germans, having captured them, were escorting them through Belgrade. In order to reach Pančevo they had to cross the Pančevo bridge, but their German escort didn't know the way. He led the column in circles through November 29 Street, then called Knez Pavle Street. People came out to watch this strange procession. They included a typesetter from Politika, a colleague and acquaintance of my father, whose name I don't recall. He was standing at the gate of his house. When he saw the column pass again, he shouted to Father: "Run, Raka, into my house!" Father hesitated, but the other captive soldiers urged him on; they used their bodies to screen him from the German escort and gave Father a chance to run into his colleague's yard. This man then gave him a business suit but, because my father was much bigger than him, he threw a winter coat over him to cover the fact that he couldn't button up the trousers, the shirt or the jacket.

For a while we lived crammed like sardines in an attic apartment in Molerova Street, because a bomb had demolished the buildings of a number of our family members. This is where we were living when the school year ended. I was in second year of the state commercial academy, completing specialist secondary school in economics.

My maternal grandfather, Len Juda Koen, was shot on July 27, 1941. He ran a kiosk in Belgrade. Grandfather Leon had visited all the family, telling everyone to hide and not to report to the police when ordered because the Germans were deporting and killing people. However he was among the first to be killed, after an incident of sabotage in Belgrade. He was shot, along with the first hundred hostages in Tašmajdan. Our Uncle Isak moved to Priština and we were sent to compulsory labour throughout June, July and August. Father was clearing rubble after the bombing. I was cleaning the buildings where German institutions and commands were housed. One day the men were taken to the Topovske Šupe camp.

In October 1941 they rounded up the remaining men. Father went to the Orthopaedic Hospital, to Dr Đorđe Marinković, a close family friend, who put a plaster cast on his healthy leg and kept him in hospital for "treatment". With the help of the doctor's wife, Stanka Marinković, we then obtained false identification documents as refugees from Priština. She obtained these through a friend at the Suvi Đeram tavern

in Sarajevska Street. My father became Radovan Rosić (the same initials as Rahamim Ruben), my mother Flora became Ljubica, my sister Buena was Bojana and I – Rahel (Ela) – became Jelena (Jela) Rosić.

In November 1941 they started rounding up men from the hospitals. My father fled, together with Stanka's father, Miloš Grčić, to my Uncle Isak's shop. He hid overnight there on November 13 and, on the morning of November 14, he took a hackney to the station, still wearing the cast on his leg. Once they were on the train, Stanka removed it for him. We women had come to the station early in the morning, during the curfew, led by Stanka through a snowstorm. Because of the weather, there was only one German at the entrance to the station. We squeezed our way through the narrow gap between the post office and the station. We all got onto the train for Priština to travel to my uncle's. Inside the wagon my father lit a match and saw a crowd of familiar faces: "Look at this, this carriage is full of Jews!" he said.



*Rahel Levi's false identification document in the name of Jelena Rosić*

We reached Kuršumljia but could go no further because the Albanians had closed the border at Prepolac. There were quite a lot of Jews in Kuršumljia, about forty. Mika Altarac Smederevac was waiting



at the station, as he did every day. With him were his wife, daughter and sister-in-law. Dača Koen was also there with his wife Lenka, brother Simče (secretary of the Braća Baruh choir), sister Elza, aunt Rejna and her husband, the owner of a photography shop in Sarajevska Street. Mr Pesah, the owner of the Takovo Cinema was also there with his son Jaša Bejosif, someone called Pinto, the Pijade family and others. We stayed at the Evropa Hotel which was owned by a taverner, Mr Živorad Arsenijević. As well as all the Jews there were Radivoje Uvalić and V. Stojanović, who were later hidden by Raša Nikolić from Konjuva. Then we rented a room in a thatched-roof cabin at the livestock market, from where we were to move to Priština. Because the winter of 1942 was very cold, we postponed the trip. There were great battles being fought that winter between the Chetniks and the Partisans. Wherever the Partisans seized power, even if only briefly, the Germans would arrive on punitive expeditions. After each of these German punitive expeditions we moved on. Some followed the Toplice river to Mereces, but we went towards Blace, and stopped in Dankovići, about four kilometres from Kuršumljija. There were about thirty of us refugees there in the house of our host, Predrag Vasić. We arrived there on February 20, 1942 and stayed a month. We spent the next six months in a place called Preskoca. Raša Nikolić worked in Belgrade in the People's Bazaar – a Jewish shop in Terazije, which was why he was helping us Jews. We rented a house at the market from Ljuba Nikolić. With a Slovenian woman, an interpreter, we fled to Grgure at night. From there, on September 10, we moved on to Kaljaja, where we lived in the home of a local resident named Živadin. We stayed there for about three months, because of Mother's sister, Olga Koen, whose married name was Bogdanović. She was later killed at the camp in Niš, at Crveni Krst. We stayed there until December 20. From Kaljaja we moved back to hide again in Preskoca where we spent almost all of 1943.

In the summer of 1943, on July 7, the Bulgarians came to arrest us and take us to prison in Kuršumljija. They didn't find Father, so only we three women were in prison. Again Živorad and Živko Arsenijević helped us out. Živko went to see two Bulgarian officers, Divčev and Bakalov, who used to drop into his tavern every morning and begged them to release us. He told them: "We Serbs have an old saying – do good and you will have good returned, do evil and you will get evil back." The Bulgarians released us from prison seven days later. We fled Preskoca on October 14, 1943. We walked eight kilometres to a village

named Grgure, to Sava Bradić. We spent the winter in Grgure. From there, with the Germans approaching, we fled to a small village, Muđere, where we hid from March 20 to April 20, 1944. After that we returned to Sava in Grgure and stayed there until the liberation of Belgrade on October 20. We then returned via Barbatovac, where we stayed until October 31. From there, via Prijepolje and Niš, we reached liberated Belgrade on November 7, 1944.

The story of how we hid at Sava Bradić's place is as follows:



*Lives saved: (L to R) Priest, farmer Sava Bradić, Raka Ruben and the village teacher*

We were hiding in the village of Grgure, in the Blace municipality, with Sava Bradić. He was a carpenter and had made for Father a perfect *camera obscura*. Father would put a camera lens on this and expose the paper on the window in the sunlight. At night, while we children were sleeping, he would develop the photographs. I remember us walking a couple of kilometres to the spring to bring back water for him to wash them. He would make photographs for false and real identification documents and photographs for weddings and funerals. For all of them, he charged in wheat, one capful of wheat for one photograph.

I would not want the noble-mindedness of the Politika newspaper staff to be forgotten, especially that of Ćiša Stevanović, his son Miro, daughter-in-law Vida, Jurij Isakovski and others. My mother would travel to Belgrade with false documents, disguised as a village woman, and they would give her the photographic material. Father used to take

the photographs which kept us fed during the war. When Mother came to Belgrade she would stay with Stanka's mother, report regularly to the police and the police would come at night for a routine inspection of the apartment. They went through all this together and put it behind them, but all of them were in fear. It appears that Mother was once reported (we think it was a Politika driver who recognised her). There was a warrant issued for her arrest and the whole railway station was plastered with her photograph. One of Stanka's neighbours, a woman who worked at the railway station, came and told Stanka to hide Mother. Mother soon returned to the village by catching the train at the Topčider station.



*Most treasured moments: Rahela  
with granddaughter Mia*

I really want to pay tribute and express my gratitude to Sava Bradić for his heroism, which most probably changed the course of events for us during the period we were fleeing and hiding. This was probably the decisive factor in our not being taken to the camps where so many members of our extended family perished.

Sometime around the beginning of 1944 when the Gestapo were coming to round up communists and Jews, my father decided that we should pack again, flee into the woods and look for a new refuge. But Sava came to him and said: "Raka, you're not going anywhere, you're safe and secure in this house! If they want to kill you they'll have to kill me and my nine children first!" When the Chetniks insisted that we were Partisan sympathisers and wanted to take us away, Sava said to them: "You can only do that over my dead body. This is the only decent family we have taken in and we have welcomed them like our nearest and dearest, and we are prepared to protect them at any cost from anyone, including you." What Sava didn't know was that Bojana and I had

made underwear from parachutes for the Partisan Drinka Pavlović from Spanac village who had been recommended to come to us. This famous Partisan woman was killed treacherously in the camp in Banjica in 1943.

Father and Mother decided that we should stay with the Bradić family until the end of the war. We lived as one family. The four of us had to share a bed at their place, but we were always all right and, which was more important, we were always safe. Sava was best man at the wedding of my sister Buena (Bojana) and my mother was matron of honour at Milan's wedding and the wedding of the younger brother, Tomislav. She gave Milan's daughter the name Olga, after her sister who was shot in the camp at Crveni Krst. Not once during the whole war did anyone from the brave and patriotic village of Grgure denounce us, although all the children knew that there was a Jewish family hiding and living among them.

For saving us, Sava and Jovana Bradić, Predrag Vasić, Đorđe and Stanka Marinković were proclaimed Righteous Among the Nations.

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*Aleksandar NAHMAN*

WAR CHILD

*Aleksandar Nahman was born in Vienna in 1933, the first child of a wealthy merchant from an old Belgrade Sephardic family. His father Marsel (Moša) graduated in civil engineering in Vienna where he met his wife Leopoldina, née Czerny, who was of Czechoslovakian origin. When they married in Belgrade in 1924, his mother converted to Judaism.*

*After the second world war, Aleksandar matriculated from the Sixth Boys' Secondary School in Belgrade, completed the Military Technical Academy in Zagreb in 1959 and, in 1969, graduated as a mechanical engineer in Zagreb. As a member of the armed services he worked in Bosnia-Hercegovina, Slovenia and Croatia. He retired in 1991 with the rank of lieutenant-colonel.*

*Of his immediate family, his father's sister, Pakita, perished in the Holocaust.*

*He is married to Ana Nahman, née Ljepović.*

*His mother, Leopoldina, died in Belgrade in 1988 at the age of 92.*

*Graduate engineer Aleksandar Nahman now lives in retirement in Zagreb, while his brother, three years younger, Professor Jovan Nahman, also an engineer and a doctor of science, is also retired and lives in Belgrade.*

Father always fulfilled my wishes, even the smallest ones. I remember his pride when he took me to school for the first time and to services at the synagogue. I remember the sound of the *shofar* at the

synagogue, the lighting of the candles and the blessing on the Erev Shabbat, the lighting of candles for Hanukkah. I remember the rabbi commending me for writing and reading Hebrew letters very well.

We lived in our own house in the centre of Belgrade. I vividly remember the demonstrations of March 27, 1941, the masses of people and flags. The cries of "Better war than the Pact," and "Better the grave than a slave," still echo in my ears.

I remember the tears and weeping of my mother as she dragged me off the balcony, not to look out into the street. A few days later all classes at school were suspended. We children, delighted at this, didn't know what was in store for us!

Father sent my mother, my brother and me to Arandelovac, to stay with the family of his manager.

The building and our apartment were requisitioned. Part of the furniture (Father's study) was taken away to be used by the city commandant, Neuhauser, and Father moved in with our *Sandak*, Samuel Davičo. Following an incident of sabotage by Emil Almozlin in Belgrade, Jews were rounded up in Tašmajdan. About 120 of these were selected and, on July 28, 1941, executed in Jajinci, near Belgrade.

The rounding up of hostages was done by issuing a proclamation obliging all Jews to report at a specified time. My father, pedantic and punctual, didn't wait for his *Sandak* so that they could go together, but went alone, so as to be on time. The *Sandak*, like many others, was late, and the Germans already had enough hostages. Our *Sandak* went to Canada with his family and survived. My careful father also secured passports for all of us in time, and money in Canada, but fate had something else in store for us.

Mother was hiding with the two of us in Arandelovac and, occasionally in the village of Misača. From that village we heard a thundering sound and saw fire on the horizon on the evening of April 6, when Belgrade was bombed. A day or two later we saw Father for the last time. He had come to visit us and then returned to Belgrade. We lived in hiding like this until a neighbour told us that the Gestapo would come early in the morning to take away Jewish children who were hiding. I remember that night, running drowsily through corn fields with a local guide. We somehow managed to slip through to Belgrade. We moved in with a cousin of ours, Jelena Ozerović, the wife of Manfred Ozerović, in Kotež Neimar. As well as the two of us, Mother was also taking care of two children of her cousin Demajo, who worked at the

Jewish Hospital. She tried to save them as well, but their mother demanded that she bring her children to her, although she knew the hospital was being closed and that they would be taken to the camp at Sajmište, where all of them were later killed. To this day I have a vivid memory of the face of Alma, who was a little older than me at the time, pale, with black eyes and luxuriant curls of black hair.

In order for us to survive, Mother occasionally had to cross “over”. This was the expression used for a trip to Zemun, which then belonged to the Independent State of Croatia. There Vojvodina farmers would trade meat products for gold and jewellery. One day, with a cousin of ours whom we used to call Aunt Eme, we were returning late in the evening and the curfew began. We were close to where we were staying, but we suddenly ran into a police patrol! Shouting and threatening they tried to take Mother’s bag of food from her. Mother then exhibited extreme courage and insolence. Shouting, she demanded (in German) to be taken to the command headquarters so that they could be told “whose wife I am!” This insolence paid off and the patrol allowed us to pass. Poor Aunt Eme was so scared that she jumped into a rubbish container as soon as she saw the patrol. When the danger had passed, she emerged, dirty and smelly, but alive!



*The Nahman family in happy days: (L) mother Leopoldina with sons Jovan (L) and Aleksandar and, (R) father Marsel (Moša)*

My mother exhibited even greater courage perhaps when she went to the Jewish Community and took advantage of the fact that the guard outside was an Austrian to get him to let her in. She then purloined from the archives the files on the two of us and on our cousin, Josif Mevorah, so that we were no longer in the records.

In 1942 we found stable accommodation where we remained until the end of the war and beyond.

In order to provide more permanent protection, Mother converted us to the Roman Catholic religion under her maiden name, Czerny. Mrs Mevorah lived in a nearby street with her son and sister and they were the only Jews in the neighbourhood. What Mother had to think about is illustrated by her advice to my brother and me to be careful if we had to urinate in a corner somewhere outdoors, not to let others see us and notice the characteristic difference which would reveal our origin. The surroundings were such that we never had any unpleasant situations. The only unpleasant things I remember, particularly in 1943 and 1944, were the more and more frequent night raids and apartment searches. The special police were particularly rough, while the Germans were a little more lenient, I suppose because Mother would reply to their questions in German.

During the war I attended the second grade of primary school in Arandelovac and took supplementary classes for second, third and fourth grade privately in Belgrade. After the liberation of Belgrade I took a special examination and continued regular schooling at the Sixth Boys' Secondary School.

After the liberation we resumed our surname Nahman and our membership of the Jewish Community.

Mother died in Belgrade in 1988, at the age of 92.



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Ana ŠOMLO

THEY DIDN'T KNOW THE WAR WAS OVER



Ana Šomlo was born in Negotin on March 27, 1935. Her father, engineer Imre-Miroslav Šomlo, was the head of the Technical Department and her mother, Budimka Smederevac-Šomlo a Serbian language teacher at the Negotin Secondary School. Her elder sister, Milana-Beba Šomlo, was in the third year of primary school and Ana in the first when the war began.

Her mother was a Serb, born in Vršac on December 7, 1907. Her father was born in Budapest on December 18, 1899. His family moved to Vršac, where Ana's grandfather, Samuel, was the first veterinary surgeon, while her father remained in Hungary to complete his studies.

She graduated in Oriental languages from the Faculty of Languages of Belgrade University. She spent two years of post-graduate study in Jerusalem. She worked for about ten years as a journalist for the current affairs program of Television Belgrade. She has published articles in a number of newspapers and magazines. She also edited the magazine "RTV Theory and Practice" and has written a number of novels and short stories. She translates from Hebrew, and lives and works in Israel.

Very soon after the Germans entered Negotin, they threw us out of the house. Many neighbours and friends approached us in the street,

inviting us into their homes and bringing us food. One of my father's colleagues, the engineer Mita Pantić, took us in and put us up in his little garden house in which there was neither water nor electricity. The following morning my sister Beba went out into the street with a bucket to fetch water from the tap. She came back in tears, telling us that some boys had spilt her water and threatened her, shouting: "Jew, Jew!"

I took the bucket from her hand and went to the tap where the boys were still standing. I was holding a stone in my hand and, when one of them came up to me, I threw it at him. I grabbed the bucket, half full of water, and poured it on them. And I shouted at them: "You're Jews, we're not." They were confused and let me take some water. I came back to the yard, very proud, and told them how I had thrown the water at the boys. My mother said to me: "Ana, you are a Jew, your father's a Jew, but you shouldn't be ashamed of that because the Jews are a wonderful, ancient and clever people and you can be proud of that."

A few days later my teacher, Ljubica Krstić, sought Mother out and warned her, with all good intentions, that I should not boast about being Jewish and tell people in school that I was proud of that, because it could cause trouble for us. Mother immediately told me to be careful about what I was saying and where I was saying it. I couldn't understand this. On the one hand she had explained to me that I should be proud, that I came from an ancient, clever people, and on the other hand she had told me I should be quiet, because it was dangerous to talk about that.

It struck me as odd that Father was at home all the time. Up until then he had usually been out in the field somewhere, where a road or bridge was being built, but now he would sit at home all day long, deep in thought. He was a very serious and quiet man. I remember once, before the war, when he suddenly returned home from some trip and immediately went out again, to the office. When Mother returned from school and asked: "What's new?" I told her "Father was here." Knowing that he was out in the field she asked: "What Father?" "Well," I replied, "the gentleman with the black hat who comes here every day." From that point on, in our family and among our friends, my father was known as the gentleman with the black hat who came there every day.

One day two German soldiers burst into our little house to arrest him. Father took his small suitcase, the one he usually took on trips and began to pack his shaving kit, his pyjamas and towels. Then he bent over and put his foot up on a little chair and wiped his shoe. The

German shouted at him and kicked him. Father staggered for a moment, stood up, looked at him, then put his other foot up, cleaned that shoe and told me to pour water over his hands so he could wash them. The German looked at him in astonishment. It seems that Father's calm had confused him.

Mother was desperate. She soon learnt that Father had been taken to the camp in Zaječar, the only camp for Gypsies and Jews in Serbia. She immediately left, in deep snow, to look for him. She told my sister and me to think of something and to manage somehow to get to some friends, to Dr Mitrović, which was where we stayed until she returned. At this time there were no telephones. We knew neither where Mother was nor when she would return. Fortunately the camp manager was a *Volksdeutscher* from Vršac, a former student of hers, who allowed her to visit Father and to take him food and clean clothing. Even later on she used to travel there often to visit him. I think he was in that camp for a little more than a year. One day when I was returning from school, I saw a grey man in a torn suit. When he walked up to me I wanted to run, I didn't recognise him, he had changed so much. It was only when he smiled that I recognised him and ran into his embrace. He had grown very old and thin: I can just imagine how difficult it was for him. He had always been very elegant. Even at home he wore black striped trousers and fine shoes, he never wore slippers. Now he looked miserable. Mother told him that he had to flee immediately, to go to friends in the countryside, because her former student had let him out for two days only, but Father refused to even discuss it. He just kept reading the papers all day long. Friends came to visit him, they kept trying to persuade him to leave Negotin, but he wouldn't. A few days later they took him away again.

Not long after that, Mother's brother, Milan Smederevac, appeared. He and mother decided to take us to Vršac, where life was easier and, apparently, less dangerous for us. Our surname was Hungarian, Mother's family was Serb and they had already taken all the Jews from Banat into camp so they hoped that we would pass unnoticed. So my sister and I continued going to school. Our grandparents took care of us, but we missed our parents. Beba returned home at the end of the school year in 1942, and I began the second grade of primary school in Vršac. However, I was unhappy, I was crying at night, so I too returned to Negotin. Mother managed to move to some apartment. It wasn't as nice as our house, but we were able to organise ourselves better than in the

little garden house. They again let Father out of camp on the condition that he remain hidden. His friends, Dr Mitrović and Judge Sofronjević used to come over at night. Our neighbour, Granny Polka, warned Mother that it wasn't nice to have male visitors to the apartment at night during curfew. After all, she was a teacher, what would the students think of her, and the neighbours were also gossiping about her. No one apart from our closest friends was allowed to know that the visitors were actually coming to see my father, rather than my mother. Again Father wouldn't hide somewhere out of town so again they took him away. Mother used to visit him in Zaječar and Beba and I would sleep at Dr Mitrović's house. His sons, Srđan, Aca, Ika and Žil, were wonderful boys. They took us sledding and played with us. I adored them, as I also adored their mother, Aunt Mica. Sometimes we were also with Judge Sofronjević and his Greek wife, Fana, who liked us a great deal. One day Mother told us suddenly that we had to organise ourselves as best we could, because she had to travel urgently to Zaječar as the camp there was to be closed down.

This time the camp manager, her former student, did not see her, but they told her that all the inmates were going to Belgrade. Someone hinted to her that they would all be killed there. Mother managed to get on the same train they were travelling on. She sat next to Father and kept telling him to jump off the train and run. However he paid no attention to her. At that time the trip to Belgrade took two days. When they reached the city they took the prisoners to the German command. Mother was sitting in the waiting room, completely beside herself, and they were calling out the names of detainees and taking them into an office from which they did not return. They called Father and she sat there, rigid, not knowing what to do. Father suddenly appeared and called her over saying they would leave. "Where to?" she asked. "What do you mean where to? I'm free, I just had to get my documents. The camp commandant in Zaječar, your student, told me that I had to travel to Belgrade for documents and that I would then be released." Mother couldn't believe that she was hearing this with her own ears. "Didn't you know that?" he asked in surprise. "That's why I was wondering why you wanted me to jump from the train when I would be free. It didn't occur to me that you didn't know I was to be released."

And so they both returned to Negotin. Of all the Zaječar inmates, only Father and an engineer named Levi stayed alive. The others were all shot the following day. Father finally realised that he had to hide. He

went to Štubik, to some friends of his, villagers who occasionally worked on road construction. The family of Mita Todorović took him in and took care of him. Their house was in a little wood, a few kilometres from the village. Mita's son Žika used to go to Negotin occasionally and from there he would bring us letters from Father, tucked into his villager shoes, and would also take him clothes.

**Alle Juden haben sich am 19 April d. J. um 8 Uhr morgens bei der Städtischen Schutzpolizei (im Feuerwehrkommando am Taš-Majdan) zu melden.**

Juden die dieser Meldepflicht nicht nachkommen, werden erschossen.

Belgrad 16-IV-1941

Der Chef der Einsatzgruppe der Sicherheitspolizei und des S. D.

**Сви Јевреји морају да се пријаве 19 априла т. г. у 8 час. у јутро градској полицији (у згради Пожарне команде на Ташмајдану).**

**Јевреји који се не одазову овом позиву биће стрељани.**

Београд, 16-IV-1941 год.

Шеф групе полиције

*One of the many German orders issued on posters which, for Jews, meant a summons to execution sites and certain death*

away. When we passed the Bukovo Hill, bearded Chetniks appeared from the woods and stopped us. They wanted to take our things. They asked us who we were. When Žika said we were the children of Budimka the teacher, they let us pass and didn't take anything. One of them told us he was a former student of Mother's. I was terribly afraid.

We were welcomed very warmly in the house of the Todorović family. Living there were Mita's wife Krana, Rada their daughter-in-law and two children, three-year-old Dragan and Čeda, who was still a

One night, a colleague of my mother, Siba Đorđević, came to us. The curfew had already begun and people were not permitted to be in the streets, but she had learnt that they would come for my sister and me the next day because, under a new law, children of mixed marriages were being taken to camp. Mother quickly prepared us and, at dawn, while it was still dark, we went to the end of the town, to a tavern where the villagers who came in from the surrounding villages for the market would gather and wait for day to break. Mother was looking for someone to take us to Štubik, but she didn't succeed. Instead she sent a message to Žika that we were waiting for him. So he came with a horse and cart to pick us up. We set off straight

baby. This was the first time I'd ever been in a village house. They slept on rag carpets. There was only one iron bed, which they let us use. There was almost no furniture. They kept their clothes in chests. However they were very good and kind to us. Rada was seventeen and already a mother of two. Another two families lived in this wood and we played with their children.

One evening we were awakened by shouting and by the light of a fire in a house not far away. The Germans had set fire to the barn. We dressed quickly in the dark. In pyjamas and odd shoes, I just pulled on my small coat and went down with the others to the dry creek near the house and we were still there when the dawn came. We didn't dare go back to the house, but instead set off through the woods to the neighbouring Vlach village of Malajnica. There we were taken in by the local teacher. We spent the next night in a classroom with other refugees. The Germans burst in during the night. They were looking for someone and inspected us all closely with a torch. Father stood up and started explaining something to them in German. We were all dying of fear. They took him outside. He was explaining the way to them. They might have realised that he was not a villager but a Jew and killed him. However they just took his leather coat and let him go.

We realised that we couldn't stay long at the school so we headed up the mountain. I don't know whether this was Miroč or Deli Jovan,



*Ana Šomlo at a promotion in the Tanjug Press Centre in Belgrade*

but we found shelter in a cave. We ate wild grapes and some leftover corn from fields. We were terribly hungry. We wandered around the woods. Once a shepherd took us into his hut and put a bowl of milk and bread on the table. We had no toiletries, only a small pair of scissors. We didn't have any soap, or a comb. I cut the lining inside the pockets of my coat and, with no one noticing, stuffed a few pieces of bread into the lining. Later, when we were some distance away from our host's hut, I proudly took my loot out to boast. Father slapped me on the face, the only time in my life he ever did that. The autumn had already begun and we had had nothing to eat for three days, so I shared the bread with my sister. Father wouldn't touch it. We met some people who were also looking for shelter and, together with them, we went in search of food. We were crossing the Zamna river, which was so narrow you could cross it over a log. We were all crawling across, only my sister was walking upright, with her arms stretched out, like a circus performer. As I watched admiringly, she fell into the river, deep in the gorge beneath us. She surfaced quickly, completely wet. Father took off his flannel coat and was wearing just a shirt. It was drizzling rain and we were afraid that he would catch a cold.

It was strange that none of us caught a cold that autumn. My sister and I were sensitive and delicate. At the change of season, when autumn was ending and winter beginning, we would usually have bronchitis but now, in these harsh conditions, we didn't even catch a cold. There was shooting around us. We were walking down a path through the wood. Suddenly a canon went off above our heads and we all fell down because of the pressure. A teacher who was in front of my sister accidentally kicked her as he fell to the ground. From the ground she was shouting: "Father, I've been hit by a canon".

"Be quiet!" Father shouted back at her. "If it had hit you, you wouldn't be alive!" Father took care of us but he didn't know how to be gentle. Once I put my head on his shoulder while he was sleeping beside me in the cave. Just as I'd snuggled up to him because it was warm and I felt safe, he put my head down on the rag carpet. "Because of the lice," he explained to me, and I understood him.

Again we found shelter in a cave. By now it was impossible to find food. The snow was falling in big flakes. We were unbelievably starved. Suddenly I heard sheep bleating and I drew my father's attention to it. He left the cave. I heard him talking to a shepherd who was taking his flock of sheep back to the village. He politely asked the man to give us

something, anything to eat. He told him that we girls had not even tasted food for several days.

“What are you doing here?” he asked father. Father explained to him that we were hiding from the Germans.

“What Germans?” the shepherd asked. “The Russians crossed the Danube at Prahovo two months ago. The war is over. Negotin has been liberated for quite a while.”

We couldn't believe this because we could hear gunfire all the time, but he told us that this was the Partisans and Chetniks fighting each other and that we could freely return to Negotin. He gave us a little food. We set off on foot to Negotin. Along the way we came across upturned carts, dead horses with legs in the air. Once we came across some children whose grandmother had been blown to pieces by a mine and they were trying to collect her. We stopped to help them. “Here's a hand,” someone shouted.

“And here's the right leg!” someone else added. The grandmother was gathered up in a laundry basket. It all seemed like a morbid game which we weren't even aware of. The only feeling we had was hunger. We saw some cans and other food which had fallen from a German cart, but Father wouldn't let us take anything, fearing that there were mines. I don't remember how long it took us to get home, but I know that it was late in the afternoon and I climbed up on the door handle to peep inside through the tiny window in the door. I saw Mother lying down and weeping.

I began trembling and shouted “Mother!” She stirred, but she thought that she had dozed off and dreamt that someone was calling her, so she began weeping even more. “Mother!” I shouted, and she suddenly jumped up and opened the door. I fell from the door handle and ran into the house. Mother was looking at me in astonishment.

“For God's sake!” she cried out. “You're alive?” She was hugging me. Then she turned to Father: “I heard that they saw you hanged. I had lost all hope that you were alive. Where have you been?”

Father explained to her that we had not known that the war was over, that Negotin had been liberated. She couldn't understand this. “How is that everyone else knew, but you didn't?” She began shouting at him and berating him. Then she put her hand on my forehead, saying “My child, look at you, how dirty you are!” I reassured her, saying that I wasn't dirty, it was lice. She shuddered. She couldn't believe it, but I picked them from my forehead and showed her how they crawl. They had eaten my ears, there was no skin on them, only cartilage. Mother



immediately put water on the stove to heat up so that she could give us a bath. She spread newspapers on the table which we shook the lice onto, after which they crawled all around the room. Mother rubbed my head with gas, from which I got "sweet wounds" which is what they used to call festering boils. It took quite some time to get rid of the vermin. But none of this was so terrible – as long as we had a roof over our heads and food to eat. We were overjoyed, but not for long.

News started arriving about which of our family members we had lost. My father's brother Pišta had perished, along with his wife, Piri, and their children, Vera and Janči. It was not until later that we learnt that father's younger brother Aca had also perished in Jasenovac, with his wife and children. We decided to move to Vršac. We set off for Banat one day on a Russian truck. First we stayed with my grandfather in Vršac, then a year later moved to Pančevo where my parents found jobs. We were greatly surprised and happy when my father's sister, Olga, returned to Subotica with her husband Endre. Ildi had also been with them in Bergen-Belsen and Mauthausen, as was my grandmother, Gizela Šomlo, while we had lost hope for Ivan. However one day he too arrived. He had survived Auschwitz, alone, as a boy. It was only many years later that a list was found of those shot in Sajmište. It included the names of their parents, Ida and Feri Ivanji.

My grandmother, who had been a big woman, weighed about thirty kilograms when she returned from the camp. She soon became very sick. She was delirious, calling her children. But she survived and recovered, physically at least. Whenever the doorbell rang she would think that one of her children or grandchildren had returned. She would stare into people's faces, asking them what their names were. Finally she realised that no one else would be returning and began to suffer deeply, but she was also very collected. She followed political events, listened to the radio and read the newspapers. She gave birth to thirteen children of whom only two outlived her.

In 1957, when I went to Israel to study, she wrote down the addresses of her relatives and friends. She knew them all by heart. They wrote to one another. Two years later, when I returned, she asked me for all the details of life in Israel. She died two years later at the age of 91.

In Yad Vashem I wrote down the names and details of all our relatives who perished in the Holocaust. Medals of the Righteous for Mita Todorović and his wife Kruna were accepted by their son Žika and daughter-in-law Rada, who remain our great friends to this day.

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*Breda KALEF*

## GRATEFUL FOR THE MUSIC



**B**reda Kalef was born in Belgrade on December 7, 1930. This well-known opera singer made her debut in the Belgrade Opera in 1960 and was a full-time member of the company until the end of her career. She played all the leading mezzo-soprano roles and achieved an international career. She performed as a guest on every continent except Australia and in virtually all European countries. She made her debut with Placido Domingo at the Tel Aviv opera, singing Carmen. She is one of the founders of the Belgrade

*Jewish Community's Braća Baruh Choir and has performed with them three times in Israel, at the Zimriya international choir festival. She has also toured US cities and many European countries with the choir.*

*She lost 26 members of her family in the Holocaust. She was an active sportswoman and was Belgrade and Serbian table tennis champion.*

I was born into a family in which the traditions of the Jewish religion and life were strictly observed. My large family would gather for all the religious festivals. My childhood was full of joy, harmony and love.

As well as attending primary school, I also went to Jewish kindergarten and to religious classes in school, where I learnt to read and write Hebrew, Jewish history, and to recite religious and national poems. This

was the beginning of my “art” career, because I was involved in virtually all performances held in the big auditorium of the Jewish Community.

Unfortunately, in 1941, when I was ten, dark clouds began to hang over my family. Immediately after the occupying forces entered Belgrade, all able-bodied men were rounded up into what they called the “labour brigades” for Jews. The members of the first brigade, which included all my male relatives, were shot, down to the very last man. The women and children were left behind, unprotected, and so easy prey for the occupying forces.

My father and grandmother were in the Jewish hospital, because my father was in a wheelchair and my grandmother was by this time rather elderly. They were taken from this hospital in special vehicles with gas chambers and, from that point, all trace of them was lost forever. The occupying forces sealed our house with all our belongings in it, leaving us in the street with nothing and, of course, with no means of support.



*The Kalef family shop in Kolarčeva Street in Belgrade*

My sister and I were hidden in the suburbs of Belgrade, at first in Košutnjak and, later, we were taken in by the nuns of the Catholic Convent in Banovo Brdo. They told their superior, the convent’s spiritual director, Andreja Tumpej, the story of our fate. He was a wonderful, noble man who took us in, obtained false documents for us and so saved us. Thanks to these documents we could enrol in school and continue a normal life because no one knew us there.

At that time I wasn’t known as Breda Kalef. My real name was Rahel Kalef but, with false documents, I had become Breda Ograjenšek, an illegal refugee from Slovenia. Under this name I enrolled in the regular school in Banovo Brdo and this made it possible for me to

attend normal classes like all the other children. At first, in school, there were some embarrassing moments when I would not respond to a teacher who was calling me by my new name. I would just sit there until a friend would warn me, thinking I had fallen asleep.



*(L) Breda's grandmother Mazal in a Jewish national costume and (R) her grandfather Jakov and grandmother Mazal in Serbian national costumes*

Mother went to a neighbouring village and worked for a family who took her in. In compensation for the work she did she was given potatoes and maize flour. With no material means of support, I was forced to go into the woods, in deep snow, to gather firewood so that we could at least warm ourselves up a little. While doing this I was always in fear of being noticed by the forest ranger. For food I would pick nettles and that, together with the maize flour, was our staple diet.

As our place of residence up in the attic was close to Čukarica railway station, I would steal coal from the wagons at night, despite their being guarded by German soldiers. I dreamt for years, and occasionally still do, about those courageous and almost crazy activities of mine as a ten-year-old girl and, in a nightmare, I used to remember running with a full bag of coal under bursts of fire from the German guards.

I would also cross the Sava river by boat to Ada Ciganlija to gather dry wood for heating. I was a witness to dreadful sights on the river,

because there would be massacred bodies floating downstream. Ironically, I would count them, without it ever crossing my mind that some of my nearest and dearest could be among them.

There was a man living in our neighbourhood who made and sold handbags in the city. One day I summoned the courage to ask him to take me in to learn the trade so that I could earn some money. He looked me up and down, looking at my little child's hands, my skinny legs, then he frowned for a while, shook his head and, in the end, took me on. From then on my day began with rising early so that I could join the queue for my ration of cornbread, then walking down the tracks of the narrow gauge railway which ran from Čukarica to the city, to the shop in which I was learning the trade and working. After finishing there I would go quickly back so that I could attend afternoon classes in school.



*Encounter with an old friend and partner on many opera stages:  
Breda and Plácido Domingo, Toronto, 1999*

Čukarica suffered a terrible fate during the Allied bombing. The carpet bombing razed the buildings above the racetrack to the ground. At the very last minute my sister and I jumped into a ditch which, after the bomb fell, was partly covered by earth, so we managed to survive it with only slight injuries.

We used to call our attic residence the dovecote. It was badly damaged. When we finally managed to get close to it we found human bodies torn to pieces by the bombs.

The occupation was long and difficult. We waited impatiently for liberation which, after so many years of misery and general suffering, was finally on the doorstep. While the battle raged between the Germans and Russians, we sheltered with our neighbours in a basement. One morning, as the bullets flew past and the bombs turned everything into flames and mowed everything down with shrapnel, some Russian soldiers, obviously drunk, ran into our hideout, saying they were looking for German soldiers. At one point they even suspected us of hiding them and they angrily ordered us all to line up, planning to shoot us. At that moment an explosion was heard outside the entrance of our hideout. The Russian soldiers ran out after the Germans, leaving us behind in shock. This explosion had obviously saved us and this was how our long-awaited liberation began.

When Belgrade was finally liberated we returned to our empty house which the Germans had plundered. From the whole house, we were able to use only two rooms. We still lived a very hard life. There was neither any income, nor any help. The soup kitchen began operating at the Jewish Community, so I would go there and be given a ration for myself, as a child, but I would take it home to share with my mother and sister.

I survived all these horrors, and I am certain that they made me stronger, that they made me capable of living the life which lay ahead of me.

Music helped me free myself from everything I had lived through and to partly forget the storm of occupation which took practically everything from me, the music to which I devoted myself with all my being and to which I am endlessly grateful for saving my sanity.

At Yad Vashem, I raised the issue, with the appropriate documentation, of awarding the Medal of the Righteous, to the Catholic priest, Andreja Tumpej. My petition was approved and the medal was presented posthumously and accepted by his relatives.

I put up a marble plaque in the Jewish Cemetery in Belgrade, recording the names of all my family members who were killed. I wanted, in this way, to gather them all in one place, because to this day not one grave has been located. By doing this, I kept the solemn promise I had made to myself.

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Vera KARAOGLANOVIĆ-KROTIĆ

THE FEAR REMAINS FOREVER



Vera Karaoglanović-Krotić was born in 1933. Her father came from a large and wealthy family. Her grandfather David and grandmother Veza, née Finci, had six children. All of them were born and lived in Belgrade.

Two of her father's brothers, his father, mother and two sisters with their children perished in Belgrade in 1941. Only one of his brothers, Sima, survived, because he was captured as a Yugoslav officer and taken to a prisoner-of-war camp in

Osnabruck, where he was protected by the Geneva Convention.

Vera's parents, engineer Isak Karaoglanović and Anka, née Ninković, had two children, Miroljub, born in 1931, and Vera. Her father had a printing business called *Zaštita*, which was the only source of income and on which, as a communist, he often used to print party material. Because of his communist affiliation he was tried and arrested before the war, in 1935. And so, because of the illegal printing of *Student*, he was again arrested in 1939 and, shortly afterwards, taken to the notorious prison in Bileća, where he served time doing hard labour with Moša Pijade, Rodoljub Čolaković and others. When the prison was closed he joined the National Liberation Movement in 1941, but was caught the same month after being denounced to the police and shot in Skela, near Obrenovac.

Her mother had a large family in Zemun and, at the end of 1940, she moved with the children to Zemun to be with her family.

*After the war, Vera completed secondary school at the Nikola Tesla Technical Secondary School and in 1952 was employed at the Boris Kidrić Institute in Vinča. This department later moved to the Mihailo Pupin Institute in Belgrade, where she worked until her retirement. She has two children, Gordana and Milan. Gordana lives in Toronto with her husband Pavle Lebl and their two sons. Milan is unmarried and lives in Zemun. Vera was widowed five years ago.*

I remember April 6 because of the confusion of the adults and my own immense fear. There were aircraft flying overhead, bombs falling and people were saying it was a military exercise.

That first day a bomb fell in the vicinity of our apartment, right in the middle of the street. There was a huge crater left there. Of course there were bombs falling all over the city but, for me, this crater was and is a symbol of force which permanently instilled in me a feeling of fear and insecurity.

One day during this time my mother met Father's eldest brother Jakov (Žale) and proposed that everyone pack and that, with the help of her connections, she would get them across the Danube into Crvenka. But Uncle Žale wouldn't hear of it. He believed that nothing could happen to Žale Karaoglanović.

My mother had a lot of family and friends in Zemun through whom she managed to get documents for us in her maiden name. So during the occupation we had some protection. They only once came to the courtyard in which we lived looking for Jews, probably following a tip-off, but then a neighbour of ours, a *Volksdeutsche*, came to our help. She came out of the house and explained in German that it was a mistake. She knew about our situation, because she knew Mother from before the war. We felt safer after this. Still we didn't know whether the next time she might be prepared to retract this statement. Fortunately they didn't look for us again.

During the occupation we couldn't use Father's printing company. Because we were Jewish, the occupying force had taken everything and seized the family's assets, which were not small. And so our mother was left with no means of support. For some time she worked for a printing company in the main street of Zemun which was owned by a childhood friend. She helped my grandmother, with whom we lived. She would go to nearby villages and bring food, some of which she sold



and some of which she kept for us. My brother, who was ten at the time, would gather firewood. He walked with our grandmother to Banovci, Surduk and other villages to help carry firewood and food.

Our *Volksdeutsche* neighbour was a decent person. She helped as much as she could. Sometimes she would sit my brother and me at her table and we would have lunch together. She had no children of her own. She would also sometimes bring something for Mother. After the war she stayed in Zemun and, even when we had our own families, we would visit her and pay our respects.

During the war my brother and I finished primary school in Zemun, with frequent interruptions and without any pleasant memories.

What remain with me always are fear, the sound of air-raid sirens, Stukas diving, the whistle of grenades, the thunder of bombs, hunger and cold. That is what my childhood consisted of between the ages of eight and twelve.

For a while, my mother and brother would go and wait for the deep carts full of bodies which were being driven from Sajmište to the cemetery. I could sense something, there were whispers in the house, but I never asked – I don't know why – what exactly this was all about. Later, after the war ended, I heard that these bodies were Jews, possibly even those closest to us.

After the liberation, to our great joy, Father's youngest brother Sima returned from captivity and was there for us in the role of a father, a guardian. He first reinstated our family surname, then sent my brother to Czechoslovakia for schooling, and I enrolled in the Zemun Secondary School. Our dear Sima took care of us until we were adult, and even after that.

Thanks to the Jewish Community, I was always decently dressed, even in primary school. And just before I turned eighteen, I became a member of the Braća Baruh Choir, with which I spent the nicest part of my life.



VI

ALBANIA



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*Jozef BARUHOVIĆ*

UNDER THE SAME ROOF AS THE GERMANS



*Jozef Baruhović was born in Sarajevo on December 21, 1934, to father Dr Haim Baruhović and mother Sida, Simha née Izrael. He has a sister, Rašela, whose married name is Malina and who lives in Israel. All members of his immediate family survived the Holocaust.*

*Until the war in 1941, the family lived in Zagreb where his father was in the services as an active officer and army doctor. Before the war the family moved to Sarajevo, while Jozef's father remained in the services in Zagreb. He was in Sarajevo for the April war, the capitulation of Yugoslavia and the entry of the German troops into the city. He then fled to Mostar, Priština, Skadar, Tirana and, finally Belgrade. From 1945 to 1953 he lived in Priština. He enrolled in the Electrical Engineering Faculty at Belgrade University in 1953 and graduated in 1959. In 1986, he completed postgraduate studies. He worked as an engineer in the Belgrade company Elektrosrbija-Minel and then at the Chemical Industry in Pančevo until his retirement in 2002.*

*He was active in the Jewish Community in Belgrade in the period from 1960 to 1985 as a member of the Community Council.*

Until 1941, that is until the very beginning of the April war, we lived a comfortable life in Zagreb as the family of a serving officer. We had a batman – a soldier and housekeeper. Father was an army doctor,

captain first class, and would soon be promoted to the rank of major. In 1939 the family gained a new member with the birth of my sister Rašela. The family was more secular than religious. They would occasionally take me to the synagogue, which I enjoyed because I would find many of my peers there.

The first hint of war came with Jewish refugees from Austria and Germany. One day they moved an elderly couple into our apartment. We took them in, providing them with accommodation and food. Mother spoke good German and would have long conversations with them in the evenings. Their message was: run, run! Mother kept repeating this to Father all the time. Father believed that we were local residents, citizens of Yugoslavia and that we were not in any danger. However, in the end, they decided that we should seek refuge in Sarajevo. Mother's relatives lived there and, according to Father's officer friends, Sarajevo, with its surrounding hills, would be well defended in the event of war.



*Jozef comes from a south Serbian Jewish Sephardic family: in this 1937 photograph, father Dr Haim Baruhović is in uniform, beside him is mother Sida (Simha); little Jozef is sitting in the front row*

Father went more and more frequently on manoeuvres and would be away for days on end. We left for Sarajevo. For a while we lived in peace there. Then one day mother suddenly woke me and my sister up, took us in her arms and hurried down to the basement with us. The

bombing began. At that time we were living in Obala, in a pleasant and spacious apartment belonging to Mother's brother. There were explosions echoing outside. As soon as the all-clear sounded for the end of the danger, Mother gathered up some essentials, we made bundles and went out into the street. Outside there was already a river of people fleeing. We set off towards the Prica family. Ognjen Prica's sister was a good friend of my mother from her school days. They lived in a modest house outside Sarajevo. When we arrived, their house was already full of refugees. We settled in a corner of the room. That is where we were during the second bombing. At one moment during the bombing there was a terrible explosion and we all fell to the floor. The room filled up with smoke and dust. As soon as the all-clear sounded for the end of the air raid, we ran out of the house into the street and headed for the hills. Beside the house where we had found shelter, there was a now a huge, gaping hole, made by the bomb which had fallen there.

We spent a few more days in the hills and then a rumour spread that the war was over. We went down to Sarajevo and headed for our apartment. There were German soldiers and German motor vehicles in the streets, with unfurled flags and swastikas on them. Our first contact with the Germans was when they came to our apartment and took two leather armchairs. They needed furniture for the Command which had been set up somewhere near our apartment. They were also taking furniture from other apartments. A few days later they returned the two armchairs. Soon the measures against Jews began. From the balcony of our apartment we watched thieves remove the copper cladding from the Kal Grande Temple. A curfew was also introduced for Jews and Mother was required to wear a yellow star. Before long a commissioner moved into our apartment and we had to move out of our pleasant home in Obala. We moved into a bedsit owned by mother's other sister, Esperanca, at 1 Petrarkina Street. Soon the arrests began, with people being taken away to camps, shot and hanged. They shot Ognjen Prica, as an old communist, along with several other prominent Jews. The deportation of Jews to camps also began. A Black Mariah, a truck converted into a windowless bus, painted black, took dozens of Jews to camps every night. In the beginning, no one knew where they were being taken. When people learnt this, and heard about the conditions in which they were living, the remaining families began sending parcels with food, but soon a rumour spread that parcels should not be sent because there was no information about whether these people were

even still alive and that the Ustaša were opening the parcels, taking the food and replacing it with stones. Then word went around that people should convert to Catholicism and be baptised. This baptism needed to be paid for. But even baptism didn't help. They would take people to camp baptised or not. I learnt all about this by listening to Mother talking to her sister Esperanca. With the constant talk about hanging and shooting, I also tried to hang myself. I tied around my neck a rope from a curtain rail and jumped from the bed. There was a strong pain and I began to suffocate. Mother ran to me and took the rope from my neck. I was scarred from this for quite a long time.

One day we went to the Army Command. Mother knew that a friend of my father - an officer from Zagreb - was in Sarajevo. I think that his name was Nardeli and that he had become a colonel in the home guard. Mother wanted us to get out of Sarajevo at any price. She went to see Nardeli and asked him to arrange for passes for us. He received us and asked us to wait. He went to an adjacent office and soon we heard shouting in German from there. Mother quickly took me by the hand and we fled his office. The German officer was shouting at the home guard colonel for allowing himself to be involved in helping a Jew.

After this incident it was as if there was no hope for salvation. We had all prepared bundles which stood on the table, because we expected the Black Mariah to pick us up any night. However, soon after, there appeared at our door a Croat named Ante, a Catholic, he worked for the husband of Mother's second sister, Erna, from Mostar. He took me by the hand, led me straight to the railway station and took me to Mostar. A few days later my mother arrived with my sister Rašela, who was barely two at the time. Mother's sister Erna and her husband David had managed to bribe the home guard colonel. They got my mother and sister to Mostar in a rented passenger vehicle. They got a few more members of Mother's immediate family to Mostar in the same way.

Unfortunately, mother's third sister Esperanca and her brother Moric did not manage to save themselves. They ended up in Jasenovac.

After a few days of our stay in Mostar they took us to the police. They locked us up in a single-storey building which I suppose was meant to be the prison. Because it was only one floor, I opened the window, jumped out and began to run. However the guard at the entrance grabbed me and put me back in "prison". They kept us there for two or three days and then let us go.

Life in Mostar under Italian rule was relatively safe. They enrolled me in school because I could neither read nor write. This schooling didn't last long. My Uncle David, who was a religious man, hired a rabbi who gave me lessons in Judaism.

The winter of 1941 was unusually cold. The water froze in the taps and the rooms we slept in were cold. There was a great food shortage. We needed to flee once more. We heard that the Italians in Hercegovina were to surrender to the Ustaša. This meant camp and certain death. Mother decided that we should seek shelter in Priština, my father's home town. We were given a pass by the Italians. This wasn't free either. My good Uncle David, the husband of Mother's second sister, Erna, gave an Italian commissioner a valuable collection of postage stamps in exchange for the pass.



*Jozef from his childhood days,  
1945*

Again we set out on a journey. Through Dubrovnik, Durrës and Prizren, we arrived in Priština. Father's family were living there, under Italian rule. We stayed in Priština for a couple of months. Mother sold our house and, with the money she raised, we set off, further into the unknown south. We reached Skadar. An Albanian police officer came to the hotel in which we were staying and questioned Mother about where she was from and why we had come. They let us go. Soon we found an apartment with the widow of an officer. We used to call her "Nanny Roz".

In 1943, Fascist Italy capitulated. It didn't take the Germans long to occupy the whole of Albania. They captured the Italians, their former allies, and sent them to prisoner-of-war camps.

We hid under false names and without any documents. At the time my father was in German captivity as a Yugoslav Army officer and doctor. My sister Rašela was four at the time and I was eight. Albania and Skadar – the city in which we were hiding – were soon flooded with German troops. Based on our experience with the Germans and Ustaša

back in Sarajevo, from where we had narrowly escaped deportation to Jasenovac, my mother decided that it was dangerous for us to stay in the apartment we had been living in up to then. She decided that we should change our place of residence once more. This was not easy. Following a great deal of searching and many difficulties, she found a tiny room in the Muslim part of town. So we moved from the Christian-Catholic area to the Muslim area. The Christian and Muslim parts of the town were several kilometres apart. However in terms of lifestyle and customs, it seemed as though they were separated by centuries. Now we needed to adapt to the new surroundings and adopt a new way of life. The most difficult thing of all was coming up with a story which would be acceptable to our new and curious neighbours. They were very interested in learning who we were and why we had come to live there. My mother invented a story which wasn't very different from our real life. The one thing she omitted was the fact that we were Jewish. So we became Muslims, refugees from Yugoslavia, "foreigners". Again we changed our names. My mother Simba became Zaida, I changed from Josip to Jusuf and my sister Rašela was now called Ajša.

It seemed that we would wait for the end of the war in a state of relative safety in the Muslim area, hidden behind the tall walls of Muslim courtyards and houses, along with the landlord's family. Mother even found me a job. As a hardworking Jewish woman she couldn't stand watching me wander the streets idly all day. She found me employment with a dentist. His office was close to the apartment in which we lived. My mother was very proud and happy that I would no longer be wandering the streets and my modest earnings became significant for our reduced domestic budget. We were living on the money from the sale of the house and it was melting away rapidly; already we were running out of money to live on. In the office of my boss, the dentist, I did all the dirty work. I was the youngest apprentice, and quite unqualified. I cleaned everything: dental instruments and the office, the waiting room and the other rooms. I also emptied the dentist's office spittoon.

However this period of relative calm did not last long. It was as though fate had decided to toy with us some more.

It all started on the day our landlord appeared at our door. He cheerfully told us that he would need our room for his son who was getting married. He gave us just a few days to find new accommodation and move out.



It didn't matter any more whether his son was really getting married or whether this was just an excuse for him to throw us out. Mother had two or three days in which to find new accommodation. The difficult wandering and searching through the unfamiliar city in search of a roof began again. She took me with her all the time, holding me by the hand. I served as some kind of proof that we were really refugees and also good and decent people. In those war days it was incomprehensible that a woman should be looking for accommodation on her own. We went from street to street in search of an apartment, at first in our neighbourhood and then further and further away in various parts of the city. We knocked on many doors. Mother begged and implored, prepared to accept any kind of accommodation, any kind of little room, even a shed! But it was all in vain. Even the story that we were refugees, that we were well-behaved and quiet children, didn't help, nor did Mother's promises to pay the rent on time. People who were themselves nervous because of the war and the insecure times did not want new tenants. Through half-open gates they would barely hear us out, then would always give the same reply: there are no rooms, no accommodation. Mother was gripped by a feeling of despair and I was unable to help her.

Finally, following many unsuccessful attempts, there was a glimmer of hope. On the very outskirts of the city, in a settlement which was virtually illegal, a few dozen metres from a German barracks, there was a tiny single-story house for rent. The little house consisted of two spaces – one room and a utility space. It was located in a small and dirty yard without a single tree in it. There was a well in front of the house which was the only source of water for drinking, cooking and all other requirements.

Overjoyed to have found any kind of accommodation, even such as this, Mother agreed to all the landlord's terms. The landlord, a big, tall Albanian with a white *qeleshe*<sup>1</sup> asked that we take good care of his little house and land, and that my sister and I refrain from causing any damage, that we pay rent on time, that is to say that we regularly set money aside for the rent and give it to him when he comes down from the mountain. And finally, that we take care of five bags of grain which he left in our room and protect it from various pests. He had brought the grain to sell it but, not having succeeded, he left it in the room. The landlord went back up to the mountains and we were left alone, in an

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<sup>1</sup> The traditional skullcap worn by Albanian men.

unfamiliar neighbourhood, on the outskirts of the city, next to the wire fence of the German barracks. But we weren't alone for long.

At this time the German troops were already withdrawing, so rumour had it, from Greece. This was no longer the victorious army which had conquered the whole of Europe but they were still quite strong, well-organised and well-armed, and capable of inflicting quite a lot more evil in their death throes.

The German organisation Todt was to provide accommodation for these troops. Very soon all free apartments and buildings near the barracks were requisitioned for the needs of the German Army. Many Albanians from the settlement, sensing the danger ahead, withdrew of their own accord and abandoned their homes. They sought shelter in other parts of town or went to the countryside. The German commission in charge of inspecting apartments came to us as well. They looked at our little home and requisitioned the small empty room across from ours. We were separated from this room by a narrow hall, no more than a metre in width. They sealed the room and left. Soon four German soldiers appeared. They removed the seal and moved in. Now we were living almost in direct physical contact with the Germans. We were with them under the same roof and practically sharing the same apartment – a Jewish refugee family and four *Wermacht* soldiers. It was especially difficult for my mother to decide how to behave towards these soldiers, because she spoke good German.

When she was a young child, Mother had spent three years in Vienna. She studied singing and learnt German well, with a Viennese accent. Now, under these circumstances, she didn't know whether speaking German could be life-saving or fatal for us. She had to make a decision on whether to engage the soldiers in conversation immediately and reveal that she spoke German, or to behave as if she understood nothing. But if she should forget herself, and inadvertently expose herself with a gesture or a move, show that she understood what they were talking about! And what if they suspected that she was eavesdropping on their conversations? She decided to speak to them. When she did so they were astonished. Where was she from? How did she come to speak German? Where did she learn to speak German? How had she strayed so far as to end up here? The soldiers showered her with questions. There, on the outskirts of a small Albanian town, a woman who speaks good German and, on top of everything, with a Viennese accent. It soon emerged that the soldiers were also Viennese and were

cursing Hitler, they wanted “the blood to start pouring from his eyes”. Over the next few days, contact was established and some kind of life together began. Mother washed their coarse army clothes and overcoats and her hands were bleeding. She, the wife of a royal officer, who before the war had had a maid and a batman, was now washing the linen of German soldiers! Sometimes she would bake them a cake or a pie and, in return, they would give us cans of meat and other food from their army rations. Our savings were almost completely spent. We needed to manage in various ways.

We and the neighbourhood children, boys from nine to ten, lived quite a carefree life during those days. We wandered around the surrounding woods and clearings, collecting snails, turtles and firewood. We didn't go to school. We were barely literate. It was a special challenge for us to trade with the Russian prisoners. The bravest among us used to exchange goods across the wire fence of the barracks with the prisoners of war.

These were Russians who had joined the German troops as auxiliary employees. They agreed to work for the Germans and enjoyed a certain freedom of movement, but were not allowed outside the compound. We bought wine and other alcoholic beverages for them from the nearby taverns. In return they would give us canned food from their rations, clothing and office supplies. The exchange took place at the back, behind the barracks, between strands of barbed wire which had been stretched apart. The German guard sometimes pretended not to see us but, if we went too far he would shout at us and we would scatter. We sold the office supplies to bookshops in town and kept the clothing and the food.

Sometimes the silence of a clearing would be disrupted by the roaring of engines in the distance and this would then get louder and louder. We would know that there was a German motorised convoy coming our way. We would then rush down the clearing and carefully approach it. The convoy would usually stop outside the German barracks. Despite the fact that they were withdrawing, these powerful motorised vehicles filled us with fear, mixed with curiosity and the desire to inspect them closely. The steel colossi were covered in dust and smelt of petrol and warm engine oil.

We watched them from a respectable distance while the German tank drivers, from the turrets of their motorised vehicles, would watch

us numbly, with no expression on their faces. After a short break the convoy would continue its journey to Yugoslavia.

The passing of the German motor convoys could not go unnoticed by the Allied fighters. They attacked them more and more frequently. British fighters came from their bases in Italy, flying over the Adriatic Sea and swept around raining down tracer rounds on the German columns. They also opened machine gun fire on the barracks next door to our home. We children found it very interesting to watch this. For a minute the sky over our heads would be filled with a rain of tracer rounds. The fighters opened machine gun fire on the German columns and ground positions, and the Germans responded strongly from their four-barrel anti-aircraft machine guns. The rounds flew past the wings and fuselages of the fighters. We never even considered the possibility that a British pilot might make a mistake and pour his deadly rain of gunfire on us.



*Jozef's father, Haim, was a prisoner of war in the Biberach camp; in this 1942 photograph he is in the front row wearing a white officer's jacket*

Occasionally, very high in the sky, in strict formation, with a sound like dull thunder, American bomber squadrons – flying fortress-  
es – also passed. They would leave long, white trails behind them. We would try to count the aircraft. There were hundreds of them and they

were heading for Romania and Germany. There they would dump their deadly cargo and return the same way. The Germans didn't even try to stop them.

One day a tall German officer appeared at our door. He was serious. He had a large, red dog on a leash. He threw me and my sister out of the room and stayed alone with my mother. A sharp, guttural German accent and my mother's sobbing voice were soon heard from the room.

After half an hour of shouting and weeping, the officer and his dog came from the room and, behind him, our mother, as white as a ghost. What had happened? The rumour had reached the ears of the German officer – intelligence officer – that living near the barracks was a woman who spoke fluent German with a Viennese accent. She lived in the same house in which German soldiers were accommodated. In the land of the eagles, this Balkan back country, such a combination of circumstances was certainly very suspicious. Especially at this delicate time when the Germans were withdrawing. They needed to get themselves out of Greece, work their way through the Albanian gorges, pass through Yugoslavia and somehow reach Austria and Germany with as few casualties as possible. The routes and times of their withdrawal had to be kept as secret as possible. The officer wanted to know who this woman was and what she was doing so close to the German barracks and the German troops. Mother's sangfroid and father's letters from captivity, written on a special form for German prisoners of war, verified with the stamp of the camp, probably saved our lives once again. It was clear to the officer that he had before him the wife of a Jewish prisoner of war, because the name indicated unambiguously that he was a Jew. As for her, perhaps she was Aryan and perhaps she wasn't. But this was not longer important. He had more important business to attend to and he left.

All around us, events indicated that the end of the war was approaching. German motorised convoys passed almost every day, they would stop only briefly and continue. On some gigantic trucks, holes in the windshields from machine-gun fire could be seen. In the barracks and the surrounding buildings, German soldiers were burning documents, papers, furniture and anything that seemed unnecessary. We children would enter the barracks and the surrounding buildings without fear. We took whatever seemed useful, whatever we thought we might need. The Russians were drinking more and more alcohol. And

we kept running back and forth from the tavern to the barracks. Our tenants were packing and waiting for movement orders.

Once more fate demanded that my mother, a gentle and sensitive woman, show courage and presence of mind. We were again visited by a German officer, a different one. With him he had a terrified young woman. Again they threw my sister and me from the room, and then my mother's penetrating weeping and the rough male voice of the officer were heard from inside the room. After a short conversation, the officer and the young woman left the room. What had happened? The young woman had been used by the Germans for entertainment and now, because they were withdrawing, she had become a burden they needed to get rid of. They wanted to leave her with us, with the woman who spoke German. But my mother was strongly opposed to this. From her moral standpoint it was not permissible for this woman to stay with us even for a moment, although the unfortunate woman could not have made any significant change to our life as it was. The officer and the woman packed up and left.

Finally the day of liberation dawned. There was shooting all night, the explosions echoed. We had no idea who was shooting who or why. The following day it was completely calm. No joyous celebrations, no welcoming of liberators. Total peace! As though the people of the land of eagles were not used to public expressions of sentiment, or perhaps they didn't know what awaited them with the new authorities. They were on their guard. Yet another unpleasant surprise awaited us later that day. Sharp German commands were heard in the distance. Mother shuddered. "What, are they back again?" was her first question.

Later we learnt that the Partisan army had engaged a German officer, a prisoner, to train Partisan units in basic military skills. We were happy that we had survived all this and now we needed to think about how we would return home. We had no means of support and I had to continue my tours of the barracks and collecting things that we could perhaps sell. Now the owners were new people. On one of these tours, when I tried to collect some coal for heating, a Partisan guard grabbed me and my friend by the hand. He put us in prison. After several hours spent in the Partisan prison, he let us out as we sincerely repented and promised that we would mend our ways. Soon we left for Tirana with a Partisan pass and returned to Yugoslavia in a large convoy of Yugoslav trucks.

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*Rukula BENCION*

I WATCHED THEM KILL MY LOVED ONES



**R**ukula Bencion was born in Priština in 1925, to father Gavriel and mother Estera Navon. Her grandfather and grandmother, who lived with the family, perished at the very beginning of the war.

After the war she worked for the Economic Council of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia, which later changed its name to the Council for Economic Planning of the SFR Yugoslavia, until her retirement in 1982.

*She was married to Jakov Bencion.*

I was a girl of sixteen in an early year of secondary school when the first misfortunes occurred to me. While I was still at school, I knew nothing about the Holocaust. I would only see the sad and concerned faces of my parents, in constant fear that something would happen. I found it odd that they were preparing rucksacks ready to flee because all the events of this period were kept secret from me.

And then, at the beginning of 1941, when Jewish families and individuals from other countries and from occupied Serbia began to arrive in Priština and other towns in Kosovo and Metohija, I began to understand the truth about the concerns of my family and the dangers which awaited us.

Fleeing from death, with the plan of somehow reaching Palestine, Jews were assigned in Priština to various Jewish families because they

had no documents. They hoped that this was a temporary solution until they could in some way obtain the documents which would enable them to continue their southward journey.

The Jewish Community in Priština set up a group of young people responsible for assisting in finding accommodation and food, obtaining medications, clothing and footwear for elderly and unwell Jewish refugees. This group was led by the then rabbi Josif Levi and my brother Nisim Navon. The group was also responsible for obtaining false documents with bribes for the Jewish refugees so that they could continue their journey to the south.

Soon there was a deadly danger for all of us. The Germans entered Priština in April 1941. They immediately imposed measures against Jews. We were ordered to wear yellow armbands with the word "*Jude*" (Jew) on them. We became outlawed citizens who could be killed by anyone without having to answer for it.

The men were ordered to do compulsory labour in the quarry from six in the morning until six at night, under guard, and I was put in a group of Jewish women assigned to clean the public buildings used by the occupying forces, and the streets, also from six in the morning until six in the evening. I was only sixteen, the youngest in the group. Like the rest of my group, I was exposed to humiliation and insults, as well as frequent slaps in the face by the police guards or local people.

In the meantime the Gestapo brought four trucks and stole all my parents' belongings from the house and from a warehouse full of goods from my father's department store. While they did this the Gestapo men lined us up in the hallway, then killed my grandfather and grandmother, beat my father with rifles and kept hitting my mother, my brother and me with a pistol butt and a braided whip, on our heads and backs. From my grandfather's body they took the belt around his waist into which several generations' worth of gold and family jewellery, enormously valuable, were sewn. They also took a metal safe full of money and various kinds of securities.

This was one of the most difficult days of my life, full of sadness and fear. For the first time I was seeing corpses and beaten people, the people dearest to me. There was blood on the floor and, even today in my old age, I am unable to forget this sight.

After the funeral the Gestapo people chased us down to the basement, to sleep in our clothes on the concrete. My brother's hands were bloody from the hammer for breaking stones and mine from the broom



for street sweeping. I would wrap my hands in rags because I had neither bandages nor medications. Illness and hunger without any medicine took their toll. This lasted until May, 1941, and the surrender of this territory to the Italian authorities.

In February 1942, they deported me, along with my father and mother, under police guard, to a ghetto in Elbasan, Albania. There were another six Jewish families from Priština there, and the others were taken to Berat, also in Albania. At that time we had no information about my brother. Later we learnt that they had taken him from the quarry to be shot but that then instead of shooting him they sent him to prison in Priština, then to Tirana, and then, finally, in February 1942, he too had been brought to Elbasan, to the men's prison – a ghetto known as *Casa dei prigioneri*. After a long time my parents and I, who had known nothing about what had happened to him, learnt that he too had been brought there.

With daily physical labour, enduring hunger, illness and cold, we were in the ghetto from February 1942 to the end of August 1943, that is until just before Italy capitulated (on September 9, 1943), when the Germans once more occupied all of Albania, all prisons, camps and public institutions. Watching the Italian soldiers fleeing into the woods to avoid capture by the Germans, we realised we were in deadly danger and decided to flee. There were now no more guards or police, so we paid for a truck in which we escaped into the woods. Then, on horses and mules from a village we climbed deep into the mountains, to the village of Shen Gjergj, where the villagers put us in different houses, with six families, in the lofts of their barns with wooden roofs and stone walls. We were using false names.

We slept on ferns and covered ourselves with sheepskins. Instead of pillows we had wooden logs. We were without food, clothing or medicines, we were sick and had no water. Instead of water we melted snow, because we were at a height of 1,200 metres. We went out only at night because up above us, above the villages, there were German motorised convoys cruising past looking for Partisans. We fed ourselves eating grass, whey and cornbread which we would get from the house owner or from the shepherd, Đafer. The village teacher, Elmaz Mema, used to secretly bring us a handful or two of beans. He suspected that we were Jews, although we all had false Muslim names. The owner of the house was named Kaplan Bala and his son was Destan Bala. We lived in fear of being denounced to the Germans and were

always hungry and sick. Mother and I were skin and bones. We were both sick and had no medicine for the various illnesses we contracted during our time in the barn. We were fighting for our lives. We lived like this until the end of April 1945 when, finally, we travelled by cart and on foot to arrive at our plundered and empty house.

Mother and I had to go immediately to seek medical treatment. My brother contracted pneumonia and a growth in the top right corner of his lung. Father died at the age of 53 as a consequence of the beating and a throat operation.

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*Mila KARAOGLANOVIĆ*

## SAVED BY THE HAND OF GOD



*M*ila Karaoglanović was born in Belgrade, on April 1, 1922, to father Isak Koen and mother Sarina, née Aladžem.

*She lives in São Paulo in Brazil.*

The war began on April 6 and my sister Sojka and her husband Riko fled to Skopje in the month of June. Riko's sister lived there, before the war she had married Dr Sima Amodaj. He was famous and much loved in Skopje because he would treat poor people without charge. Before the war broke out, the Yugoslav-German pact was annulled so, on March 27, people went out into the streets in mass protests in Belgrade. The young people were shouting "Better war than the pact – better the grave than a slave!" The Germans soon took their revenge for this by bombing Belgrade and occupying the country.

In August 1941, the Gestapo took my father to prison because he had refused to wear the yellow armband with the word "*Jude*" on it. Obviously someone denounced him. Ten days later he was shot with another 99 prisoners who they dragged out of prison. It was common

knowledge that for every German soldier killed they shot a hundred people.

The two of us were left behind, my aunt (my late mother's sister) and I. We had no contact with Sojka and Riko because, after the country broke up, Skopje went to Bulgaria, because the Bulgarian King Boris allowed German troops to pass through to attack Romania. We were living in fear and were also short of food. The men worked on the roads while we women worked as servants. I was working as well, in the German consulate. I washed dishes, and cleaned the stairs and the toilets. I would be given lunch there.

On July 29, 1941, the German occupation authorities ordered all Jewish men to report to the police at Tašmajdan. They separated out 100 of the men, put them into trucks and we never saw them again. A rumour spread that all the men would be rounded up and sent to camp. And this is exactly what happened, in September if my memory serves me. There was also a rumour that they would round up all the women and children.

My aunt had a shop in Sremska Street, near Terazije. The Germans seized this shop from her as soon as they arrived. My aunt was everywhere trying to get false documents with our photographs. Because she had been in trade for years, she had good connections. She obtained the documents, for a large sum of money. At this time we still didn't know what to do or where to go. We waited to see how the situation would develop. This was at the beginning of November, 1941. I was nineteen at the time, and my aunt was 42. One day I said to my aunt "What are we waiting for? If the Germans take us to camp that is certain death! Why don't we try to flee?" Then we made a plan. My aunt had some Jewish friends who lived in Rakovica and we made an arrangement with them to set off by train to somewhere in Serbia the following day. We didn't dare leave from the main railway station in Belgrade.

The next day, at dawn, dressed modestly and with scarves on our heads, we boarded a train for Leskovac. The German inspectors passed through and our documents passed the test. We arrived in Leskovac with just a small suitcase. To be on the safe side, we introduced ourselves as victims of a fire, from Belgrade. A bomb had fallen on our house and we had lost everything. We took the first room we found. One bed, one table. The room was damp and the winter harsh. We bought the most essential items and an electric hotplate.

We would spend most of the day in bed. One day, when we went out to buy something to eat (this was at the beginning of February), we saw a truck full of Jews and Gypsies. We discovered that they were taking them to be shot. This sight was so distressing for us that we decided to leave Leskovac immediately. We put our belongings in a small truck and went to Niš.

In Niš we rented a room with a few pieces of furniture in it. The Germans constantly made raids and inspected documents in the city. We would both put a piece of bread in our shopping bag and we had an agreement that, if they caught one of us, the other would run. But where to? In March my aunt went at least once to the railway station planning to befriend railway workers. No one could get on a train to travel to Skopje, but railway workers would come to Niš to repair carriages. When my aunt got to know a railway worker who was born in Skopje and she asked him if he knew Dr Sima Amodaj, he replied, laughing: "Well, he saved my wife's life!" So, by pure coincidence, there was a connection established.

We wrote a lengthy letter to Sojka and Riko and addressed it to Dr Sima Amodaj. When Sojka read the letter and learnt that we were alive, she wept tears of joy and, with the letter in her hand, ran off to find Riko. They needed to obtain documents showing we were Bulgarian and send them to us. Everything needed to be worked out very carefully. For our part, we needed to have a safe connection that would get us from Serbia, that is from Niš, to Predejane, the first place in the territory under Bulgarian occupation. We walked all night in the dark with our guides, over terrain full of holes and overgrown by dense forest. My aunt walked with great difficulty and I was practically pulling her along. We were lucky with our guides. We had paid them well and they could have killed us, knowing that we had money, without anyone finding out anything about it. At dawn we reached Predejane and there the guides handed us over to their connection, who took us to their place to rest and eat something. Early in the morning our host loaded his oxcart with wood and set off to the market to sell it. We walked behind him dressed as village women. At the railway station he waited until the train arrived. There were about twenty of us. A Bulgarian soldier was checking the documents. When he reached us, he bowed to us and returned our documents. We didn't understand this gesture, but I told my aunt that it was probably a sign of respect for an older person.

According to the documents we were Bulgarian women and that was why he bowed to us.

The train was full of Bulgarian soldiers. I pretended to be asleep. We reached Skopje station at midnight, took a horse-drawn cab and went to the address we had been given. The city empty, the only sound was that of the horse's hooves. Sojka had sensed we would come that night. When the cab stopped outside the house she dashed into the street and there was no end to our crying and hugging. We quickly went into the house so as not to attract attention. This was April 1942.

The situation in Skopje was becoming increasingly dangerous for Jews. The pressure of the Germans was being felt, despite the fact that none of them were actually in Skopje. Jews were required to wear yellow armbands and "*Jev žilište*" was written on the doors of apartments in which Jews lived. It was clear to us that we needed to prepare for flight. As Dr Amodaj, the husband of Riko's sister, enjoyed a great reputation, he found us an Albanian who was willing to get us across to Albania for a large sum of money. When Sojka was fleeing to Skopje with her husband, my father had given her 100 pounds. The Albanian, who was born in Albania but lived in Skopje, knew all the highways and byways. He gave his solemn word to Dr Amodaj that nothing would happen to us.

Riko was afraid and hesitant about leaving, but Sojka was persistent, firmly set in her belief that salvation should be sought in flight. The Albanian dressed her as a Muslim woman. He was walking in front of us and a friend of his was at the back. We moved at night, in pitch black, over inaccessible mountains, walking over stones and through water, with no one saying a word. At dawn we arrived in Uroševac, which already belonged to Albania. They immediately took them to the *questura*. The *questor* knew everything and, when Sojka had rested a little, he took them to the house of a family.

Rifat returned to Skopje with Sojka's letter and so, in great secrecy, we started organising bringing the second group to be saved. This might have been in November 1942. However, in March 1943, the Germans rounded up all the Jews who happened to be in Skopje at the time and no one ever saw them again. Šukica was in this group as were some other friends of mine from Hashoimer Hatzair.

In the second group that Rifat brought across, there were five of us, with two guides. We left Skopje. On the outskirts of the city we threw away our armbands and Rifat gave us Muslim costumes and veils. My

aunt was walking with great difficulty. We helped her and practically pulled her along so that she wouldn't give up. At dawn we reached Uroševac. The Albanian police were waiting for us there and they took us to the *questura*. Rifat and his friend disappeared. The most important thing was that the *quaestor* was prepared, because Sojka had befriended him. When they introduced us to the quaestor, he said that everything was all right and that he would move us in with a family.

It was an emotional reunion with Sojka. Although only two weeks had passed, it had been very dangerous for all of us because we hadn't known how far we could rely on the *quaestor's* promises. The important thing was that, as he had promised, they did not send us back to the Germans.



*Mila, in mourning after her mother's death, walks with childhood friend Emil Koen, 1939*

Soon after this he got us to Priština, where there were other Jewish families living as refugees. We stayed there for a while. Once about fifty Jews had gathered, we were put on a bus and taken to Kavaja.

In Kavaja we had *confino libero* status. Every person was required to report every day to the *carabinieri* and sign the register. We rented an Albanian house and began to sew. My aunt somehow managed with food and cooking and Riko did some other work. It was enough to feed us. Like the Italians, the Albanians behaved decently towards us. There were about fifteen or so Jewish refugee families in Kavaja. On Sundays,

we young people would gather, sing and entertain ourselves. That's the way things were until September 1943 when Italy capitulated. The Italians from the *carabinieri* told us "Now you're free. We'll destroy all

the documents and you manage on your own, because the Germans are coming here.”

We fled into the mountains, although it was dangerous there too. And Riko came down with malaria and we had to go somewhere he could find medical treatment. We took out the false documents with which we had hidden in Yugoslavia and fled to Skadar. We rented a room with a kitchen in a one-storey house, with windows overlooking the courtyard. We began to sew once again. Riko began making briefcases with a friend of his. It wasn't a problem to find the leather and the shops happily bought these briefcases. Our landlady, and everyone else we came into contact with, thought we were fire victims from Belgrade. Allegedly we had lost everything when a bomb fell on our house and we had come here to try our luck. Things were relatively peaceful until one day two Gestapo men burst into our courtyard and started shouting. Sojka saw them and quickly got into bed. They rounded us up roughly and took us to the Gestapo on suspicion that we were Jews. We were incredibly lucky to be released, only the hand of God saved us. I have never heard of anyone else ending up with the Gestapo on suspicion of being Jewish and getting out alive!

We had been denounced by Šefkija, an Albanian who was collaborating with the Germans. But he had been summoned to Tirana and this was what saved us. They interrogated each of us separately. We asked for an interpreter, even though we spoke some German, so we could prepare what we would say. At one moment one of the soldiers was telling the commander what wonderful leather briefcases Riko made. He was very interested in this and said he would call in to buy a briefcase. This convinced them that we were not Jews, because Jews aren't tradesmen: Jews are traders or bankers, or involved in other kinds of business.

When we returned home, Sojka said “If you hadn't come back I would have killed myself!” We couldn't flee straight away, we had to wait for the commander to come and buy his briefcase. Of course he came, was given it as a gift, and all was well in the end. The next day we packed our most important things. We didn't even say goodbye to the landlady, but went immediately to the other end of Skadar. Sojka and Riko rented a room, and my aunt and I took another room, far away from them. We almost never went out.

In the spring of 1944, there were less and less Germans in Skadar and they eventually disappeared altogether. We were still there when



the liberation came. We made contact with Dr Amodaj in Skopje. The Fascists had spared him and his family because they needed doctors. They had heard nothing of us and couldn't believe we had saved ourselves.

As soon as Belgrade was liberated, in October 1944, we returned from Skopje. In Belgrade we learnt that my father had been shot as one of a group of a hundred men who had been taken out of prison in August 1941.

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*Tamara ALONI*

## OVER THE MOUNTAINS INTO ALBANIA



*Tamara Aloni was born in 1936, in Banjaluka, to mother Rašela, née Vajnštajn and father Alfred Abraham Turnauer. From her marriage to David Aloni she has three sons. Avik finished geography and tourism and works for the Eged bus company. Doron is a mechanical engineer and an Israeli Navy officer and the youngest, Gil, completed commercial school*

*After the second world war, in Haifa, Tamara completed training as a nursery school teacher for children up to two years of age. She lives in Haifa.*

As soon as my twin sister Zlata and I were born, my father and mother separated.

My grandmother felt that Mother, because she was now alone with two children, should return to Skopje where she could take care of us while Mother worked as a seamstress. We lived in Skopje until the war broke out in 1941.

My mother's sister Tamara had a Serb friend, Savo Poleksić. When Savo saw what was happening to Jews in Belgrade, he decided to save Tamara. He took her to a village in the Banat part of Romania, to his mother, and hid her from the eyes of the occupying force. There Tamara hid in a dugout during the day and only came out at night. No one but Savo's mother and her sister knew about Tamara in the dugout. At the

same time, Savo sent a message to Tamara's family in Skopje. The message read that they should all get out of town as soon as possible and immediately flee towards Albania, so that they should not share the fate of the Belgrade Jews, who had all disappeared and about whom no one had any information.

Mother took this warning very seriously and immediately decided that we should flee. It was a very brave decision for her to head for a completely unknown place with two children. I don't remember, because I was only six at the time, and Mother never told me, what roads we took while we fled. I know that we crossed mountains and that Mother would pay people to take us across borders. And so we reached Albania, a place by the sea. I don't remember the name of the town, but I do remember that my sister and I went to the seashore to collect driftwood to use as fuel for heating and cooking.

In this seaside town we lived in a little room. I don't know what we lived on, but I presume that Mother supported us by sewing.

I remember my sister and I going to school. I think we attended two years of primary school there. I still remember our teacher, who wore a black veil over her face and, every morning without exception, would slap us across the fingers with a ruler.



*Tamara today, with her husband, daughter-in-law and son*

We moved and changed accommodation frequently until finally, I don't know how, we arrived in Bari in Italy. From Bari we got to Santa Cesarea. At this time the war ended.

We were then transferred to Milan where the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee took us in, fed us, dressed us and put us up in some facility where *madrihim* (youth leaders) had arrived, sent by Sohnut. They were responsible for gathering abandoned Jewish children without parents and taking them to Palestine. Mother agreed we should go to Palestine, so we were taken to Florence, to Villa Poggiolini, where there was a centre for children to await travel to Palestine. The centre was called *Aliyat Hanoar Hadati* (Youth Aliyah of the Religious). We were there for a year and a half, learning Hebrew, the Tanah and the Torah in preparation for our departure for Palestine.



*Life fulfilled: Tamara's grandchildren*

In October 1947, we set off for Palestine on a ship called the *Transylvania*. We travelled with the Fuks family as their children. They had a passport and a certificate issued by the authorities allowing them to move into Palestine with their family.

On our arrival in Palestine, we were given accommodation in Kfar Hanor Hadate – Kfar Hasidim (Religious Youth Village – Village of the Orthodox). This was a farming village whose founders were Hasidic Orthodox. We immediately began attending school, but were also obliged to do two hours of farm work every day after school.

Six months later our mother arrived with her second husband, and took us from Kfar Hanoar. This was the beginning of normal life with our stepfather, who was a second, good father to us and with whom our mother had our brother Heskijel. We settled in Haifa where I still live.

At the end of this incomplete story of my life journey, the story of the greatest tragedy that befell us, I blame myself for not asking Mother about our time of hiding and wandering around. I have the feeling that I am missing part of my life which I think would be very important for me to pass on to my children as a legacy.



VII

IN PRISON IN SARAJEVO



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*Jozef Hajim KABILJO*

## YOU ARE OUR DEAR BROTHER



*Jozef Hajim Kabiljo wrote his wonderfully precise and simple testimony on how he survived the times of the Holocaust at the age of 87. He sent it to the Federation of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia in 1984 from Israel, where he lived to the end of his life.*

*His story shows that he was with the home guard in Pale when the liberation came. From an Ustaša prison, together with a small group of Jewish tradesmen whose work was needed, he was turned over, under guard, to the home guard.*

*The reason his story ends there can be seen at the end of his testimony in the words he quotes of the home guard captain.*

When the German Army was ruthlessly demolishing Belgrade, and when they bombed Sarajevo in the early dawn of April 14, 1941, I was sheltering with my wife and two children in a nearby village. Late that afternoon, to our great distress, Yugoslavia capitulated.

Returning home, we found a completely demolished apartment. We sat and wept. Mustafa and Izetaga Hardaga were my good friends and, at the same time, they were the owners of the rented building in which I ran a plumbing shop and a factory for lead pipes. They had a large, Bosnian style house at the very corner of the Jewish Primary School, across the street from the Sephardic Temple and the Gairot

Palace, with eight shops and, on the first floor, was the Hadruga brothers' apartment. Mustafa sold Persian carpets and Izetaga had a shop next door to the Husretbeg Mosque in the market and sold everything "from modern shoes to clogs". Their wives were called Zejneba and Bahrija. They were religious, patriarchal and wore long, hooded over-dresses.

Having heard that many had fallen dead at the Mejtaš crossroads, and that all houses had been demolished, these true friends, all of them seeming out of breath, ran over to see what had happened to us and whether we were alive.

The four of them took the four of us straight back to their house without a word. We hadn't saved anything, we entered the home of the Hardaga family with a knapsack and, as though at the house of a parent, we were welcomed and entertained more than well, so much so that we forgot ourselves and did not think about the great misery which was happening around us.

I withdrew all my money from the Melaha Bank to quickly redo an apartment, despite the fact that the Hardaga brothers advised me with the following words: "Don't leave our house before the war ends," and took me by the hand to their basement to show me that they had money. They embraced me and said "You are our dear brother, no matter what your religion is."

War psychosis changes from one day to the next. It began to get worse and worse for us Jews. We were outside the law. There was a lot of robbery and extortion. We were banned from the food market. Deportations to the death camps began. The appointed two commissioners to my shop who promised me the moon and managed to get me some yellow identification from the Police Administration. This meant that I was protected because I was needed by the Independent State of Croatia and they asked me to cooperate with the commissioner because, if I did not, I would be sent to a camp. There was a large notice written in oil letters on the wall of the Hardaga house. They were making death threats to anyone who hid and helped Jews. Hardaga tore this notice off the wall at night.

Embittered, we watched from behind the curtains of our room as, under the very nose of the Ustaša guards, the worst Sarajevo scum demolished our temple and plundered everything the army couldn't demolish with dynamite. Its beauty and the size of its copper dome had made this new Sephardic temple unique in the world.



Zejneba's father, a general goods trader in Pazarić, often came to visit the Hardaga family, as though they were his own, bringing them big bags of food. He revealed to us the secret that in his home he was hiding the family of Izidor H. Papo, his wife and two children. Papo had a thread factory in Sarajevo in Kračule Street. He was closely linked in trade with Zejneba's father, Ahmed Sadik Šarlop. He managed to get the Papo family across to Italy. The Ustaša butchers learnt this, so they arrested him and threw him in the Sarajevo prison known as Hasan Kule. They then transferred Sadik, with another forty Sarajevo prisoners, to the notorious Jasenovac death camp. Right in front of the camp entry gate, on the orders of Luburić, they killed them all with daggers.

The Hardagas were welcoming and, above all, kind to us, but the view from our window showed the Gestapo office, the Ustaša police, the joint Sephardic and Ashkenazi Community and the Bar-Kobhe sports hall all within a circle of 200 metres. The sports hall served for the receipt and sending of parcels to inmates in camps and prisons. A somewhat smaller "Kal di Kapon" served as an assembly point for sending people to compulsory labour. The helpless, whom no one wanted, were put in the other rooms and it was also an assembly place for the elderly who were being sent off to camps. My shop was also inside this circle. Within this circle I would run into many of my fellow-citizens with their many lamentations and desperate protests and surprise at the fact that I was still moving freely around and still with my family.

It was for a short while that this miracle of a yellow identification card saved me, despite the fact that I was obediently working for my commissioners. This would have worn out nerves of steel.

With tears in our eyes we explained to our hosts our desire to return to our uncompleted apartment and we were left without enough words to thank them.

One morning the commissioners, Stipo Stjepanović and Bruno Eterle, were waiting for me outside the door of the shop with a tough question: did I know who had destroyed the machinery for the production of lead pipes? After a short conversation, the commissioners went to the police administration to report this rather awkward matter.

The workers who operated these machines did not appear for work that day and for us, this was a risky situation. We needed to flee immediately.

Vlado Zubović, an officer, had married a Serb woman and in order to avoid being captured, he defected to the home guards. But it was pos-

sible to speak to him. He was my next-door neighbour. We sought advice from him on how to get out of this grave situation.

Vlado got a home guard pass for himself, his wife and two children for Trebinje so that he could leave my wife and children there with his mother-in-law.

Major Radović, the head of the chemical laboratory in the army home-guard hospital was my friend from skiing on Mt Jahorina. I confided in him face to face and he took me by the hand straight to the hospital prison and made sure that I got everything I required. I changed and got into bed. Dr Leon Pinto was doing compulsory labour in the hospital, as a doctor, wearing a home guard uniform with a Red Cross armband. He was examining patients and was shocked when he stood by me. I quietly told him how I came to be in the prison hospital and he put the chart with the diagnosis on my bed, squeezed my hand and said "We don't know each other". I lay like this for almost a month. A molar began hurting me really badly and I reported this and was given a referral slip for a dentist.

A *Volkesdeutscher* took out my molar and looked at me sternly. At one in the morning, the night duty officer in the hospital, with the police administration guard, signed for the prison guard that the police were taking me over. I was taken to the blockhouse of the Marijin Dvor area. There they recorded my personal details, the guard strapped on his revolver and took me along the coast straight to Miljacka, to the Hasan Tower, to the Beledije prison.

The prison door guard let us in and signed the handover document for the guard, hailed the turnkey and ordered him to throw me into number four. With no conversation with me whatsoever, the iron door clicked behind me.

Inside the cell it was dark, only the glimmer of a tiny light bulb in the hallway allowed me to get a glimpse of and feel the raised wooden bed with about twenty inmates, all huddled together in the middle and deep asleep. I felt around for a small place for myself on the bench and heard quiet whispering in Spanish. I leaned my ear closer and made out that they were accusing a tavern keeper who had denounced them. They took no notice of me at all, but I took the hand of the one who was whispering and addressed him with the following words: "*Ken sos tu?*" (Who are you?).

"I fled from the hell of Belgrade where there are no longer any Jews and, travelling from village to village, I finally got to Sarajevo, to

my cousin. My name is Jozef Kabiljo.” I shuddered, but didn’t interrupt him. “I was born in Sarajevo. Two decades ago my father had a men’s suit shop next to the Catholic Cathedral. He moved to Belgrade. The Academic painter Danijel Kabiljo Danilus is my cousin. I completed primary school in the *maldarim*. My teacher was Avram Altarac.” I held him to me with both arms and wiped the flood of tears from my face.

“I remember you well, you were my school friend, you used to give me half your breakfast so that I would draw you a monkey, and always only a monkey. The other students got fed up with it and started calling you *el majmuniko*.” (monkey man). Next to him was a big, young-looking man, with a round face, the son of the market gardener Katan, a big family in Velika Avlija, next to the big, old temple. They were all taken to Jasenovac and all killed.

“My name is the same as yours, Jozef Kabiljo,” I said.

At that moment the door opened and the turnkey interrupted the conversation. Like a brigand he woke up each and every person and shouted at the top of his voice:

“If anyone knows anything about the water supply system, come with me.” I was the first to stand next to him, then the young-looking one, my apprentice Brozović, stood next to me and kissed my hand.

We rushed down the stairs, straight into the big storage area. The fire-extinguishing equipment was there. All the lights were on. Inadvertently I stepped into the water and the guard shouted sharply “Next to the wall!” All four walls were lined with highlanders from the villages of the Trebević mountain. Now they all instantly raised their hands and pressed themselves with their palms against the wall.

I immediately noticed that the problem was drinking water. I looked for the hydrant, for shut-off valves and for the water meter. I closed all the valves I found and set off to recover the water. I gave each person a canvas bucket and, forming a chain, we bailed out a large quantity of water. Many villagers from Trebević and Jahorina recognised me. I asked them secretly “How on earth did you highlanders fall into the trap?”

“By deception, but now it’s too late, there’s no life for us any more.”

The day was dawning and the prison warden appeared but did not want to look at this great human misery. The guard took me to him in the office so I could explain everything to him. The guard told him that all the people were wet up to their knees. “May they all drop dead,”

he said, using the Ustaša vocabulary. Then he asked me “Are you a *chifut*?” (Jew).

“Yes I am.”

“Go back to the *chifut* cell.”

The turnkey on the long hallway on the first floor practically stuffed me into the elderly men’s *chifut* cell. This was more than horrifying at first glance. Not a single person could stretch out. They were all sitting with their legs crossed, and they were all in their old age. Squatting right next to the door was a tinsmith assistant, Maestro, with the worst case of itching. The Partisans had sent him from Crepoljsko to Sarajevo for medical treatment and someone there denounced him.

I took the only space there was, next to the cell toilet. With great difficulty I managed to convince the guard of the real state of things inside the cell. In the morning, the police doctor opened the tiny square window in front of which Maestro placed himself, his body and chest bleeding from scratching his terrible itching.

The same day, late in the afternoon, the prisoners from “Number 8” were ordered to each collect their things to move to a better prison, in the old police administration in Obala Vojvode Stepe. Before we left the guard took three of us and gave us a bucket each and some old sacking to scrub the long prison hallway. We worked skilfully and rapidly like true professionals.

We approached the remaining part of the stairs which led to the second floor, to the “office” for the interrogation of detainees, through which many communist patriots passed and did not come out alive, and neither did Benjamin Finci-Binjo, who died after brutal torture. He was thrown from the window of the prison cell on the second floor into the concrete-covered prison yard. The secretary of the local committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia in Sarajevo, Marijan Braun, and his fourteen-year-old brother Antun died the same way.

There were countless numbers of communists and progressive patriots in prison at the time of the elections of communist leaders Đuro Đaković and Dr Jokanović.

While washing the hallway we reached the stairs to the second floor at an unfortunate moment. I saw the guards carrying out a stretcher covered with an old blanket, from under which could be seen a head as yellow as wax. The man was holding on to the stretcher with his left hand. I recognised my good friend Foht. This was an encounter which I will never forget. He was an honourable patriot who didn’t follow in the

footsteps of the *Volksdeutschen*. He was a design engineer for central heating. He was married to the sister of Danijel Ozmo, an art teacher at the Sarajevo Secondary School, the son of parents who had eight children. He belonged to the Roman Petrović group of painters. He was taken to Jasenovac in 1941 and shot in 1942. His sister, Hana Ozmo, the secretary of Benevolencija, was also shot in Jasenovac.

At night, in a long column of the elderly, the feeble and crippled in cold and storm such as we had never seen before, we stepped into the deep snow, making a path through it. When we fell, only the guards had the strength to pull us up, by force or by beating us. I was dragging under my arm the exhausted Danon, a flour trader. The column dragged itself with great difficulty, somehow reaching the great gates on the yard of the old Police Administration prison on the bank.

The big prison yard was also covered in snow. The elderly men could neither sit nor stand, and it was impossible to get to a certain room on the first floor because water from the frozen pipes and faeces from the toilet had spilled down the stairs. Somehow, with great difficulty, I climbed up to that floor with a guard. The guard woke the *Zimmerkommandant*, Altarac Čizmar while, in the other room, I found Judge Papo and five inmates lying on the bare, damp parquet floor with no covers. A few of the somewhat stronger of us from above dragged the old men along the ice as a human chain, while the superiors were stacking them up in the room like sardines. It is difficult to imagine such misery. It was here that I had a sad encounter with a good friend and good neighbour. We looked at each other sadly, and he whispered: "We'll sleep here together."

"How did you manage to get a straw mat into the prison?" I asked him.

"Here's how: just before the second world war, young King Petar made an unofficial visit to Sarajevo. In front of the Husret-Beg Mosque, the terrorists of the Croatian Ustaša movement shot at the king. The incident was hushed up, but the youth terrorists were tried and I was officially appointed to defend them. With my painstaking defence, I saved their necks.

"Ever since the day the Independent State of Croatia was proclaimed, they have been persecuting me constantly. In the month of November they arrested me and asked me to turn over my apartment to them and immediately after that they threw me in prison. My wife went to the court president to beg for mercy. He promised, and acknowl-

edged my merit on behalf of the Croatian movement and ruled that food and bedding could be brought to me. Prison Warden Lerec allowed my son to bring food and things, but then would not let him leave the prison. My son managed to escape. For four days now I have had no news of my son or my wife. I haven't told Lerec that my son is missing, nor have I received any decision. So, if the snow melts, I'm in Jasenovac."

The prison warden, Jozo Lerec, a tall man with a consumptive-looking face, was harassing everyone from the guards to the most desperate old men. He beat Judaći Koen, a tinsmith, with a lash because he dared to beg him to visit his wife in the hospital. She had jumped from a high window in a state of shock. In the big prison basement he discovered two eight-year-old children disguised in women's clothes. He chased them off to the men's camp.

One of these two children was the only child of the *hazan* of the temple of Bjelave, Josef Koen, famous as the owner of the Sarajevo Haggadah which travelled from Barcelona to Sarajevo and which many writers of international reputation have written about.

The guard obeyed the unusual order. He took them by their hands and, going from one room of prisoners to another, asked whose children they were. Koen's child was holding a prayer book tightly in his hand. They immediately recognised this religious child. He was a child of the temple, who often carried the children's Sefer Torah. They sent him to Čizmar Altarac's room.

The child was bright and immediately from the door recognised his father lying on the bare floor, and hugged and kissed him. He said that his mother had sent him to help him. The father was delirious with fever and asked him over and over again: "Whose are you, you good child?" He sat by his father's head and read passages from the prayer book he had learnt from his father, praying for his father's good health.

Beside them on the damp parquet was another very ill man – Levi "Kanja" the oldest Sarajevo second-hand goods dealer, from the outskirts of the city. They had carried him to the prison on a stretcher. This was a large, well-known community with a house below Bjela Tabija, next to Smrtna Stijena. Koen, in fever, was talking to God: "Almighty, have mercy on us who recognise you, praise the work of your goodness every day, and punish Satan who inflicts evil on you, not for our sake, but for the sake of our innocent children." The child was using a wet cloth to cool his father.

It was with great difficulty that we took him away, not to hear his father's death rattle.

Early in the morning the hearse came from the Konkordija undertakers. Judge Papo, Altarac Čizmar and I carried him out to the car in an open wooden coffin and put him in the car. Papo was pushing me to see him to the cemetery, but Lerec chased me away. Just two days later we also carried the second-hand goods dealer, Levi, to the hearse.

The second friendly child was jumping from one lap to another, and everyone by now knew that he was the child of Moni Altarac, a bright and always cheerful taxi driver and owner of a motor mechanic business. This was a large family, with ten children of the carpenter Avram Altarac, also known as *la kultura*, who would often be invited by the intelligentsia to spend a merry evening at the Šadrvan Tavern.

Moni married the daughter of Glaser, the manager of the Pinto-owned Šik factory. With his garage and mechanic business, Moni had a good reputation and so was absolutely indispensable to the Ustaša. When the notorious Luburić came to Sarajevo, he was moved completely, with his workshop and cars, to Jasenovac, and placed at the disposal of the butcher Ljuba Miloš. He proved to be an artist in dealing with that brigand.

Five months later, Moni found his son in the death camp and, thanks to the mercy of Miloš the butcher, the two of them managed to get through four years. Following his liberation, the son, with the motor mechanic trade he had mastered in Jasenovac, moved to Israel and now, happy and content, runs his own motor mechanic business in Haifa.

On the mat of our room superior, Judge Papo, Lindo Altarac and I were planning how to get our hands on freedom while these freezing days lasted and while all the trains from Brod to Sarajevo were buried in snow.

We knew very well that Jasenovac only offered us death. There were about sixty elderly men in the room, all of them starving, either dozing or sleeping. All their family members had been taken away and they had just surrendered to fate. They cared about nothing and didn't even speak among themselves.

Lindo said "They took away my wife, two children and the two freight vehicles which kept my family fed." The locals jokingly called Lindo the Mostar fox, and were all surprised that he had not found a way to save himself.

His first proposal was to break into the former office of Dr Ezra Kajon, the police doctor, and go out to the Obala. This fell through.

His second proposal was to somehow get to the loft. With great difficulty we managed to get out into the attic. We removed roof tiles and saw that we could not get out that way, but returning to the room was risky. We hid in a large wooden chest, as big as a room. Archives of no importance to the Independent State of Croatia had been stored there. One of the biggest records there was a bundle of about ten files on which was written in large letters "Dr M. Zon", which at that time meant this was some kind of good client of the police.

Hungry and frozen, it was not until late in the afternoon that we were able to return to the room during the changeover of the guards.

Judge Papo, surprised by our long absence, encouraged us not to give up but to continue. He told us about the death of Levi, the second-hand dealer, and said he would assign us to take the body down to the Konkordija hearse, and that we should again try to go to the cemetery with the car, so he too would follow us. But Lerec didn't miss anything and he threatened Papo: "Make sure that car doesn't drive you out as well."

The guards became disturbed early in the morning and could be heard in the courtyard. They were going from room to room selecting young and healthy people, of whom there were very few, to work on cleaning the unfinished part of the building, the part next to the old Koševo Hospital itself. We set off in a double line.

This large, unfinished building, intended as a hospital, had been turned into Ustaša barracks. This barracks was occasionally used for a manoeuvres baptism for recruits who had finished their six months of training. One unit would go to the Skakavac waterfall, and another to the Crepoljsko forest to fight a battle with the Partisans. On the way they would kill peaceful villagers in front of their houses and chase the women and other household members to the barracks.

Our host in the Ustaša barracks, up on the third floor, begins to introduce us to our job. He opens the doors of the great hall. It was an awful stench and an even more awful sight: faeces on the floor and big pools of blood, even blood splashed on the walls. The feast of the young Ustašas' baptism probably finished here. Some of us were pressing handkerchiefs to their noses, some to their eyes.

The Ustaša looked at us angrily and shouted: "Don't waste time, get to work," and gave us some rough old rags and a small number of



buckets for water. The witnesses of this atrocity said “Well, our Lerec is lenient compared to this heinous crime.”

They took us back, hungry and frozen, via Štamparska Street, Sokol House and the Benevolencija building, outside which guards were guarding the inmates of the women’s camp. Dead silence, like outside Koševo Cemetery. Our women and children were there. We were approaching the demolished big temple, once the pride of our community. The poor had taken its heavy walnut doors and architraves to burn to thaw out their frozen children.

I glanced at the house of my good protectors, Mustafa and Izetage Hardaga, and saw right in front of the door Zejneba’s sister, pretty Nađa, wearing wide women’s trousers. I raised my hand so she could recognise me in this unfortunate column. She saw me. As though struck by shock, her cry ruptured the air, although no one knew why. Only Lindo, beside me, knew it had something to do with me.

Nađa’s father, Ahmed Sadi, whose nickname was Šaralop, was born in 1884 in Thessalonica, in Greece, and had grown up among Jews in Bitola. He moved to Sarajevo in 1913 and, from 1930, he lived in Pazarić. He preferred to do business in Sarajevo with Jewish companies and bought goods for a mixed goods store. He often visited his children in the house in which, thanks to the goodness of a decent family, we had been protected for quite some time, and it was there that we also met Ahmed Sadik, a man full of goodness and true faith which he carried in his heart. He saved the family of Isidor H. Papo, his wife and two children, from certain death, and the Ustaša criminals killed him in Jasenovac.

Yad Vashem became interested in the case of this saviour and in Jerusalem he was proclaimed Righteous Among the Nations. In the valley of the destroyed Jewish communities near Yad Vashem, in a beautifully planted park, the names of Ahmed Sadik and the Hardaga family will live for eternity.

The Vrace Memorial Park was completed in November 1981, and is one of a kind in Europe. It was built in Sarajevo on a hill where national heroes, fighters and victims of the Fascist terror were shot. Engraved in stone, on artistically arranged walls which had once been execution sites, are the names of victims. And here the name of Ahmed Sadik is recorded for eternity.

This unexpected encounter with Nađa shook me strongly to the point of tears. Awaiting us in the prison yard was Alhalel with a caul-

dron of hot, non-greasy soup and, after that, the comfortable straw mat in the prison cell.



*Vrace Memorial Cemetery in Sarajevo: the names of Jews who perished and other victims of the Fascist terror*

We told Judge Papo of the terrible misery of the Orthodox villagers from the surroundings of Skakavac and Crepoljsko and that we are anticipating having to do the same revolting work the next day as well. Lindo had brought some information from the unfinished hospital. He had found a way, an easy way to escape from the labyrinth of this hospital, through the plum orchard and a shortcut to the railway station. There he was at home. He was the king of unloading fruit and vegetables from Mostar and he also loaded empty crates into open wagons. There is no checking of the baskets until Mostar and, if we reached there and the Italian guards were to catch us they would shout *benvenuto!*

I liked this idea so much that I immediately showed them the “bunker” where there was 16,000 dinars hidden, and I gave this to Lindo, because the whole thing would go more easily with money, and then we went to bed.

Salamon Altarac Čizmar, the room superior, asked Lindo what he had been doing so late, and he repeated to him what he had told us.

Lindo came to our room early in the morning and we continued talking. Suddenly two detectives and a guard were asking who Lindo was. "I am," he replied curtly, and they quickly handcuffed him.

Lerec, who was always in a bad mood, was waiting for him in the office, interrogated him and beat him. Shortly after this the same people burst into the room again and asked "Who is Kabiljo the plumber?"

"I am," I said.

"Come to the office with us."

Lerec grabbed my by the lapels of my coat and asked "Why did you give Lindo four thousand dinars?"

"To buy me a little food."

"Where did you get the money?"

"When I came to the prison they didn't search me and they didn't take my money."

"Are you the one with the shop next to the *chifut* school?"

"Yes, I am."

"Get out of here, go to your room!"

I ran back, happy as could be, and told Papo what had happened. Lindo remained, all bloodied, in a corner of the office.

I wondered how I got off so easily with that villain. Then I remembered that, two years earlier, the owner of the Bosnian Post Office printing company, Josip Bretler, had been elected president of the fishermen's association and that, within two months, he had to catch a Danube salmon and organise a banquet for them.

Having paid the workers, I checked again and saw that Josip was hanging around a lot in high rubber boots with another person whom I didn't know. Josip, the rich man, rewarded this man really well and they drove off grandly to Foča in a taxi for this exceptional fisherman to show him where the Danube salmon lie. The Turkish coffee they had drunk in my store at that time had come in handy for me now.

At my request, Papo, the room supervisor, assigned me to clean the prison yard thoroughly and watch two agents bring two women from the gate. I jumped to lend a helping hand to carry the bulging, heavy leather suitcases over to the office. I saw the wife of Moric Sternberg, known in Sarajevo as a contractor of various major city works. With her was her daughter Lola, the wife of Dr Oskar Grof, who was in war imprisonment. She could have fled but had stayed behind to take care

of her elderly mother, of whom I always spoke with deep respect. I had pleasant memories of the frequent banquets at which her brother Jakov played the violin and her other brother Karlo the cello. They would be joined by cellist Jakov Buki Bahar and made a pleasant trio.

At the prison office they were asking for their personal information. I reached for the suitcase and Lerec looked at me and ordered me to first put them in the women's section.

I talked about the prison, not exaggerating anything.

From the prison courtyard, they had broken into the basement of another house. A long, dark line of small windows. I saw and recognised each and every person next to the entrance door. The number of children and women was unknown. They cursed my living and dead, in Spanish, thinking I was one of the detectives.

Beside the entrance door was a round table and on it two children. The mother covered them with her body, protecting them against the cold air. When she raised her head I recognised her, the wife of Kamhi, a cobbler from Krekova. Her husband was in captivity. We looked at each other without greeting.

Suddenly Aunt Blanka, the mother of Buki Bahar, threw herself at me from a dark corner with her full weight, lamenting explosively at the top of her voice. She had simply gone crazy. It was only now that she recognised the Šternberg family and again fell into a state of hysterical weeping.

A calm and good-natured young woman squeezed into a smaller space and cleared two square metres for the newly-arrived sufferers. She spread a blanket for them onto which they crammed themselves like two poor women. They thanked her with their tears. For me, these moments were more than terrible. I had to go back and immediately tell about the desperate life these women, old women and children were living. We were wringing our hands helplessly. Still, at the administration they decided to intervene because there was spotted typhus spreading in both the women's and the men's camps.

With no hesitation, Lerec assembled twenty of us and several guards, wrote a few words to the commissioners, Bujas and Milaković and sent us off to bathe at what used to be the Ashkenazy Municipality.

Judge Papo and I led the group so that I could start up the water heater. We opened the commissioners' door and – surprise – Jakov Maestro was there. He had voluntarily gone to the women's prison in Đakovo with the jurist Teodor Pinto, who later defected to the

Partisans in Slavonia. He was consulting with Srećko Bujas, head of the Sarajevo District Court and Judge Milaković. He was telling his colleague Maestro sharply and loudly “I am performing an unrewarding function, at a time of beastly rampage and lawlessness in the Independent State of Croatia. We, commissioners, Milaković and I, are putting maximum effort into alleviating your suffering but we are not succeeding. This barbarian Lerec has sent you to bathe but the bathroom and showers no longer exist, even the pipes themselves have been torn out as Jewish property.”

Weeping, Judge Papo begged Bujas, who knew his merits, to use his influence to help him out. He didn't promise anything and only shrugged his shoulders. Maestro was also looking sadly at his distant cousin and mentioning the names of the dead, of the closest relatives, in the Đakovo camp. Bujas cut the conversation short and his last words were “Run in any direction you can! The inquisitors are worse than terrible.” We three public servants used to solve people's problems together but now we can't even solve our own. We kissed one another, certain we would never meet again.

We returned to the prison unwashed, but happy to have been spared a day of compulsory labour. Five clever young men seized their chance while the guards were guarding the fenced-off front side. They stepped into the shallow and sluggish Miljacka river behind the temple and the community building, climbed up onto the bridge and fled straight to Mjedenica and the Trevebić mountains. In the yard they lined us up by name, ten of us, seven young men and three older ones. We all knew one another, apart from one man in an ironed suit and tie and with expensive suitcases in front of him. At the roll call he responded as Professor Fred Novačić Najfeld. The guards gave orders to move and Novačić asked “Mr Supervisor, what about my suitcases?”

“They'll follow you to the station!”

We quickly crossed the Čumurija, the bridge, and reached Bistrik. It was a steep climb and the guards were following us to be sure we were not late for the train. No one was carrying anything except old Judaći Koen who had a bag, some copper kitchenware and two Tanah books.

We arrive at Bistrik station out of breath. There was no one on the track, only Arnautin selling hot *salep*. I ordered *salep* for everyone, the guards as well.

Behind us, four Ustaša privates arrived and took over the list to count us. In a little while, another one with the Ustaša privates said

something and was looking at us from the distance. The train arrived and they made us get into a reserved car. We were all sitting, silent. Ten minutes later, the lieutenant asked each of us separately what we do: Levi a glazier, Levi and Finci carpenters, Koen and Maestro panel beaters, Kabiljo a plumber, Atias a painter, Papo a tailor, Finci the manger of Rubič's warehouse and Novačić a teacher. Less than an hour's drive to Pale, and the lieutenant came back to me and asked again whether I was an electrician or some other kind of tradesman. I repeated: a plumber for water, sewerage, gas and central heating. To make sure he asked me questions to the very last detail and finally spoke out and said he was from the same profession and was a manager with Viktor Penzo in Osijek. The conductor said "Pale Station!" and we all jumped from the train.

Following the instructions of the villagers and the station manager we took a shortcut to the children's convalescent home, but the smart Ustaša privates, four Muslims from near Foča and Rogatica, they let the ten of us walk through the deep snow and tread a path for them, those Ustaša.

Exceptionally exhausted, after three quarters of an hour of tiring walking, we spotted the convalescent home and a home guard next to the sentry box. He had taken his uniform coat off so they could see his Ustaša epaulettes. He allowed the lieutenant to go into the guard house with twelve soldiers and one guard. Face to face they agreed he would let us use the entry booth with the workshop. We felt we were at the border, but didn't know whether it was a Chetnik or a Partisan border.

I was silent and didn't say a word to anyone. I broke free and asked the lieutenant, my trade colleague: "Excuse me, but what are we going to do here in the forest?"

He looked at me and replied loudly: "If the first Partisan rifle should happen to fire, one of you will hang from a beam." A miracle, but everyone took this calmly as though it had nothing to do with us.

"It is the sergeant's wish that you dig a trench for yourselves and make a toilet so that you don't pollute the surroundings." Hungry, wet and frozen, we dug. The Ustaša privates, hungry, were looking for the lieutenant to talk about food. He was nowhere to be found, so the sergeant gave the Ustaša privates some of his own food. We all lay down in the workshop to sleep, so no one knew who was guarding whom. In the morning one of the Ustaša privates woke up and headed to Pale to get the sergeant who told him that, next to the Catholic church, was the

saddler, an Ustaša commander, and “you reach an agreement with him any way you can”.

The Pale commander reached an agreement with Colonel Rajman to feed these four Ustaša privates until some definite solution was found. There was no one looking after us. Next to our booth, over the wire, was a convent, burnt out, smoke still coming from it. And we, hungry, were digging like moles and found some staples, a kitchen clock and some half-burnt blankets. We were supplying ourselves and old Koen was reading paragraphs from the thick book of Tanah and repeating: “You see, children, how there is a God.”

Beside our booth, the workshop had become a reception room and we were tired and wanted to wash and clean ourselves. And we also had a guest, a municipal guard had come to see who those communists were who had settled in the woods. He was armed with a revolver and there were two hand grenades hanging from his belt. He wanted to know everything: who we were and what we were. He had to report to the head of the municipality, Hadžalić, who also had his own sawmill. Hadžalić listened to the commander’s conversation from his phone.

Now the home guard sergeant also announced the visit of Colonel Rajman. Professor Fred Novačić put on his tie. We let him, the teacher, say a word or two in a more refined way. We saw Rajman riding a horse up the hairpin bend. We, the others, withdrew and the sergeant was waiting to hold his horse. Professor Novačić introduced himself and changed the topic of the conversation, asking who those tradesmen were: “Do you have a panel beater? Give him to me. I have tools and sheet metal for him to forge and solder me a coffin to be sent to Osijek urgently.” Grey-haired Judaći Koen stepped out and stood in front of him and his first words were that he had served in the Austrian Army.

“And do you know how to tailor and solder a tin coffin for me?”

“Certainly. I’ve done far more difficult work.”

In no time the body of a home guard was brought to our workshop. It had probably been under the snow for a long time and was unusually bloated. Novačić offered Judaći his geometrical skills, I got him a bracket on which he could weld the tin sheets and the carpenters rushed to get planks of wood from Hadžalić’s sawmill. The same day the sergeant called on the army telephone to say that the coffin was finished and was well made. Judaći saved our reputation to such an extent that Colonel Rajman asked the Ustaša for the ten tradesmen to be placed at the disposal of the home guards to contribute to the improve-

ment of the hygiene service, because of the typhoid which had spread widely in Pale.

Four Ustaša privates took us before the home guard command, they got travel papers, food and a receipt for ten men. We were so overjoyed that we almost kissed the Ustaša privates.

Colonel Rajman came up to us with the words: "As of today, you belong to us home guards, for work, food and clothing. Be smart and work hard, don't flee, because you will be killed. On this hillock is the gendarmerie barracks and our warehouses. Take what you need. At this same place, for today, you will get food from the army cauldron." The sergeant took us out and gave the colonel's orders to the quartermaster, and we threw away the rags and got dressed. We were given mess kits and hoped that we could wait for the cauldron with food.

The cauldrons with food were brought to the square outside the barracks, and the army from the border positions with the Chetniks and the Partisans was settling in. The captain approached us, asked us, and told us that he had served a Jew for eighteen years, in a mixed-goods store in Osijek.

"A few years ago the boss said:

"You have served me long enough," and he gave me a shop in the same street and goods to get started with. Those are the Jews that we are now persecuting. Go to the cauldron first and, if it's not enough for you, you will get some more."

We returned to the children's convalescent home and sorted out our tools for the work we had been told we would get.

I am now stopping writing. I began writing modestly and simply, the way I know how – although, as a manual worker, and at an advanced age (87), I'm not much called upon to do this – because I feel morally indebted to the murder victims to put all the atrocities down on paper.





## VIII

### NONANTOLA

The idea of saving young Jewish people and children from Nazi pogroms was launched as a branch of the activities of the Zionist organisation in Nazi Germany. The idea of young people moving to Palestine (Alyat hanoar) came from Recha Freier in Berlin. Thanks to this, more than fifteen thousand children and young people were saved from the occupied European countries during the second world war. Some of these had already lost their parents, while other parents, in mortal danger themselves, sacrificed their children in order to save them, pushing them down the road to salvation hoping that at least they would survive the horrors of the Holocaust.

Several hundred of these young emigrants had been smuggled into Yugoslavia by April 1941 and, with the country already occupied, they continued their journey to Italy, to Nonantola. In 1943, they were joined by a group of children from Split.



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*Jozef BEN CION PAPO*

SALVATION ON THE FRONT LINE



*Jozef Ben Cion Papo was born in Sarajevo on January 5, 1926, to father Mordehaj and mother Hana-Anita Papo, née Salom. He lived there until 1935, when the family moved to Zagreb. There, before the war, he completed the fifth year of secondary school*

*His brother Zadik-Cezo and his father Mordehaj were taken to the Jasenovac concentration camp where they were slaughtered. His mother Anita joined the Partisans, but was captured in a battle with the Germans in 1944, taken to the Sanzaba prison near Trieste and, from there, to Auschwitz.*

*After evading arrest on several occasions, Jozef Ben-Cion (Giuseppe Papo), managed to cross to the Italian zone of occupation. In 1943 he was transferred, along with another thirty or so children, from Split to the small town of Nonantola in Italy, with the help of the DELASEM organisation. Following the capitulation of Italy, he crossed the front with his friend Kurt Šnajder and joined the Allies.*

*He arrived in Palestine on June 6, 1944.*

*After the war he worked until his retirement as a civil aviation inspector with the Israeli Ministry of Traffic. Since then he has focused on computer projects.*

The persecution of Jews started at the beginning of the German occupation. We were required to wear yellow armbands. Jews were taken to compulsory labour, many were sent to death camps. That April, the Ustaša took my father Mordehaj Papo and my elder brother Zadik (Cezi) Papo to Jasenovac, where they both perished.

Our building materials shop, which was at 64 Ozaljska Street, and our apartment at 29 Marovska Street, were seized by the Ustaša. My mother Anita Papo (née Salom) and I hid with the Catholic Vlahović family for a couple of months, giving them money and valuables in return. Because it became dangerous for them to hide and care for both of us, I had to leave. I travelled to a tiny village near Varaždin, where I lived with some local people, the family of our maid. They took me in as though I were a relative – for financial compensation. In July I was forced to leave them. I returned to my mother in Zagreb. There I was caught and sent to Otočac in Lika, a labour camp run by the Ustaša. In October, with the help of a Muslim captain, Ešref Kurjaković, a former tenant in our home, I was released from the labour camp and, posing as his son, I travelled with him back to Mother in Zagreb. Some time after this our family in Dalmatia sent us fake passes to travel to Solin, near Split. In January 1942 we left Zagreb and, after a difficult journey, we arrived in Makarska.

For about two months we hid in various places under Italian occupation until they finally deported us to the island of Brač, to the village of Sumartin, where there was an assembly camp for Jews, under Italian command. I remained there until April 1943.

There were fierce battles being fought between the Partisans and the Fascist occupying forces in this area. It was dangerous to remain there. With another thirty children I was transferred from Split to the town of Nonantola, with the help of DELASEM. There this group of children known as *I Ragazzi di Villa Emma* (The Villa Emma Children) found shelter. Some time after this my mother joined the Partisans. In 1944, during a battle with German troops, she was captured by the Germans. She was taken to the prison of Senzeva, near Trieste, and from there was deported to Auschwitz.

In Nonantola, there were about a hundred of us children from Germany, Austria and Yugoslavia staying in Villa Emma. This was a huge building belonging to a Jew called Grassi di Milano, and was being managed by DELASEM. There were also a few older refugees in it. We were banned from leaving the town. The older children worked

with the farmers in their fields and workshops in order to earn some of the staple foods we needed. The locals were very sympathetic to us and helped us in any way they could and as much as they could, especially the priest, Don Arrigo Beccari and the doctor, Giuseppe Moreali. I worked in the warehouse, packing clothing parcels which DELASEM would send to various concentration camps in Italy. Life in the commune was bearable, but we lived in constant fear that the Fascists or the Nazis could deport us to concentration camps.



*In front of Villa Emma after a sports event: (front) Jozef Papo, (L) Jakov Maestro, Armando Moreno*

my life. On the evening of September 8, our leaders told us that the Germans had begun invading Italy and that we were in danger of falling into their hands. They asked to evacuate Villa Emma urgently and take only some warm clothes and essential toiletries. Because I worked in the warehouse I was lucky to be able to choose good clothes, suitable for a long journey. That night I decided to go towards southern Italy, find the front line and cross it.

In the autumn of 1943, Mussolini fell and the German Army entered Italy. All the Villa Emma children vacated the building during the night of September 8, 1943. Most of them hid in the local monastery, under the supervision of Don Beccari. The following day my friend Kurt Šnajder and I decided to flee towards the south of Italy, so that we could cross the front and reach the Allied troops.

Throughout August and the beginning of September 1943, the Allies continued to bomb northern Italian towns heavily. They had already come ashore in Calabria, in the Salerno area. I then began thinking about how I could get across the front line and rid myself of the German threat to

At dawn a large number of us young people were moved to a hayloft beside a grain warehouse, about half an hour's walk from Nonantola. There I slept for a few hours on a stone bench. Early in the morning I met my friend Kurt Šnajder, and we exchanged opinions on our situation. We concluded that we needed to leave the place where we were hiding as soon as possible, before the Germans reached Nonantola. The plan for our flight was as follows: First we would find our leaders, Joško and Marko, inform them of our decision and get some money for travel. Then we planned to rent two bicycles from the bicycle shop and ride them to the railway station in Modena. There we would send the bicycles back to the owner and take the train to Rimini. In Rimini we would look for a boat sailing south along the Adriatic coast, so that we could get as close to the front line as possible. They agreed with our decision and gave us their blessing to flee and save ourselves. We were each given 3,000 lire and a false identification document. It was some priest who provided the documents.

Late in the morning we picked up our bicycles and promised the owner we would return them the following morning. When we reached the railway station in Modena we discovered that the train had left half an hour earlier, and that there would be no more trains in that direction for the rest of the day. After some hesitation, we decided to go to Bologna on our bicycles. However, after riding for half an hour, we saw a train going in the same direction as we were. It was full of German military vehicles and armed soldiers. When we reached a crossroads, German soldiers sent us off the main road, so we found ourselves on some back road, heading south towards the Apennines. Late in the evening we reached a village called Zocca and found a place to spend the night. The owner was very curious about who we were and where we were from, because we spoke good Italian and knew about current affairs. This was a friendly conversation. We introduced ourselves as students from Modena whose parents live in the Molise region. We had lost contact with them because of the Eighth Army invasion and this was why we were now returning to them. We dined well and were given a pleasant room to sleep in. That night we decided to ride towards Florence, get in touch with the local Jewish Community and ask them for advice on how to get to the south.

Early the following morning we continued our journey through the Apennines. After a few hours it became difficult to ride uphill. For some hours we walked, pushing our bicycles, until we reached the top. Riding

downhill at high speed we came very close to the town of Pistoia. There we heard sporadic rifle and machine gun fire. We approached an army post and met some Italian soldiers who told us we should leave immediately because there were battles being fought between them and the *Camicie Nere* (Black Shirts). We bypassed Pistoia and found a back road to Florence. We arrived in the city late in the evening and found the Jewish Community centre and the synagogue.

We knew some Community members who used to visit us at Villa Emma, and the Centre guard was sure we were two of those young people, *i ragazzi di Villa Emma* (the Villa Emma children). He took us into an office and gave us something to eat and drink, and we spent the night there. In the morning we met a clerk and a few Community members. We told them what had happened at Villa Emma. They decided we should stay in Florence until the situation became clearer. We were each given the address of a family who was prepared to take care of us. We were tired and dirty from the journey and wanted comfortable accommodation. All the same, I didn't want us to separate. Kurt was a tried and true friend, wise and clever, with a great deal of experience in life. For me, to be without him, or to lose him, would mean failing to achieve the goal we had planned together. They took me to a Jewish family whose name I have forgotten, a lawyer about 48 years old with a crippled leg and his 23-year-old daughter. They welcomed me warmly, putting everything in the apartment at my disposal, as though I were family. I told them the story of my life, about my family in Yugoslavia. They listened. After that we had a lengthy discussion about the whole situation, about what would be the right thing to do, how it should be done, where to go. This was like spending a day with my own family, I felt that they were supporting me in every way. They advised me to stay with them until the situation improved, or at least until it was clearer. In their opinion, going towards and crossing the front line was dangerous, they felt it was better to stay as far away from it as possible. It was difficult for me to agree with them. I had seen the Germans successfully uprooting Jews in the occupied parts of Yugoslavia and I knew they would do the same here. I was deeply convinced that I must flee the Germans and join the Allied troops.

The following morning, September 12, Kurt telephoned me, asking me to meet him without delay at the station, to find out whether there were any trains going towards Rome and the south. We also decided to return the bicycles to their owner in Nonantola. First we took

care of everything which needed to be done in order to send the bicycles by train. We put them on the train personally and, having done this, our consciences were clear. There was chaos and confusion at the railway station. Thousand of Italian soldiers, who had been withdrawn from southern France, had gathered at the station, trying to board trains for their homes. When we saw this, we decided to set off the following morning, travelling south. When we sought information on trains leaving the next day, we discovered that there would be a special train for Rome at 2.00 p.m. and that tickets could be purchased in advance. We bought two first-class tickets with reservations and agreed to meet at 1.00 p.m. across the road from the station. I immediately went to inform my hosts of this decision and to organise my departure. Only the daughter was at home. When I told her we were leaving, she was speechless. We were both sad. She called her father to ask him to come home and talk to me. In the evening, we sat at the table, in silence, eating pasta with parmesan. When he finished his dinner, the father asked "Giuseppe, do you know anyone in Rome?" The short answer was no. "All right," he continued, "I shall give you two letters with full addresses, in case you need help." One of the addresses was a friend of his – the Arch-Rabbi of Rome and the other a close relative who lived in the city.

The following morning we were talking and planning my trip from Rome to the front. He showed me on a map the road and the places I needed to pass. He gave me an envelope with a small map of Italy and detailed instructions on the back, the two letters and a lot of money. His daughter prepared me a rucksack with the necessary clothing, food and a written blessing for a good journey. Our parting was sad, with just a few kisses. I was happy to meet Kurt at the station. We went to find the train, which stood on the first platform. This was a train of 32 carriages and two locomotives, one in the front and one at the back. The train was already full of Italian soldiers. We walked along the platform to find first class. When we went up the stairs of the carriage, we were immediately stopped. The carriage was full of Italian officers and a few civilians. They had already been waiting for hours. The train's departure had been postponed for an hour, nobody knew why. A large number of soldiers and other passengers were still trying to get in, but could only find room between the carriages, on the stairs. Many had even climbed onto the roof. There was a screeching sound and the train began to move. After some time it slowed down and then settled down to a steady

speed. It stood for a long time at the larger stations. We finally arrived in Rome at midnight.

There were thousands of Italian soldiers sleeping on the platforms in the station. The passengers were getting off slowly, jumping over the bodies and looking for a place to lie down. Kurt and I saw a group of soldiers walking towards the exit of the station, so we followed them. Then we found ourselves outside the station, still walking behind them through the streets of Rome. Soon each of them had entered a building, using a key. We found ourselves on a street with many *Albergo* signs. The entrances were all closed so we rang and knocked on doors, but nobody would open for us. Occasionally someone would shout, from some distance behind the main door, asking who we were. When we said we were travellers and wanted a bed for the night, there was no reply. Hopelessly, we continued to look for accommodation in other streets.

The night was silent and calm, lifeless. Suddenly we heard the noise of vehicles. One stopped close to us. Two soldiers jumped out towards us and shouted: "Stop! Don't you know that the army has introduced a curfew?" We told them we were travellers from Florence, that we were trying to find accommodation and that we didn't know that a curfew had been introduced in Rome. They demanded that we get into their vehicle. They took us to a military barracks, an enormous building full of armed soldiers. When we climbed to the second floor, we saw that there were machine guns placed at all the windows. They finally took us to a large hall whose floor was covered in straw, especially along the walls. We sat in a corner, covered in straw and waiting in fear to see what would happen. The two soldiers told us that there were street battles being fought with the Germans during the day. One of them called the duty officer who began questioning us. We told him the whole truth. His eyes showed compassion. He told us "You're no longer civilian prisoners, but Jewish refugees and, tomorrow, at your request, I shall turn you over to the Jewish Community centre."

In the morning the officer came for us with a soldier and told us that the soldier would escort us to the bus station. After driving for fifteen minutes, the bus would stop exactly outside the Community building. The soldier would tell the driver to tell us where to get off. He asked us if we had money to pay for the tickets. We assured him we had and thanked him for his help and kindness. We were at the bus station ten minutes late. After some time the bus arrived. We climbed aboard



and the soldier gave the driver instructions about us. Because I had given the driver a large bill, I waited for him to give me my change, with my wallet in my hand. A few stops later he gave me the change which I put in my pocket. At the station the driver pointed us to the Community centre.

When we arrived and introduced ourselves to the staff, I realised that I didn't have my wallet. I was miserable. Everything was lost: my identification card, family photographs, the map of Italy and all the money. A clerk promised to see that it was found. He called the information service and asked whether a wallet had been found in the number 18 trolleybus. We were told that the driver was still working and that it would be best to wait for him at the station. We immediately went to the station and waited for about a quarter of an hour until the trolleybus arrived. I recognised the driver and told him what I had lost. He had my wallet in his hand, ready to give back to me. We were all happy, especially me. At the Community we spoke to a couple of members about what was happening in Rome and about the situation on the front. We talked about the children from Villa Emma in Nonantola.

Kurt and I spent that whole evening planning our journey for the next day in the light of the situation on the front. We now knew that the Eighth Army was advancing successfully to the south, that the city of Potenza had fallen into their hands and that the Germans were withdrawing in this section of the front. However on the Salerno front the Germans had successfully cut off the advance of the Allied Army. We decided to head towards the southern front. We would travel east from Rome, to Abruzzo, and then south to the region of Molise.

We left Rome at 11.00 a.m. on September 15, taking the train to Sulmona. There were many stops along the way on this journey, so we arrived late in the afternoon. We slept in the hallway of the railway station, which was full of Italian soldiers. Early in the morning we were awoken by the sound of a train coming from the north. It was going to Benevento. The train stood at the station for only half an hour. It was packed and many people were getting off to buy something to eat and drink. In this confusion we found ourselves in the corridor of a carriage, standing right next to the toilet, from which a horrible stench was spreading. The soldiers were fighting among themselves over the space, so we stayed where we were. Many soldiers who had just arrived were trying unsuccessfully to get onto the train, and many climbed up onto the roof. The train left the station followed by shouting and whistling. It

was going slowly and making a lot of noise and, after travelling for four hours, it stopped on a plain, close to an apple orchard. Most of the passengers got out and ran towards the garden. As we were already in the corridor, close to the door, we were simply pushed from the carriage and joined the crowd. Twenty minutes later there were no more apples. On the way back, jostled by the crowd, I couldn't find Kurt and missed the car. I couldn't even get in. I was running from one door to another but everywhere was packed. Desperate, I found a place between two carriages, where they join together. I was in panic, holding on to some cables with my hand. My suffering ended when the train stopped out in the open once more. It was about two in the afternoon and we were close to the city of Benevento. The train crew told us that the city had been bombed, that the station and the tracks had been destroyed and that the train would stay where it was for the time being.

In the meantime I found Kurt and was happy that we were together again, but I had lost my rucksack with all my things. We decided to walk to Benevento. Along the way we came across some fruit and we ate, mostly figs and grapes. On a hill we ran into a priest who had fled the city two hours earlier, before the Allies had bombed it. He gave us instructions on how to get through the city from the north to the south so that we could reach the *Autostrada de due mari* (The Highway of Two Seas).

The city of Benevento was completely demolished. There was no one alive, we only came across bodies. It was dangerous to walk through the streets, because large pieces were falling from ruined buildings. Once a whole house collapsed in front of us. It was also dangerous to walk in the middle of the street because of the many fissures and pot-holes, deep holes filled with water, caused by the powerful explosions. When we left the city we saw two German soldiers getting out of a car and entering a house. We stopped for a minute to think about what we should do, but they emerged again. One of them was carrying a large radio. They got into the car and left. I left the city with painful emotions. Throughout the journey I was haunted by the sight of dead bodies, swollen, without legs and arms.

We walked across the fields, moving quickly towards the south, with no idea where we would spend the night. Dark was already falling in the east. We were looking for some kind of shelter but, in this lowlands region, there was no village in sight. Right in the middle of a field we saw a small wooden shelter. We went to see if we could spend the

night there. This was a roughly built shepherd's shelter, about two metres square, with straw spread on the ground and three branches over the top as a roof. The daylight had gone and we found ourselves in the dark. We removed our shoes and lay down. We were hungry and exhausted. We listened to the sounds of nature. It was a quiet night, with a blue sky and lots of stars.

After some time Kurt interrupted the silence, saying that we should change our original plan. He believed the front was more than a hundred kilometres away and said that this was too much for us. But the Salerno front was less than twenty kilometres away and we had a better chance of reaching it. My opinion was that the German counterattack had prevented the entry of the allies into Salerno and that the whole area was blocked. Crossing the front line there would be too dangerous. We talked about this for a long time and couldn't agree. We fell into a deep sleep, with no agreement on how to continue our journey the following day. Three hours later I woke up and began scratching my whole body. I could feel the fleas jumping on my neck. I went out to relieve myself and sat down on the ground, deadly tired, with heavy thoughts about what would happen the following day. It began to get light while we were on our way to the "Highway of Two Seas". Along the way we picked some figs and sat under a tree to eat them. It was out of the question for us to part company but, in some way, we were in a conflict. We finally reached the highway and saw convoys of German and armed vehicles and soldiers going west. This meant towards the Salerno front. We were both scared and speechless. At the crossroads, Kurt said he was going towards Salerno. He continued in that direction. I stood still, confused, watching him leave and not knowing what to do. I looked around to see where I should go then, after all, started following him as he already gone quite some distance. I loved him a great deal and was sad at the thought of losing him. Suddenly it became clear to me that being together also meant a greater chance of saving ourselves. So I followed him. We were both content.

We were walking along the highway. There were German convoys passing quite frequently. We decided to get off the highway and continue on in the direction of the city of Avellino but taking a different road. There were German positions right through the whole area, with tanks and heavy artillery. Again we took a different road and reached the village of Baronissi. Here I discarded all my remaining personal items. When we got close to the village we saw a warning sign. "This is a front

area, unauthorised crossing will be punished.” After we passed Baronissi village we ran into a villager and asked him how far Salerno was and which road we should take to get to it. He told us that he was a smuggler and that he had been to Salerno a couple of times to smuggle goods across the front line. He showed us the road and the villages we needed to pass through without putting ourselves in danger of running into Germans.



*Route to salvation for Jews from Nonantola, from Modena southwards to Salerno*

Sporadic shooting and the thunder of air battle could be heard ahead of the front. As we passed through a valley between mountains we came across Italian Army deserters camped, waiting for the Germans to withdraw. We were given further directions on how to reach Salerno. There were only two mountains between us and the city.

It was already afternoon, we had a short rest at the foot of the first mountain, eating a few apples and figs. Rested, we began to climb. After two hours of climbing, when we had almost reached the top, we heard the clanging of chains. A German patrol with rifles, machine guns and ammunition belts around their necks intercepted us. "Halt!" they shouted. We stopped. They looked us over carefully and then, speaking in halting German and Italian they asked for directions to a village, pointing with their fingers to a map. We replied, in Italian, that this was a village on the way to the village where we lived. They put us in front of them to lead them to their destination. When we crossed the mountain ridge and began to descend, we saw a plateau and, on it a cabin and a horse. Someone came quickly and took the horse from the cabin. The patrol sergeant issued orders to the soldiers to line up for an attack and said something to the soldier standing next to him. Kurt understood what the sergeant said. When they headed for the cabin, Kurt suddenly signalled me with his hand to follow him and started running off to one side, into some bushes. My immediate reaction was to follow him. And so we ran through thorny bushes, trembling in fear that the German patrol would open fire on us. Running like this for about ten minutes down a hillside through dense forest, we disappeared from their sight and so escaped. We were out of breath, with bleeding wounds, torn clothes and in pain, we were scratching our hands against the thorny bushes. Kurt told me that the Germans had planned to kill us as soon as they finished their shootout with the man from the cabin.

Later, when we reached the foot of the mountain, we saw a tiny village on a plain. We quickly began heading in that direction to find someone to help us. At the entrance of the village we heard the gurgling of a stream. This was running water, coming from a tap about two centimetres in diameter which protruded from a post. We drank and washed the blood and sweat from ourselves. When we looked around, we saw that the village houses were empty. Then a man on a donkey laden with two buckets for water came up behind us. We greeted him with a smile and asked him a lot of questions. He was a village resident, and all the locals had evacuated the village. For the moment they were all in the monastery, and he showed us, pointing with his hand to the white façade of a building near the top of the mountain. He had come to fill his buckets with water for them. He told us that the German defence positions were at a certain distance from the village – one or two kilometres from the Allied firing positions. We decided to cross the front

line. We passed through the village and saw no one. It was only when we came close to an isolated blue house, the last in the village, that a German soldier shouted "Halt! Halt!" He jumped out with a rifle aimed at us. We began speaking in Italian. He ordered us to go into the house. We entered a large room full of crates with weapons. There were German officers and soldiers sitting on them, playing cards and drinking beer. Speaking halting Italian, the duty officer asked us who we were. We told him that we were shepherds and that our village was a few kilometres away to the west. He replied "*Inglese vedere Italianos, sparare*" (When the English see Italians they will shoot). We insisted on doing what we had intended and said that we would continue at our own risk. He found this suspicious and said sharply "*No! Heraus! (out) Fuori! (out)*" We left the place nervously and went back through the village. Right in the centre of the village we sat under a big tree to rest and plan what we should do next. The tiny village was calm and the sky bright. As I was eating an apple, suddenly hundreds and hundreds of rounds from rifles, machine guns and other weapons, a multitude of shells were flying over our heads, some falling quite close to us. Hell on earth! Ten minutes later, everything had quietened down. We decided to join the villagers in the monastery.

As we were leaving the village, we came across a German soldier behind a stone fence with a grenade in his hand, ready to throw. He was angry because we surprised him. He shouted "Get out of here!" We passed him slowly, feeling all the time that he would throw the grenade at us. We finally reached the tap, drank all the water we needed and washed our faces again so we would be ready to climb up to the top of the mountain. On the way to the monastery, we came across the peasant with the donkey, carrying his water buckets. We followed him because he knew the shortest way. Finally we reached the monastery.

We went through the great door at the front of the building and found ourselves in a large cave. There were a lot of people lying or sitting on the ground in no kind of order. Children were running around among them. They were asking angrily for help. Faces with expressions of fear, pain, sadness and anxiety. They immediately introduced us to the village elder and priest. They were very interested to learn about the situation in the country and to hear the latest news from the front. We told them what we knew and they gave us a few boiled potatoes. After this, they offered us an unusual place to spend the night. With the help of a ladder, we climbed up to the highest level of this space, which was

in a corner of the cave. This was a kind of narrow terrace along the façade, overlooking the outside. They brought two wooden benches for us to lie on. As there was still some daylight, we observed the surroundings at sunset. We saw the valley and the familiar village and, in the distance, Salerno Bay. There were hundreds of battle ships and boats in the sea and, on land, we could see the artillery, tanks and machine gun positions of the Allied troops. There were many aircraft in the sky. They sporadically opened fire on the German positions. The Germans were fighting back from the positions behind us, opening fire on the ships with heavy weapons. We watched this battle on the front for an hour as though we were watching a war movie in the cinema.

It was dark when we went in. There were candles burning inside the cave and the main entrance was firmly closed. Because we were tired, we went to the place we had been given to sleep. The bench was only thirty centimetres wide and I was afraid that I would roll off it in my sleep. I lay on my back, looked up at the stars in the sky and slept like a log.

We suddenly awoke to the sound of a bomb exploding and rocks rolling from the top of the mountain. We jumped from the benches and stood against the wall. Several smaller stones fell on our terrace. Some pieces grazed me. It was 1.00 a.m. They told us that a mother with a child had gone out, leaving the door open. A plane flying at the same height saw the light and dropped a bomb. We decided to leave the monastery and sleep outdoors.

We set off, climbing to the top of the mountain where we came across a huge wooden cross with a figure of Jesus Christ, standing on a cement pedestal. We lay down under the cross and fell asleep. At dawn we were woken by two strong explosions. We noticed a huge fire in the distance, where the German positions were. A few minutes later an even louder explosion followed, and this completely demolished a bridge. The German troops were withdrawing and had abandoned their positions in the village.

In the early dawn on September 19, 1943, we returned, taking the same path through the village and approaching that last, blue house with fear. This time we didn't see any soldiers. We kept going a little further and came across a large, square stone. Next to it was a German soldier with a machine gun. We looked in surprise a little longer: he was already dead.

We continued on towards the west, in the direction of Salerno Bay, where we met two British soldiers. We said that we were civilian prisoners. They took us to an officer to whom we told our story. He drove us the same day to their headquarters in Salerno. There we were interrogated by the British intelligence service. They held us there for about two weeks until there was a convoy of ships leaving for Tripoli, in Libya. They got us to the British military camp near Tripoli, it was called Transit Camp 155. We were there for about two months and then they transferred us to Bari in Italy, where we joined the Allied unit AMGOT (Allied Military Government for Occupied Territories) as interpreters. At the beginning of June 1944, I emigrated to Palestine.



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*Arni VAJNINGER*

## LIFESAVING DEPARTURE FOR SWITZERLAND

*Arni Vajninger was born in Leipzig, Germany, to father Salamon Vajninger and mother Rahel. He had a brother, David, who was two years younger. He lost his father early, he was arrested by the Nazis in 1938 and sent to a concentration camp where, along with thousands of other inmates, he was killed at the beginning of April 1940.*

*Arni Vajninger was one of the boys who, thanks to the Youth Aliyah, reached Nonantola and so survived the Holocaust.*

*He lives in Israel.*

My father Salomon Vajninger and my mother Rahel went to Leipzig from Eastern Europe after the first world war. The Nazis arrested my father on September 1, 1938, and sent him to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp where he was killed in April 1940, along with thousands of other inmates. I was thirteen at the time and was given a chance to leave Germany with the *Jugend Alija* which was organised by Recha Freier. My family decided that I should join this children's transport to Palestine.

I left Leipzig in October 1940, and met children from Hamburg, Berlin and other cities on the train. We were travelling to Vienna. There we managed to find a man who smuggled us over the border into Yugoslavia. After climbing mountains, we arrived in Zagreb, a safe sanctuary. Unfortunately for me, I fell ill and was unable to continue

the journey to Palestine. I had to stay in Zagreb while the other children left Yugoslavia and reached Palestine. While I was recovering in Zagreb, I met Armando Moreno and Joška Indig, two young *madrihim* in the Zionist organisation.

However, once the Nazis attacked and occupied Yugoslavia in 1941, all roads for fleeing the country were closed. Armando Moreno assembled a group of children and took them to Belgrade a few days before the war began, while Joška Indig stayed behind in Zagreb. They both tried to find a way to save us. Through contacts with the Italian Jewish community we managed to leave Zagreb, which by this time was under Ustaša rule, and head for Ljubljana. There we found accommodation in a hunting castle, which at that time was occupied by the Italian Army. But fighting soon began in this territory and we had to leave.

With the cooperation of the Italian Jewish community's DELASEM (*Delegazione assistenza agli emigranti*), it was made possible for us to reach Nonantola, a place in the province of Modena, in central Italy. We were provided with accommodation at Villa Emma. This was a large house, earlier owned by an Italian Jew and uninhabited at this time. In Nonantola we made friends with the local population, who were kindly disposed to us and helped us. Armando Moreno, who was very active at this time in saving children, assembled another group of children from Yugoslavia, so we formed a *hasharah*.

In September 1943, Italy capitulated. The Nazis soon occupied northern Italy, including Nonantola, while the Allied forces came ashore in southern Italy and began advancing on Rome.

The people of Nonantola did everything in their power to hide most of the children. All the same, the direct presence of the Nazis was a sign for us that we had to seek salvation by moving to safer territory. At that time, for us, this meant Switzerland. Before we made a final decision on what to do, a group of children tried unsuccessfully to cross the Swiss border and returned. Several of us, together with Armando Moreno, decided to try crossing into Switzerland from Italy. And we succeeded! Thus, in October, Armando, another four boys and I arrived, via the Alps, in Cernobbio, a place on the Italian-Swiss border. Our connection was safe. The man who waited for us at the border showed us the way and cut the barbed wire for us at a safe spot, so our group of six, led by Armando Moreno, reached Swiss soil and found safety there.

There were still many obstacles to be overcome, but for us our departure for Switzerland saved our lives.

The war atrocities passed and left, on the few Jews who survived, traces and consequences that we cannot forget as long as we live. When everything calmed down, later on, our paths diverged. Still, as circumstances had it, after many years, in the USA, we met those with whom we went through all those difficulties together. We were in constant touch with Armando and his late wife and had warm relations with them.



IX

EL SHATT



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*Mira ALTARAC*

## LIFE UNDER CANVAS



*Mira Altarac was born in Zagreb in 1938 to father Mordo Marko Altarac from Tuzla and mother Regina Altarac, née Koen, from Sarajevo. After emigration she returned to Zagreb where she completed primary and secondary school and then enrolled in Zagreb University to study comparative literature and English in the Faculty of Philosophy. She worked in the Mladost publishing company and in the Zagreb City Library. For some time she lived in England where her son, Daniel*

*Ilan, was born. He is now a physics engineer, married to Ana Domaš.*

After our sojourn in Split, which is where we were in 1943 when Italy capitulated, Mother and I joined the Jewish colony in Vela Luka on Korčula for a short time. From there, after the Germans occupied Korčula, we went to Vis and then, with a group of Dalmatian refugees, we set off to El Shatt, a desert in Egypt near the Suez Canal. There were about thirty of us Jews. Father joined the Partisans.

I remember with anxiety the flight from Korčula. The news spread in the middle of the night: the Germans were coming! In pitch dark, without turning the lights on, we were boarding the boats. As a child of barely five, some of the dramatic things that were happening seemed funny to me: a man in a coat, with a hat on his head and a briefcase in

his hand, fell into the sea and had to be pulled out. The weather was awful and the sea rough, the boats were rolling. There was rain pouring down the walls, children were crying and everyone was vomiting.

I remember the nine day voyage on the Mediterranean. However, before we reached Port Said, we had stops along the way, in Italy, in the villages of Santa Croce and Santa Maria della Salute. They put us up in empty, abandoned villas. Before that the Allies disinfected us: mothers with children were put under hot showers and we were dusted with DDT. The village women from the Dalmatian islands were reluctant to undress and go naked under the showers. There was also a possibility of us being sent somewhere across the ocean, but Mother and I stood firm – we wanted to meet Father after the war. Cleaned and disinfected, we continued our adventures by boat: Bari, Brindisi, Taranto, and then nothing for days. After three years of fleeing and hiding, this journey seemed like an idyll, practically a holiday. I enjoyed sleeping in hammocks on the ship because I could swing in them. There were also members of the British Army with us. I remember one young officer who showed us his family photographs, with a little girl my age, and he would offer us sweets. All the same, just so it wouldn't all be seen as idyllic, I have to say we had daily drills in case the ship came across a mine – there were many of them scattered in the sea. Despite all the potential danger every day, the island people had a very nice time and found the voyage so pleasant that it was with heavy hearts that they disembarked in Africa!

And so, after a long voyage, we approached Port Said. The ship was surrounded by little boats with Arabs in them, famous for their skill as traders. All of them persistently offered their goods for sale; obviously they didn't know we were refugees from war-torn Yugoslavia and not some idle tourists. Our first shock came on the first night. They put us in a huge abattoir, where we slept on the bare concrete. We had slept in a meadow, under the stars, back in Mosor, but this was something different. In the morning they put us in trucks and we stopped in the El Shatt desert, close to the Suez Canal. The tent settlement was already in place. There were large tents waiting for us, twenty or so people to each tent. Of course for me, as a child, this tent city was interesting, but I think it was something of a shock to the adults, in fact they were scandalised. There was also the tropical heat, and we weren't used to that.

That first night, no one slept well. Children could be heard crying all night. In the morning a rumour spread that some members of the group – children and elderly people – had already died during that first night.

However life soon settled into a normal state. By this I mean that our basic needs were met: latrines were built, the kitchens began working: people would go “to the cauldron” with plates for their rations and stand in lines. Soon we were given tropical hats for protection from the hot sun. We were accommodated in Camps I, II and III. We were free to move around, people would walk to the Suez Canal to watch the big ships pass by, but returning and finding your way around this tent settlement wasn’t easy, at least not in the beginning. However, this problem, too, was soon solved: streets were set up and named. We also fought with the *ghibli*, the desert wind. Anyone who has been in the desert knows how difficult it is to find protection from the winds there.



*On the hot sands of El Shatt: Mira  
with mother Regina, 1944*

We shared a tent with the three members of the Salom family, former owners of a match factory from Travnik, the only ones who separated their space inside the tent with some pinkish, sheer fabric in an attempt to create an illusion of privacy. To this day I am grateful to Mr Salom, who would tell me the tale of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves, the only one I heard in my early childhood, while mother sang a lot. In addition to them there were also a father and daughter, old Mr Jungwirth and his daughter Olga, and there was also the elderly and nervous Mrs Lustig. She was worried about her daughter who had stayed behind in the country

and simply couldn’t accustom herself to the new living conditions, constantly objecting “Dreadful, dreadful!” There was also a family of five from Brač, with one extra person. After the war we stayed in touch with them for some time.

At least people were able to relax and joke. In the evening, as we returned from a walk to the Suez Canal, Mr Salom, who had stayed at home, would improvise, rolling a piece of cord on the sand he would give them a good scare, there would be panic and frightened screams of "Snake, snake!" The more resourceful people tried to grow watermelons in the hot sand, or boil eggs on it.

There was a hospital set up and I was admitted to it. I had mumps. All of us were vaccinated against tropical diseases. A cultural life was organised, a school was started, a very active folk dancing group began and even a theatre.

I turned six and began attending the first grade of primary school. At first we sat on empty petrol cans and wrote on the sand, but before long we were given exercise books (with inscriptions in English on one side and Arabic on the other) and textbooks. I've kept all of these! It's very interesting to leaf through them, especially from today's perspective. Along with Partisans and the Red Army, they also contain various names, such as Zlata, Mile, Cvijeta and Džafer, and places of worship, Catholic churches and mosques. On one photograph of my father I proudly wrote in my newly learned letters "My father is Partisan!"

There was even a working mail service. So indirectly, through someone else, Mother received the news that her mother had died in the Sarajevo hospital. The news was sent by Marica Guina from Metkovići, who had saved our Lotika from Sarajevo and was later proclaimed as Righteous. She died this year, 2003, at the age of one hundred and one. Immediately after the war, Mother went to the Sarajevo hospital to ask where her mother was buried, but they wouldn't tell her anything.

It was possible to maintain personal hygiene, but not to peacetime standards. I don't remember washing in the mornings, but there were shower stalls where people could go and shower when they wanted, first checking whether there was any water. If the Arabs were something of a curiosity for our people, they too were interested in white women, so it would sometimes happen that a young Arab man would peep curiously inside the showers. I remember they used to go to work in trucks and would clap their hands and shout in rhythm "*Aha la bib azi ze,*" which is supposed to mean "I love a pretty girl".

The small Jewish community observed the feast days. These were celebrated modestly and, later, a cantor from Zagreb, Leon Altarac, would say prayers on holidays and at funerals.



There were a large number of American and British nurses in the camp, they were nice and discreet. My mother had never in her life known how to be idle, so she worked for one of them who was known to everyone as Miss B. Mother would clean her tent. Miss B would sometimes leave her some clothing or toiletry item with a discreet note to my mother: "For you, Regina." We still have a photograph of her with an inscription to my mother: "To Regina, with much thanks, Wilhelmina Healey, Miss B."



*Unhappy childhood: Lea (second from L) and Mira Altarac (third from L)*

There were many courses begun in the camp, so my mother signed up for a course in English. The teacher took his students on a day trip to Cairo, from where I got a pretty pair of blue sandals.

Later we laughed at Mother's story of how she began talking to the trader in all the broken languages she spoke and how, in the end he asked her: "*Quantas linguas parala la signora?*" to which she replied "*Ninguno!*"

There was also a love story which began in our camp. Thirty-seven-year-old Nina Salom, was a plump, pretty brunette who had been married before the war to her uncle, but this marriage, in today's language, "was not consummated". She fell in love with Dr Vučković, who was in El Shatt with his wife and two sons. Mrs Vučković committed

suicide by jumping into the Suez Canal. Nina, Dr Vučković and the Salom family did not return to Yugoslavia. We heard that they stayed on some Indian reservation in Canada. None of them are still alive.

In the spring of 1945 came the resounding news that US President Franklin Roosevelt had died. The war was nearing its end. After fifteen months on the burning sand of Africa, we again faced a long journey home.

I vividly remember our arrival in Split: euphoria in the streets, cheerful people singing, flags waving. I was walking along the street with Mother who was holding my hand and weeping.

“Why are you crying?” I asked.

“Well, the war has ended! Yes, ended...” she replied sadly. She still did not know that seventy members of her family would not return. In Split we met Father wearing a Partisan, or rather an Allied, uniform. It was a three-day journey to Zagreb in an open truck with armed Partisans. Lots of shooting along the way. We arrived in Zagreb late in the evening, it was drizzling and the city was dark.

And in exactly the same way as we had left our apartment in Derenčinova Street in 1941, as though we were going out for a coffee, we were now given an abandoned three-room Ustaša apartment, fully furnished, just as ours had been in 1941, and which also had some Jewish things in it. As was usual at the time we shared the apartment, with the three members of Jakica Montiljo’s family (all of whom went to Israel).

A “new life” had begun.

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*Rikica VOSTREL*

## TRAVELLING THROUGH UNCERTAINTY TO THE PORT OF SALVATION



**R***ifka-Rikica Vostrel, née Altarac, was born in Sarajevo in 1929 to father Leon Altarac and mother Roza, née Atijas. She has a younger sister, Lea-Lilika.*

*All members of Rikica Vostrel's family – her father, mother and sister, survived the Holocaust.*

*After finishing secondary school she worked in Split, in the City Headquarters of the Pioneer youth organisation, then in Zagreb and the Central Youth Committee, in the department for Pioneers. After her marriage she devoted herself to her family and began accompanying her husband on his assignments in diplomatic missions.*

*She has two sons, two grandchildren and one great-grandson.*

*She lives in Zagreb.*

My journey to El Shatt really began in 1943, in September, when Fascist Italy capitulated. Until then I had lived with my parents in Split where, in June 1942, I experienced one of the saddest days of my life. This was the day when Fascist units, the so-called *Figli de la Lupe* (the sons of the wolf) suddenly burst into the Jewish temple.

My father, Leon Altarac, was an employee of the Jewish Community and *shamas* of the temple, so our family lived in the Community building next door to the temple.

The Fascists entered the temple during prayers. Many of the congregation were beaten and the temple and our apartment were demolished. They threw all our things out of the windows and then set fire to them right in the middle of Narodni Square. We were left with nothing but, which was most important, we were uninjured and alive. We were rescued by good people who found us temporary accommodation and helped us with clothing and footwear. However this ominous day left a deep impression on my soul. This was why, as a girl of thirteen, I became involved with the illegal activities of the League of the Young Generation and SKOJ (the Youth Communist League of Yugoslavia). I'm almost certain that I was the youngest SKOJ girl in Split at the time.

When Italy capitulated, I knew that I had to leave Split, because I could not stay and wait for the Germans and the Ustaša to arrive.

With my parents, my little sister Lea (Lilika) and my elderly grandmother, I headed off into the unknown, going to join the Partisans. Along the way we were separated. My family went to a Partisan refugee camp and I went to a unit. For about four and a half months I stayed first on Mt Mosor and then on the islands of Brač and Šolta, where I was a member of the District Committee of USAOH (the United League of Anti-Fascist Youth of Croatia) for these two islands.

However a new enemy offensive began so, at the end of 1943, we had to evacuate from Brač. The journey to the island of Vis remains an unpleasant memory. We crammed ourselves into a yacht which wasn't very big. There were so many of us that we were practically lying on one another. I thought that we wouldn't make it because of the strong *bura*, the north-eastern wind, which was swinging the yacht around like a small gondola. But in the end all was well and we reached Vis.

I knew nothing about my family except that they had been evacuated from Mt Mosor, from Srnjin where they had been staying in a Partisan refugee camp. I assumed they had been evacuated to one of the islands, but they weren't on Vis.

On Vis there were Partisans, the wounded, women and children, in other words this was an army base and a camp for refugee Partisans from all over Dalmatia. There were also Allied soldiers and sailors there. Among so many people I felt lost and on my own. But this was merely my feeling because, along with many others, I was chosen to set off to Bari (Italy) where, under an agreement between the Supreme Headquarters of the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia and the

Allied forces in the Mediterranean, there were already many refugees and wounded people.

In Bari we were met by many of our people, including acquaintances of my parents. From these I learnt that my loved ones were in the Carbonara reception camp, not far from Bari. I wanted to go straight to them, but for this I would have needed a special permit which I couldn't obtain. I managed to send them a short letter letting them know that I was moving on with a group of Partisan refugees and that they should find out where we were and follow me.

From Bari we were moved to Tukurano, where there was a reception camp for refugees and the wounded. The camp was in two parts, one for reception and quarantine (disinfection, washing etc.) and the other part, known as the clean camp. I was in quarantine, but in a "clean" barracks, part of a group whose job was to disinfect children. One night, after a few days in Tukurano, I was lying on the floor of the clean barracks, covered with a thin borrowed blanket and was slowly dropping off to sleep. Suddenly I heard familiar voices and saw Mother and Father with Lilika in their arms. This was an unforgettable moment. I managed to obtain a permit to join my family and continued my life as a refugee with them.



*Meeting Jews from the British Army, El Shatt 1944. Marked in the photograph: (1) Mira, (2) Lea and, (3) Rikica Altarac and (4) Nada Levi*

From the clean camp, where my family was, we continued on together. We were given accommodation in abandoned villas in Santa Maria di Croce, near Otranto, and other groups were also accommodated in villas in Santa Maria di Nardò. Here we waited for them to organise a convoy to leave for Africa. From a number of tiny places in the region we gathered together in Taranto where the convoy would leave from. We were put up in huge, cold and uncomfortable halls while we waited for a couple of days for permission or an order for us to board the Allied ships which would take us far away. This was not a pleasant period. We couldn't wait to leave, despite not knowing what awaited us at the end of the journey. In about the middle of February, 1944, we boarded a large warship, one of three in the convoy.

The ships were full of refugees, mostly from Dalmatia, and wounded Partisans. I never thought about the danger but it most certainly was dangerous. There were mines and submarines in the sea and the danger of bombs from the air. We had one real alarm on the voyage when enemy aircraft flew overhead, but everything was all right in the end, and we arrived in Port Said in Egypt. I remember that we then travelled on some strange train and that we finally reached our destination travelling through the desert in an army truck.

The entire trip from Port Said to El Shatt had a devastating impact on us. The desert, the sand, the incredible heat, no settlements, no greenery anywhere, deserted and sad. Nor did we have a better impression when we reached El Shatt. There were a large number of tents on a huge, sand-covered space which were lined up in a way that they formed some kind of streets and sectors. There were also buildings which housed the kitchens and bathrooms.

The camp we had reached was close to the Suez Canal, it was known as Camp 2, and there were three more camps in the vicinity. Camp 1 was nine kilometres from the Suez and Camp 3 was two kilometres west of Camp 1. For a brief period there was also a camp in Khatatba, about two hundred kilometres from El Shatt. The camps in which we were accommodated had been used before our arrival as quarters for the British Army.

Our family: mother Roza and father Leon, grandmother Lea Atijas, sister Lilika and I, together with my aunt, Regina Albahari, and her son Albi, were accommodated in Sector B, Tent 30B. There were also four other families and one single man living in this tent. There was the Kario family from Belgrade, with a son my age whom we called Bubi;

Jozef and Sara Klajnodštajn and their adopted niece Nada Levi Klajnodštajn, whose parents had perished (Nada Klajnodštajn, whose married name is Čuk, now lives in Zagreb); Finika Šnitlinger and her daughter; my peer Hari Štajner (who became a journalist in Belgrade after the war) with his mother, and the one single man, a lawyer named Franić from Makarska.

The camp cots were lined up next to one another along both sides of the tent. The living conditions were quite difficult, given that people of all ages, men and women, children and the elderly were all together. Across from our family was Jozef Klajnodštajn, who was very ill and who, unfortunately, died there.

We lived in a kind of commune. There would be a bell for breakfast, morning tea, lunch, afternoon tea and dinner. We could eat in the dining room or take the food to our tents. In several places in our sector, in small, walled spaces, there was water which was warm and unpleasant tasting, so we mainly drank tea.



*White clothes for the white sand and heat in El Shatt: Rikica's younger sister Lea in her mother's arms, Rikica in the centre in white dress*

There was plenty of food, although we didn't like it much. A few times Mother cooked something herself. Father would earn some money as a barber so he was also able to buy some things in the can-

teen. A good friend of ours made us a small tin stove with an oven, so my mother would sometimes bake a pie. We received clothes from the Red Cross, and skilled hands could make dresses out of nightgowns, so you could say that we were decently dressed. The women did needlework and decorated their parts of the tents. These were usually decorations from the bags in which the food arrived.

It was extremely hot during the day, while the nights were cold. Sometimes there were hot and unpleasant winds and we once even experienced a real desert storm which tore down many of the tents.

After several months in the camp, the seven of us in my family were given separate accommodation in half a tent. The other half, separated by a canvas wall, was given to another family.

Life in the camp was very organised. Everyone had their own assignment, or a place to be on duty. There were camp committees which were responsible to the Central Committee of the refugee camp. Sector committees were directly in charge of the needs of their sector and these needs were coordinated by the camp committee. I myself was a member of the Camp Committee and later also of the Central Committee of USAOH (the United League of Anti-Fascist Youth of Croatia) for the refugee camp. I worked in the sector education department and attended the third year of secondary school. For my excellent results I was commended as the best student of the IIIa class and was given the booklet "Declaration of the Second Session of AVNOJ" (the Anti-Fascist Council of the National Liberation of Yugoslavia).

After some time in the camp, there were various workshops organised, such as tailoring, shoe-making and a barber, and these offered their services free. They used all kinds of materials such as cans and old rags. Skilful women took threads from the tent ropes and knitted various items of clothing.

The cultural and educational work was done in groups. There was a camp choir led by maestro Josip Hatze and a theatre group which, as far as I remember, even performed in Cairo. Later there were also brochures published about youth and pioneers. As I already mentioned, my father worked as a barber, but he was most active as a member of the camp religious club and he performed Jewish religious ceremonies. These rituals were also attended by Jews who were members of the British Army stationed somewhere nearby. They would mostly visit us on Jewish festivals. The others also practised their religious ceremonies and customs.



A British Army member, Jakov Mizrahi, gave Father a prayer book which he used in El Shatt. On the empty pages he wrote down the names of Jews who died in the camp and were buried there with a funeral service. He also wrote down the names of three Jewish children who were born there. Jakov Mizrahi was from Jerusalem.

People were born, lived and died in the camp. People were also married there, but the harsh conditions cost the lives of a large number of newborn babies and children under two and, especially, elderly people. There was a cemetery established in the camp and a monument built. Unfortunately, over time, this cemetery was devastated and is no longer recognisable. As far as I know, steps are being taken to restore it.

We learnt about the end of the war during the night between July 9 and 10, 1945. We all came out of our tents and celebrated like mad. After this we were impatient to return to Yugoslavia. Our repatriation was organised in groups. In July 1945, we returned to Split.



X

IN PRISONS  
IN SERBIA AND GERMANY



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*Ženi LEBL*

## CHILDHOOD FRIEND – AND “WAILING WALL”



*Ženi Lebl was born on June 20, 1927, in Aleksinac, to father Leon and mother Ana, née Robiček. Of her closest family, her father and elder brother Aleksandar survived the Holocaust, while her mother perished. From 1933 she lived in Belgrade where she completed primary and lower secondary school. Before Jewish women and children were taken to the Sajmište camp, she fled to Niš and lived under a false name in the house of Jelena Glavaški. Because of their illegal activities, they were both arrested on February 22, 1943. Jelena was later shot. She was proclaimed,*

*posthumously as Righteous Among the Nations.*

*Since September 1954, Ženi Lebl has lived in Israel, where she has devoted herself to the history of Jews on the territory of the former Yugoslavia. To date she has published fifteen books, of which nine are in Serbian. She also translates Israeli writers and poets from Hebrew into Serbian. She is the recipient of 23 awards for scientific and literary works in competitions of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia.*

On September 1, 1940, I enrolled, happy and contented, in the fourth year of the First Girls' General Secondary School in Belgrade. This was in Bitolaska Street, the famous "Blue School". I was thirteen

years, two months and ten days old at the time. We had returned just before that from our summer holiday which, for years, we had spent in Miličevci, a village close to Čačak where my father was manager of a magnesite mine. My most beautiful memories were linked to this place. The only thing missing, at least for me, was our Lady, a beautiful female German Shepherd who my brother had brought to our home in a little bag five years earlier. At the time she looked like a ball of fine wool. Who ever would have thought that this would grow into such a large, beautiful, devoted and noble creature, who became part of the family and had her own yard and a summer and winter residence.

In Miličevci there were neither electricity nor running water. It was the same in the mine house in which we lived, but my father had brought a huge, one-eyed radio with enormous batteries and he solved the problem of running water by pumping water onto the roof into a big metal barrel. Every day we took turns pumping the water from the pump beside the house. As there was now running water in the house, the impression was that everything was exactly the same as in Belgrade.

We had a beautiful, clean stream, one course of which father dammed up and thus made quite a large pool through which the stream kept flowing. On the terrace where we would eat lunch, swallows had built a nest and each year they would return to Miličevci from wherever in the world to lay their eggs and raise their young.

We also had guests from time to time. During the 1939 summer holiday we hosted the Glavaški sisters, Jelena and Ruža in our "villa". Jelena had been my nanny in the period when my father had been the manager of a coal mine in Aleksinac where I was born and spent the first five years of my life. I remember Jelena talking about how she had moved to Niš. I don't know why I registered this fact because it wasn't at all important to me at the time.

At the beginning of the 1940-41 school year, my brother Saša, who was five years older than me, expected to enrol in the first year at university in October. There was no indication that there would be any problems. And why would there be? And then, on October 5, 1940, unrest crept into our peaceful home: trepidation, presentiment or, better to say, foreboding. Something was going on, something that no one had ever thought could happen: Saša was told that he could not enrol in the faculty, neither he nor certain other friends of his. But why, for the love of God? Because he was a Jew. Because he was a Jew? Could that have been the reason?

It turned out that a decree about this had been passed. I learned that it was called the *Numerus Clausus*. However the decree also included certain paragraphs by which it was perhaps possible to bypass this decision, if not for all Jews then at least for my brother and a few other people, if it could be proved that the fathers of the future privileged students had earned merit for the homeland, that is if they had fought “on the right side” in the Great War of 1914-18.

Our home started to look like a beehive. Father usually only came once every two weeks to spend two or three days with his family; now he came very often, but was busy all the time. I saw that they were searching for old documents all over the house and in various institutions. This is when I learnt that my great grandmother, Jelena Lebl, had been a volunteer nurse in the Serbo-Turkish war in 1877 and had even been given a medal. I learned that my grandfather, Aleksa Robiček, was a recipient of the Albanian Commemorative Medal. But it was my father who most filled me with pride: not only had he fought in the Serbian Army, been wounded and crossed over to Albania, he had also received high praise from the Allies because, during the breakthrough on the Salonika front, he had found coal which had enabled the Allied Forces to establish an energy supply. I learnt all of this only thanks to the *Numerus Clausus*. And so, in about the beginning of March, 1941, my dear brother received permission from Education Minister Miha Krek personally to enrol in the first semester of the of the Engineering Faculty at a time when the second semester was already well under way.

Shortly after he had taken care of his son’s university enrolment, Father was called up for a one-month military exercise. It seemed to me as though it somehow did him good to forget to some extent all the strain and, even more, the humiliation we had experienced over the past few months. I never dreamed at the time that this “military exercise” would last four years and four months and that it would save my father’s life. Somehow during those days our long-time maid, Rozalija, suddenly disappeared. Mother, my brother and I were left alone at home. And, of course, our Lady.

I heard about the beginning of the war on April 6, on Radio London. I was supposed to start a first aid course in the cave in Tašmajdan at 8.00 a.m. that day. This was a “conspiratorial course” which had been organised by SKOJ in the First Girl’s General Secondary School, with Ružica Vasikić heading it. Ružica had recruited me in October 1940 to

be a sort of class commissioner for SKOJ and this first aid course was my first concrete assignment. I had asked my mother to wake me at about 6.30 a.m.

By 7.00, all I had left to do was brush and plait my hair. Mechanically I turned on Radio Belgrade, which was silent. I found this odd so, although I don't really know why, I switched to Radio London which at that time of day would broadcast a program in Serbian. And now a miracle: Radio London was broadcasting the Yugoslav National Anthem, "God of Justice". I pricked up my ears because I knew this wasn't any kind of Yugoslav holiday. So, what's this about – why this now? I soon found out. The announcer began the broadcast in sombre tones.

"This morning at 5.00 a.m., Germany declared war on Yugoslavia. German bombers are flying towards Belgrade..."

I was beside myself with agitation. I burst into the bedroom where Mother was reading *Politika* in bed, shouting:

"Mother, the Germans have declared war on us, they are coming to bomb us!!!"

Mother, astonished, put her finger to her mouth and whispered:

"Calm down. You'll wake Saša up!" She obviously thought something was wrong with me, but I continued in the same raised voice:

"Mother, the war has begun..."

"Who told you that, child?"

"Mother, it was just on Radio London!"

"What's London got to do with it?"

I saw that Mother didn't believe me. I ran out into the street, just as I was, with one plait and a comb in my hand. The street was empty on this Sunday morning at 7.00 a.m. Suddenly sirens blared out from above, like alarm sirens, making the blood freeze. Then the blast of a bomb was heard here and there. In our street, neighbours began opening their windows. First, heads appeared, looking up to the sky. Immediately after that, people began coming out into the street in their pyjamas, talking loudly about how "our planes are looping loops" as though these were our army pilots giving an aerobatic display. I was shouting at the top of my voice that these were German bombers, but no one heard me. At that moment my mother also appeared and pulled me back into the house, straight to the basement. She too had probably heard what Radio London was saying.

The war had really begun. Belgrade was bombed, there was rubble everywhere. The country was in disarray and was soon occupied. The Germans entered Belgrade.

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My brother Saša went to compulsory labour. He began working on clearing the rubble and pulling decomposing bodies out. I think this had a worse effect on Mother than on him. And then our small home began to fill up. First came Grandmother Regina, then Aunt Šarika, then Aunt Mina, who had been evicted from her luxury apartment in Jovanova Street. Of course they were all wearing yellow armbands and the only one not obliged to wear one was me, because I had not yet turned four-



*The Lebl family before World War Two:  
mother Ana, father Leon, brother Aleksan-  
dar-Saša and little Ženi*

teen. As Jews were not allowed to go shopping before 10.00 a.m. (by which time there was nothing left at the green market, when there was no green market), I was “our foreign affairs minister” as my mother used to call me. In the morning, before the curfew, I would go down to Aleksandrova Street and there I would wait in a shelter for the baker to open. And by some miracle I, who had always been skinny and fussy about food, suddenly developed an appetite. I would pick chunks out of the warm loaf of bread. Mother couldn’t scold me because she understood what hunger was.

And when we had nothing to eat, our problem was how to satisfy our Lady's hunger. Several times mother wanted Lady to leave and took her out into the street, knowing that because she was so beautiful and wonderful someone would certainly take her in, but Lady would return to Mother and it even seemed to me that she looked at us reprovingly for wanting to get rid of her.

Two months after the beginning of the war, on June 4, 1941, the first card arrived from father. It read that he was alive and well and in the Oflag XIII B prison camp near Nuremburg. The most important thing for us was that he was alive, but Mother was thrown into despair by his signature: "Your Number 6547". A few days later a form arrived, the *Paketschein* which we had to have in order to send him parcels. It explicitly stated that we could send sweet beans, onion, flour, raisins, sugar, cooking oil and prunes – none of which we had. However Mother would not allow Father to think that we were in trouble, that she was taking from her children, as my grandmother used to complain, just to make the difficult prison life easier for him. She began selling jewellery.

In the middle of August, three people from Banat were "allocated" to us, two from Vršac and an elderly lady from Pančevo. Aleksandar Molnar was from Vršac, as soon as the war broke out his German wife had left him, taking their daughter, and he was taking this very hard. Also from Vršac was Livija-Lili Kampf; her husband was German but never left her side, not for a minute. (He even got her out of Sajmište in the end and, after the war, they moved to Israel.) Our pantry, which was always well stocked with jars of jams and pickles, was emptying rapidly.



*Ženi at thirteen*



Soon after this they locked Molnar up in Topovske Šupe, a camp near Autokomanda in Tabanovačka Street. Mother sent me there a few times to take parcels to him. This was difficult for me, but hardest of all was when they told me there was no longer any need to bring him parcels.

Our garden which had once been beautiful, full of roses and peonies, was now full of nettles, but this was intentional. The woman from Pančevo was a real artist and made something from them which tasted like spinach. I could only think about how Lady was suffering and once I went to the restaurant of Hotel Moskva where the German officers would go with local girls. I could see that they weren't so interested in the food and left a lot on their plates. I immediately collected some of the pieces they left behind and took them home for the Pančevo woman to make Lady some soup.

There are two events from this time which remain in my memory. The first was a card from Father in which he told our mother "Be prepared to be both mother and father to our children."

The second unforgettable incident was when, during the first months of the occupation, I was with my mother who was wearing her "label" and two neighbours came up to us and said: "We're really sorry you have to suffer because you have a Jewish husband." Mother didn't hesitate to explain that she wasn't suffering because of her husband, but that she was also Jewish.

"Good God, it doesn't show on you!"

Mother didn't reply, but I did.

"And what exactly is supposed to show? A tail? Horns?"

The women were astonished, and walked away as mother gently advised me "You must learn that silence is golden!"

The beginning of the school year was approaching. I had never before had so much determination to study than when I was deprived of that right, having been banned from even before the notorious *Numerus Clausus*. And life went on, the schools were working.

And somehow it was exactly during this period that they began arresting Belgrade Jews who, up to now, had only been sent to compulsory labour. Mother began to despair and was trying to find a way to secure false documents for Saša to go to Italy, because she had heard that the Italians had a more humane attitude to Jews. Several times Mother went with jewellery and money, but she didn't get the passport. Of course she couldn't complain to anyone. Finally, at the very last

moment I think, Saša got papers in the name of Giovanni Marlemco and travelled to Split. I remained at home with Mother, my grandmother, Šarika, Mina, Lili and the woman from Pančevo. And our Lady.

On December 8 the gendarmes passed a decree which affected everyone except Mother and me. This obliged everyone to report the next day to the Special Police for Jews at 21 Džordža Vašingtona Street. The following day we went there to see Grandmother off. It was a terrible sight. There were Jews, mostly women, children babies and an occasional elderly man standing in the freezing cold. After they listed them all, they began putting them in trucks and taking them to Sajmište.

With heavy hearts we returned home. Mother was convinced that we hadn't been summoned because she was, after all, the wife of a Yugoslav lieutenant colonel. However the following day we were summoned for December 12. And then something happened which changed my fate. The Germans arrived in a three-wheeler on December 11. They stopped outside our house and asked where Regina Robiček lived. They had come to seal off her part of the apartment. While they were walking down our garden path, our Lady barked at them, foaming at the mouth. Then she jumped up on the fence and, when that didn't work, she ran and jumped over the fence which she had never done before. While she was still in the air, one of the Germans fired a bullet to her head. This was the first time I had seen a living creature killed, and one I loved infinitely. As I was hugging her dead and bloody body, mother begged me to leave her. How could I leave her when she had not left us even in the worst of times? "They'll kill us like that too!" I shouted to my mother who may already have thought this herself. I couldn't bury our faithful Lady. I covered her with a layer of snow. I couldn't get over her and kept crying all the time.

Mother prepared two rucksacks and filled them with the most essential things. She embroidered our initials on all our things and on each rucksack. Later in the afternoon she went to say goodbye to some of our neighbours and I simply got dressed, took my rucksack and headed to the railway station. There was a group of miserable and unfortunate men and women there. I mingled with them and, when they got on the train, I did also.

I occupied a seat, if it could be called a seat at all, in the net for suitcases. This was the only empty space between the bundles of my fellow travellers and a suitcase here and there. I had the impression that all the people in the train were a single group. I didn't know who they

were nor where they were from, until they began talking and grumbling. I could tell from the way they spoke that they were from Vojvodina. They began talking about the atrocities of the Hungarians in Bačka, about the town of Sombor and now and then they would mention the names of families who had perished. Of these I remembered the Lazić and Maširević families. After travelling for several hours, sometime before midnight, at some station, someone said:

“Everyone out!”

I had no idea where we were until I saw the sign “Niš” on the station. We all got off and, once again, I was among the crowd. Someone said that if anyone had relatives in the town this would be helpful because it would be less accommodation the Commissariat for Refugees would have to find. I was among the others who registered. I told them that my aunt lived in Niš, but I only knew her name – Jelena Glavaški - I didn't know her address. This wasn't a problem. At the station they had a list of all the residents of the city. They established that my aunt lived at 12 Hilendarska. They began explaining to me that it was “right beside the road to Pirot” and then, even more precisely, in the Canićeva building, but I had absolutely no idea where either the road or the Canićeva building were. I was alone and small, so someone took pity on me and decided that I needed to get to my aunt that evening. They called a police officer to take me, not only because he knew where the Canićeva building was, but also because this was now after the curfew. The police officer tried to strike up a conversation with me, asking me about this and that, but I asked him to leave me alone so he gave up.

I was well dressed in a winter coat, a woollen jumper and warm trousers. Everything was dark blue (like my school uniform), except for the rucksack on my back. From the knitted cap on my head, under which only my thick braids showed, to my woollen socks and warm, heavy boots, I had everything to protect me from the terrible cold. However, despite being so warmly dressed, I was still very cold. It was snowing, but it was in my soul that I was cold. I was also tired, frightened and worried: what would happen when we reached my “aunt”, how would she react when she saw me? I had no idea what her political position was, her view of the world or her attitude to Jews.

Finally, after a rather long walk, we reached the Canićeva building. This was a building of four stories with an entrance from a courtyard. Because both gates were closed, the policeman looked for a bell. He rang and, somewhere at the top of the building, a tiny window from the

stairs opened and a head appeared asking who was there. The policeman replied by asking the woman to come down and open the gate. She asked for a few minutes to dress and disappeared from the window. The policeman asked me if I had recognised my aunt's voice and I said I had, although I wasn't sure.

Quite some time passed, seeming like an eternity to me, before she appeared in front of us. She looked at me in silence. I spoke up, saying we should thank the man for bringing me to her. I shook his hand and he was gone, even before Jela had unlocked the gate. She was still silent, and it wasn't until we were on the stairs somewhere around the second floor that she spoke:

“Well, you're all I needed!”

Now it was my turn to be silent. I stopped, and then the first thing I could think of to say was:

“Well, nothing then. I'll go back.”

Jela came to me and hugged me:

“I'll explain!”

We continued up the stairs to the garret. From the door I could feel warmth and smell burnt paper. Jela told me that the reason she had taken so long to come down was not to get dressed – she had already been dressed – but because she had to burn some “compromising material”. She explained that she now worked with the Red Cross and the Partisans, and that she had leaflets to give to activists from the village of Lužani the next day. This was such a weight off my chest: if Jelena was working with the Partisans she was definitely not on the side of our common enemy. Because she had destroyed everything, she now needed to make them all over again. She went to the attic, which was on the same level as the garret, brought a typewriter and put some sticky copying device on the floor. This looked like an oilcloth table cover covered with honey. She was typing the leaflets and I was copying, laying the papers on this mixture and going over each copy with a rolling pin. When we finished working it was almost dawn.

A short while later, Jela left for work, telling me to think about how to get some kind of identification document, because life was impossible without one. Her apartment was tiny, but all the others had been requisitioned, there was a German living in each of them and there was the obligatory “list of tenants” in the entrance of the building. She needed to register me as a tenant and for that I would need documents.

I began to think. I remembered those people from the train being told that they would be registered at the Commissariat for Refugees. I dressed so that my face wasn't showing at all, only my heavy braids hung down my back. Out in the street I asked the first woman I saw where this commissariat was. She didn't know, but some other woman also stopped and she not only knew where the commissariat was, but also told me that I would have to go there with my father and mother, because you had to be over 16 to have your own identification document. I thanked her sincerely for this valuable information and set off. There were a lot of people outside the commissariat and inside the building. Somehow I got myself into the middle of the queue and reached the counter, which was quite high. I could only just see the clerk, who asked me who I was with. No one. How old was I? Well, sixteen and a half. Why was I so small? Because the Hungarians had killed my parents and I had had nothing to eat. I even began to cry so the clerk took pity on me. He asked me for my personal information and, because I had the initials JL embroidered on all my things and had heard on the train about the family from Sombor, I said Jovanka Lazić. Where and when was I born? Well, in Sombor of course. And the date to match my age of sixteen and a half. Father's name? Milorad. Mother's name? Here my brain stalled, until I managed to mutter: "Anka". Her maiden name? Again Sombor helped me out: Maširević. Tears began to well up in my eyes. The clerk asked no more questions. He gave me a temporary refugee identification, saying that I would get a permanent one when I brought two photographs. He told me to go to the police with the refugee identification and they would give me a temporary identification card. He explained to me how to find the police building. I thanked him warmly. This procedure was repeated at the police and I had to make sure I repeated the same information I had given at the Commissariat. Here I played the role of my life, cried at the right moment and was given a temporary identification card, to be replaced with a permanent one when I brought two photographs.

Happy and satisfied with two, albeit temporary, identification documents in my pocket, I set off down the main street where I saw a photographic studio. As I was about to walk in, I felt a hand on my shoulder. I turned to see a bearded officer, one of Kosta Pećanac's Chetniks, with a rifle on his shoulder and wearing a uniform decorated with cartridge belts, on his head a fur cap with a skull and crossbones.

"Ženi, I recognised you by your braids!"

It was Rade, my neighbour from Belgrade. I barely recognised him because this was no longer Rade the modest student. I froze.

“Is your family here?”

I didn’t know what to say, how to behave. I just managed to say:

“You can report me... You can turn me in...”

He was silent, looking at me. It seems that my desperation and hopelessness was reflected in my face. He spoke:

“You know, it would be best for both you and me: we have never seen each other, we have never spoken to each other! “Bye now.”

He turned around and blended into the crowd. I stood there frozen, my eyes wide open with fear and I almost forgot that I was on my way to have my photograph taken. I went into the shop, the photographer told me to sit down. I sat down, I was numb. I barely heard the man shouting:

“Are you deaf? It’s finished!”

My God, what was finished? Ah, I was to come and collect the photographs the day after next.

I wasn’t sure whether perhaps Rade had set a trap for me. Maybe his soldiers were following me. I began walking in the other direction from Jela’s home. I became lost in this town that I wasn’t familiar with. I went into buildings and, a few moments later, I would come out, to hide all trace if someone was following me. I wandered like this the whole day, sucking pieces of snow when I was thirsty. The dark fell early this December winter day and I was completely disoriented. With great difficulty I managed to find the house just before curfew. Jela was furious.

“In God’s name, where have you been? What were you doing out in this cold?”

Proudly I held out to her the two temporary identification documents. She whispered.

“Only a Jewish mind could come up with something like that!”

I didn’t know how to react. Perhaps this was some kind of compliment, but I was affected by it. I took a deep breath and told her about my encounter with Rade. She was beside herself.

“How did he recognise you?”

“By my braids,” I told her honestly.

Without a word she went to a drawer, took out the largest pair of scissors she had, walked up to me, took one of my two braids and began cutting it. It was pretty difficult, but in the end she managed. Holding it

in her hand, she walked to the furnace and threw it into the flame. The other braid met the same fate. I clutched at what was left of my hair with my hands. I was wretched and miserable. I felt as though I was lying under a guillotine, but I didn't say a word.

\*

Life at Jela's was very exciting. She was no longer working in a kindergarten but at the Red Cross, and this was on orders, so that she could keep in contact with prisoners. I thought she was an active member of the Communist Party, but she wasn't. In fact she was active, probably more so than all the most active members, but I never asked whether it was she who didn't want to join or whether they didn't want her in the ranks. Perhaps she needed to prove herself. And she was most certainly doing that. She was writing leaflets, which I would copy; she would tour villages, distributing them. We were getting medical supplies from the head of the mental hospital and occasionally people from a Partisan unit came to our place to collect them. The apartment was also a warehouse for jumpers and caps, as well as mittens for fighters, with the thumb and index finger separated from the other three fingers. Because Jela went out to work, I was the "liaison officer". I knew the couriers and would open the door when they gave the password and hand the material over to them.

Jela strictly forbade me to go out into the streets. She would only let me out for a few hours at a time to go through the narrow back streets to visit her best friend from Aleksinac, Darinka Dinić, a teacher who had a son, Racko, two years older than me. He had to be persuaded that I, who had been his best friend from childhood, was dead. Her other friend, Goka, was a seamstress, so I would also go to her place to warm up a bit and help her as much as I was able to.

The last time I had seen Racko was at the consecration of the memorial church in Deligrad, which had been built with the help of donations from the women of the Kneginja Ljubica association in Aleksinac. My mother was very active in this and I had also been involved, as a four-year-old, in performances for the consecration of the church, reciting "Three Brigands", singing "Adio Mare" and performing some "pynastic", which was what I called gymnastics in those days. When the building was finished and the church was to be consecrated, Mother and I travelled from Belgrade to Aleksinac. From there people

travelled to Deligrad in hackneys. They put us children in one. In order to keep us occupied, they bought us each a flute which needed to be filled with water so that it would work. I put water in mine, but Racko didn't, so I teased him until he lost his temper and took my flute and threw it so hard that I heard it crack like a grenade. That was when I started hating him, but he was now the only friend in Niš with whom I came into contact. I knew who he was, but he didn't know who I was. Aunt Darinka used to tell him that all Jews had been killed. I was trying to speak with a drawl, in a Vojvodina accent, adding their "*Ta, kasti...*" to everything, and he was amused by this and would laugh at it. So several months passed until one day Aunt Jela and I took the narrow back streets together to Aunt Darinka's place. Jela went into the room with her and I stayed in the kitchen with Racko. He suggested that we sing and I began singing "Adio Mare". Racko shuddered and raised his voice "Anything except that!" So he did remember his childhood friend. I insisted and continued to sing until he banged his fist on the table saying "Enough!" I stopped, but insisted that he tell me why he was forbidding me to sing this song of farewell to the sea. I kept pestering him until he "confessed" that it reminded him of a small Jewish girl from his childhood who was no longer alive. I felt a lump in my throat. In the whole of Niš, only Jela and Darinka knew about me, the real me. So I decided that if that was the way Racko felt I would take a risk and tell him. I asked him:

"And what would you do if she appeared here and now?" Racko interrupted me:

"You really have no heart, have you? You shouldn't joke about things like that!" Dear Racko, if only he had known how serious I was! And I told him:

"I'm that friend of yours."

He looked at me in astonishment: "She wasn't from Sombor!" he said.

"Neither am I." He asked me to tell him my name and when I did he said I must have heard it from Jela. Then he asked for my sister's name. When I told him that I didn't have a sister, only a brother, I thought he was pretty convinced, but then he remembered, and said I had to tell him something that only he and I would know. And so I told him our story about the flute on the way to Deligrad. He came over and hugged me hard and whispered:

"This is our secret. Mother and Jela mustn't know that I know!"



From that point on, life was more bearable. I had someone to complain to, to tell things. He never reacted, never comforted me, but I know that I could confide in him, that he was my "wailing wall".

\*

Our attic, which was on the same floor as the apartment, became the centre of activity of the resistance movement. There was a false wall in one area, behind which we hid the typewriter and the gelatine duplicator. The rest of the attic was covered in sand and we used it as a library for banned literature. We remembered where we had buried each book. Fighters who had to spend the night in town could also find temporary shelter in our attic.

One day a man with a shaved head arrived and asked for shelter. We immediately found him a spot in the attic. We learned that this man had killed a German officer and it had only been with great difficulty that he had reached us. He told us his name was Srba. The next day when I went out into the street, I saw that there was a wanted poster for his arrest on all the buildings. Srba had to stay in our attic for about a week. I used to take him food. He always had a big revolver and a grenade by his side. I asked him what he did for a living. "Metalworker," was his reply. At the time this was a very modern occupation. "What about you?" he asked me.

What could I tell him? "I'm an intellectual," I replied cheerfully and, in order to prove this, I dug up Marx's "Capital" from the sand.

"Come on then, tell me what it says in here," he insisted. Somehow I managed to get out of the situation and left him to amuse himself with "Capital". (Years later I learnt that "Srba" was Dragi Stamenković, and that he had been certain that Jela and I had perished. When I told him that "that little girl" had survived, he recalled me telling him that I was "an intellectual".)

A man called Zoran began visiting our little apartment. Jela told me that he was the secretary of the local committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia for Niš. Unbelievable as it sounds, I didn't like this man from the very start. He was always chewing something green which would get stuck between his teeth. Jela told me that I should tell him my story, or rather consulted me about this, saying that if I were discovered, he might be able to intervene. I strenuously refused, using Jela's own argument: that the fewer people who knew about me the

safer I would be. But Zoran was something different. I was insistent: there was no way I would tell him! One day Zoran came to me with "an order" for me. I was to go to Belgrade and take something to some address and return with a letter for him. I refused. Rade had recognised me in Niš and God knew what would await me in Belgrade. I told him that I didn't know Belgrade and that I didn't want to travel, but that I would arrange for someone else to carry out this mission for him. He agreed. I found a boy about my age, he was our neighbour and his father was a captain in captivity, so we called him Aca – the captain. He knew about the resistance movement and, although he didn't know any details, he saw me and Jela as role models for resistance against the occupying forces and was prepared to undertake any task given him. I asked him to travel to Belgrade and to do this job for Zoran, without revealing to him who Zoran was. And Aca – the captain – did it. When Zoran came to collect what he had brought, he insisted I tell him the name of the person who had brought it. I refused energetically. Jela still had full confidence in him, but she respected my personal aversion to the man.

On Saturday, February 20, 1943, Jela travelled to the village of Lužane, to her friend Zaga, and took leaflets with her. She was to return on Monday, directly to work. On Monday, February 22, in the morning, our regular courier, Aca, was to come and collect the medical supplies that had been passed on to us by Dr Jekić. We had agreed that after that I could go to Goka. And everything went as agreed. Aca came, bringing some little bag that expanded so much because of the material he put inside that I said someone might be suspicious, but he told me that he was certain that no one had followed him. He convinced me too. Aca left and immediately after that I also left to go to Goka's. When I arrived I immediately attached myself to the furnace. Goka advised me not to do that because I would only feel colder later on. I accepted this and walked over to the window. The street was blocked and every three metres there was a Bulgarian soldier in full gear. They all had rifles on their shoulder with bayonets fixed.

"Goka, they must be going to arrest someone!" I started to say, but I had not even finished the sentence when Bulgarian soldiers suddenly burst through the door.

"Is Jovanka Lazić here?" they asked.

"Yes, she's here," I replied, not knowing what was going on.

"Get dressed!" they ordered. Goka, scared and surprised asked

“Me too?”

“No, not you!”

I got dressed, trying to pull the collar of my coat high enough to hide my face. And that was all I had to hide because I no longer had those treacherous braids of mine. We set off, a strange party, little me with huge soldiers in front and behind and on both sides of me. This suited me very well because it meant I couldn't be seen. I asked where they were taking me, and the reply came short and clear:

“To prison!”

In the distance I could see a similar group. I could just make out that among the four Bulgarian soldiers was none other than Jelena. They wouldn't let us talk at all but regrouped the column. There was one Bulgarian soldier in front, another three behind him, in the third row a soldier, then Jelena, another soldier, me, then another soldier. Behind us were three soldiers and behind them one more.

We were heading for our apartment. The yard outside the entrance was full of Bulgarian officers. In the middle of them, talking to them, chatting, was Zoran! When we came to the entrance, Zoran stepped aside with one Bulgarian officer who asked me:

“Do you know this man?”

“No, not at all!” I replied, honestly, because I didn't know him like this, as a Bulgarian agent. Zoran laughed.

“Of course she does, she knows me well.” What luck that he didn't really know me. And Jela definitely knew that too, in this situation. The same scene was replayed with Jela as well. She also denied knowing him.

Zoran, whose real name was Miša Obradović, stayed downstairs with his friends while the two of us, escorted by several soldiers, began climbing up. They wouldn't let us talk. We reached the apartment and the search began. They didn't find anything, because everything was in the attic, behind the false wall. I thought this was the end of it and began removing my coat but they stopped me and reminded me we were going “to prison”.

Zoran and his friends were no longer in the yard when we came down. We resumed the same formation through the streets of Niš until we reached a building with a sign “Administration of the Bulgarian Army in Yugoslavia”. We passed the guards and climbed to the second or third floor. We stopped in a broad hallway. They separated us so that Jela and I had one soldier guarding each of us. I was outside a room

from which some pleasant, but rather loud, music could be heard. Well, I thought, this isn't really so terrible. As we stood like this I began feeling faint from hunger. I had not eaten anything since my scant dinner the night before. I was more concerned with this than with the fear which had begun to emerge. The guards had already changed shifts once, which meant more than two hours of standing, and then the door of the "music" room opened and two soldiers appeared, dragging a bloodied body, face down, by one arm each. I could barely recognise Aca who, just that morning, had collected the medical supplies and assured me that no one was following him. They dragged him through the hall to the sound of the beautiful music from the open door. Camouflage to drown the cries of the victim. About fifteen minutes later, Aca walked with great difficulty down the hall, his face had been washed and he managed to show me with his fingers that they had put electrodes on his forehead. They returned to the room and the interrogation resumed. Now I was no longer hungry, I was thinking only about whether I would survive the suffering.

The guards changed three more times before they decided there was no point waiting any longer to question us. We went down the stairs to the basement, to an enormous, filthy room, where there were two men standing in corners, facing the wall. I recognised them both. One was a Bulgarian officer who had been transporting our leaflets in a suitcase with a false bottom. He was still in uniform, but with no insignia of rank. The other was an old railway worker. There were two guards standing in the middle of the room. They put Jela in one of the free corners and me in the other. We were told to stand with our backs to the room. I couldn't do it. I sat on the floor, facing the guards. They began to shout at me but I simply said I was hungry and unable to stand. One of them, a non-commissioned officer, came over to me and said quietly that he would bring me something to eat on his next shift. I thought this was a good joke, but it was at least some kind of comfort. At about midnight they called Jela in for questioning and this NCO began his next shift immediately after that. He walked over to me and gave me a piece of bread with beans. This was my first and, for a long time, my only meal. He had arrived just in time because I was called in for questioning soon after this. We arrived outside the "music" room. On the left was a large table with a bright lamp shining in my face. I couldn't see the man on the other side of the table, I could only hear his voice. Standing next to me was a tall, skinny man, elegantly dressed

and nice looking. The questions were coming from the other side of the table and, at first, I thought I was safe. However every time I gave a negative answer, blows rained down on me from the elegant civilian. (Later I learnt that his name was Angel Popov). It was not too bad while they were just slaps in the face or blows with a fist to my head and body. But then, apparently, his hands began to hurt so he showed me a truncheon, a wooden stick with rubber on one end. The wooden part read "I know everything" (*Az vsičko znajem*, in Bulgarian). He asked me if I understood. I told him I did not and immediately felt the force of the truncheon, especially when the blows landed on my head, which was, for me, the pinnacle of pain. I was bloody, miserable and wretched. The elegant civilian then ordered me to take off my boots and placed me across two chairs, facing the floor. The blows of the truncheon now landed on my feet which hurt more than anything up to that point. After each few blows the invisible voice would ask me questions and every negative answer from me resulted in more blows. And the music from the record player went on, and on, and on.

I didn't ever cry during the interrogation, but I wept constantly in the basement, which was now filling up with people. There must have been more than fifty of us in there. The old railway worker encouraged me. I saw Jela only once more, all beaten. Later they moved her to some other basement.

They formed a transport from us prisoners. No one knew where they were taking us but we knew that the Germans were now responsible for us. The Bulgarians had played their role. They drove us in freight wagons. We were hungry and thirsty, but our fellow-sufferers advised us that, if they opened the wagon doors in the Independent State of Croatia, we should not accept any food, because the Ustaša would poison us. But I was so hungry that I accepted the little bit of slop they offered, I was the only one to do so, and I stayed alive. Eventually we arrived in a large transit camp where they ordered us to strip naked. They removed our things and took us to a bathroom where we showered. When they returned our clothes to us we could barely squeeze into them because everything was wrinkled and had shrunk during the disinfection. Some young inmates came over to me and told me I should flee because I was too young to die. That was when I realised, for the first time, the direction our transport was heading. My first attempt to get out didn't succeed but then, late in the afternoon, two men took my by my arms and legs and simply flung me over the high,

barbed-wire fence like a sack of potatoes. Under normal circumstances I would have been all bruised and battered, but now I immediately stood and began running. I came to an overpass and turned right. There wasn't a soul in sight I could ask for directions to the railway station. After quite a long time I came across a boy about my age who was driving a horse and cart full of soil. I spoke to him and he became frantic with fear and asked me if I knew where I was. I didn't, so he explained to me that I was in Marburg, which had once been Maribor but was now part of the Reich, and that it was now forbidden to speak Slovenian, let alone Serbian. He explained to me where the railway station was – in



*Ženi Lebl's false identification in Niš, in the name of Jovanka Lazić, 1942*

the opposite direction from where I had been heading. He knew from my wrinkled clothes that I had escaped from the camp. When I finally reached the station I saw that it was full of German soldiers but, right at that moment, there was a train passing through so I jumped into it. It was full and I sat on the floor. All eyes were on me, on my wrinkled clothes which gave away the fact that I had escaped from camp. A little later a German patrol passed through. They didn't ask me many questions. At the next stop they took me from the train and put me into a camp which was full of women from Poland and the Soviet Union and an occasional French woman. They were repairing enormous cables. I learnt that this was an auxiliary airport near a place called Wiener Neustadt. Here they repaired aircraft and aircraft parts. I made friends with a French woman called Gabrielle. The Germans were almost certain that the Allies would not bomb this auxiliary airport because they knew there were a large number of prisoners and internees there. One day during the Allied invasion of Sicily, one inmate, a former pilot from Poland stole a JU-88 after he had repaired it, but the Germans shot him down a few kilometres away. Then the Germans brought in twelve brand new six-engine aircraft called Gigants. Apparently Allied intelligence learnt about this and despite the prisoners being used to shield the airport they decided to destroy these aircraft before they could even take off on their first mission. Many of our people were killed in this attack, my friend Gabrielle among them. They then divided us into groups and sent us to various parts of Germany. My group was in Berlin. We lived in a rather large apartment. Every morning they took us to work at the BPW factory. There I worked on various machines for making metal parts. Because I had short arms I had to stand closer to the machine. One day a drive belt caught my hair and tore it out from the roots which was terribly painful. After that we had to wear scarves. I thought that I was going to be bald for the rest of my life but my hair later began to grow again. One day German soldiers came to search the place we were living in. I found this very strange. We were not in contact with anyone (or so I thought) and now we were being searched. I didn't follow my mother's advice but began shouting at the soldiers: wasn't it enough that we were prisoners, did they have to harass us as well? The others all remained silent. It was just my luck that they found weapons there and came to the conclusion that I had been shouting to try to cover things up. Apparently I was the only one who didn't know about these weapons. This was not long after the attempt to assassinate

Hitler. They took me out in the thin dress which I wore all the time until the liberation. Outside the house was a small, black car with a gas producer on the back. We set off through the streets of Berlin and stopped next to a monumental building at 30 Oranienburgerstrasse. I later learnt that it had been a synagogue and next door to it, at no. 31, was the Jewish Old People's Home. The gate opened and we drove into the courtyard.

After the reception procedure they took me down a hallway to cell no. 3. The cell had a heavy wooden door with strong locks and spy holes. Written on the door, in chalk, was the number of inmates in the cell. My cell, which was two metres by three metres, contained about twenty women. The floor was concrete, the window was bricked up and there was just a tiny opening high on the wall. Bedbugs fell from the walls at night and sucked our blood. In the morning they would return to the wall, heavy and sluggish, so we could easily kill them with the wooden soles of our shoes, leaving bloody stains on the walls. New inmates were very scared thinking this was human blood. They were right, of course, but it wasn't from beating. There was a toilet behind cell no. 12 and, beside it, a washroom. They took us to the toilet in line once a day, cell by cell, giving us only a short time, and the line was guarded by two soldiers.

The name of the prison warden was Artur Bernd. He was a short man who did not wear a uniform. The guards were brutal. There were three categories: SA men, SS women and "Vlasovci", Russians in German uniforms from the Army of General Vlasov.

The SS women were the most brutal and Frau Wachmeisteren Müller was the most notorious of these. Her specialty was to hold up a raised boom gate and, when all of us inmates were under it, to drop it on our heads with as much force as possible. This made her laugh hysterically.

The Vlasovci were no less cruel. The most despicable of these was named Yuryev. His specialty was to hit inmates in the head with a revolver butt, not infrequently spilling their brains out. This almost happened to me. I woke up one morning totally paralysed. To make things worse, I had been in the cell longer than anyone else and so had to report on how many of us there were in the cell. I remembered that there were fourteen of us. I asked my cellmate Ženja (who was a translator there) to report to Yuryev, but he pushed her away, screaming at her, asking her where I was. When she told him I was sick and unable



to move, he walked over to me. I saw him take his revolver out and was certain that he would spill my brains. I closed my eyes but the blow didn't come. I dared to open my eyes. Yuryev's arm was being held by a German officer who was in the hallway while the guard was counting us. Luckily for me this officer was interested in seeing what was going on in the cell and so he saved my life.

From the third group of guards, the cruellest was an SA guard named Nahtigal. This "nightingale" would walk through the hall with a whip in his hand and, if there were no victims available, would lash at his boots and the cell doors.

They would call people out for interrogation from the end of the hallway. They would shout a name and the inmate had to report through the peephole, identifying the cell they were in. They would usually shout my name as "Jofanka Lacik". (I remember the person who was called most frequently was named Zelenjin-Larski who we nicknamed Rimski-Korsakov.) My interrogator's name was Betzin and his assistants (who were more cruel than him) were a *Volksdeutscher*, Adam Lang (I later learnt that before the war he had a shop in Belgrade selling birds as a cover) and a pretty, young Serb woman, Persida Lukanović. They constantly demanded that I tell them where the weapons had come from and what they were intended for.

At New Year 1945, the prison at 31 Oranienburgerstrasse was packed, so they took quite a large group of inmates to the temporary Burgstrasse prison, a bombed-out three-storey building of which all that was left were the toilets on the ground floor and they weren't working. It was very cold. There was snow falling on us. And then the sirens sounded for an air raid. We saw searchlights moving across the sky over Berlin and then felt the ground shake from the bombs. We stayed in this toilet prison for a few days and were then returned to Oranienburgerstrasse.

On Hitler's birthday, April 20, 1945, a civilian came into our cell and read each and every one of us a death sentence signed by Himmler. As there were many of us in the cells, some were taken out. They were putting a stamp shaped like a minus sign on the back of our hands. They lined us up and took us on foot through the streets of Berlin to a neighbouring street, Grosse Hamburgerstrasse. There they locked me in cell 44 on the first floor. Had I stayed in cell 3 in Oranienburgerstrasse I would certainly not have survived.

There was an inmate in our cell who always knew whether it was the British or the Americans bombing Berlin and what kind of aircraft they were flying. I had no idea how she knew this. And perhaps she didn't know. We just really wished that there would be as much bombing as possible as long as they didn't fall on us, in the centre of the *Reich*, in the centre of Berlin. Those days, when the bombs were dropping on all sides, our expert was in a dilemma, she didn't know what kind of aircraft were bombing us or whose they were. At this point Ženja spoke up and said that these were *katyushas*.

“*Katyushas?*” asked our expert, “What kind of aircraft is that?”

Ženja calmly explained that these were not aircraft at all but a kind of mortar. Fantastic! This meant that our liberators were somewhere close to Berlin, that our liberation would come soon, if we lived to see it.

Eight days later, while there were heavy street battles going on, two guards opened the doors of our cells and told us that we were free. It was not possible to walk through the streets, but somehow, among the bodies of the *Hitlerjugend* boys, Berlin's last defence, we came across the body of a horse, still warm. Some former inmates, Italians, managed to get organised: they found a butcher's knife somewhere and began cutting the horse's thighs and giving them to us. Someone else found a huge can of milk and brought that over. This was a terrible combination for our starved stomachs. The pain, the vomiting and the diarrhoea began almost immediately. We needed to find a building where we could shelter from the bullets and mortars coming from both sides, the Germans and the Soviets. Finally we found it, the only building in the area, a two-storey building with two entrances to the basement. On one of the entrances the French immediately wrote FRANCE, on the other the Dutch wrote HOLLAND. However they then moved to the first floor and the Polish moved into their entrance and changed the sign to POLLAND. Dana, a former inmate who came from Zemun, and I moved into the French part so I changed their sign to FRANCO-SERBE. Then we felt something like an earthquake. This was the German counter-attack. One of their mortars had hit the first floor and killed the newly-liberated Dutch. Then came the Soviets. They forced everyone but the Italians out of the basement and set up their command there. The two of us moved up the rickety stairs to the second floor. There was neither water nor food and the two of us, wretched and miserable, ill and crawling with lice, couldn't wait for the fighting to end. But then came a nuisance of another kind, one we hadn't expected.

Drunken Soviet soldiers began pursuing us. It was more than unpleasant to discover that we needed to hide from the people we had thought were there to liberate us. The only one of whom we have a pleasant memory was a young Soviet soldier who promised to take care of us because he had two sisters of about our age – and he kept his promise. The next day I asked him who he was and where he was from and he replied: “Sasha Tsukerman, from Vladivostok!”

On May 1, 1945, Dana and I set off on foot from Berlin. Straight ahead to the south-east. We were weak and ill, but free. We walked more than eighty kilometres until we reached a place called Kotbus. There we saw the first train, which was clearing mines. What was important to us was that it was going in the opposite direction to Berlin. We got ourselves onto it and somehow arrived in a place called Liegnitz. The train stopped outside the town and there we found a group of soldiers, former prisoners from Yugoslavia, mainly villagers. They immediately adopted us as guides. They were also hungry so they scattered and began gathering everything they found in the fields: cabbages, carrots and so on. On May 8, at about midnight, shooting began. We were frantic, thinking that this was the German counter-offensive. Then we noticed that there was no blackout in the town, that everything was lit up, and learnt that this was actually the Soviets celebrating the capitulation of the Reich. We continued our journey and arrived in a small Polish town called Rawicz.

Because I spoke Polish, they delegated me to find the Red Cross. The woman I asked began to explain to me, but then my Yugoslav friends appeared from around the corner. The woman realised that I wasn't Polish and refused to continue her explanation. In the end we somehow managed to find the humanitarian organisation and begged them to give us something to eat. They told us loud and clear that we could have some food if there was any left over after the Poles had eaten. There wasn't. So again my companions scattered and again we had fresh agricultural produce, though often at the expense of being chased with shovels and rakes. We again got on a train and reached a place called Częstochowa. The train was continuing on to Warsaw, which didn't suit us. We needed a train going south-east. So we reached a place called Sosnowiec where we learnt that transports for the repatriation of prisoners were being put together in a nearby place called Katowice. There was a man among the Yugoslavs they called “professor”, the only one of them who could read and write (much later I

learned his name was Andrija Radenić). He asked us to help him write a list with the names of the Yugoslavs and I agreed, stipulating that, in return, "my group" would have to be included in the list of repatriates. He promised to do this and he kept his word. Our transport set off. In the wagons of the freight train were liberated Czechs, French, British and Yugoslavs. The first stop was Krakow. We were not being given any food so, once again, my experienced cadets were our saviours. The train was passing along the Czech border so I was certain that we would soon part with the Czech group, but this didn't happen. We continued the journey and, because it was very hot and humid in the wagons, we would usually climb up onto the roof. I know that we were completely sooty after passing through tunnels so, at various stations, the train driver would turn on for us the water which was used to fill up the locomotives. We passed Tarnów, Jarosław, Przemyśl and reached Lviv. My sense of geography was whispering in my ear that Lviv wasn't exactly on the way to France and England, and that the Czechs were now travelling away from their border. Nor did we Yugoslavs have much in common with this part of the world. I told the professor of my suspicions, but he berated me for having no confidence in our liberators. Nevertheless I asked him to go with me to the Soviet command in this town and ask them to explain and tell us the details of our itinerary from here on. They told us that it was no mistake, that they were taking us to Odessa, and that from there everyone would go to their own home. God! I remembered seeing them closing liberated Soviet prisoners into freight cars and writing on them "Don't trust the returnees!" I told the professor openly that I was sure they were taking us to Siberia.

"Don't talk nonsense," was his reaction.

We continued our journey to the east and, after about thirty kilometres, arrived in a place called Lawoczna. I got off the train and told "my group" that they should join me if they didn't want to go to Siberia. Everyone got off, the whole wagon. Only the professor stayed behind, but he too jumped off the train as it started moving. We stayed there for a few days while the professor and I negotiated our repatriation with the authorities and then one day they put us in a freight wagon. I took note of the places we travelled through: Jasi, Skole, Tuhle, before arriving in Debrecin from where they transferred us to Kikinda.

I arrived in Belgrade at the beginning of June 1945, after a journey of more than a month after my departure from Berlin. The arrival in Belgrade was traumatic. The city had been liberated for more than

seven months, but the two of us, Dana and I, got on a tram, we were frail, dirty, full of lice and without a single dinar in our pockets. The conductor insisted we get off if we didn't pay, he signalled to the driver not to move the tram, but I dug my heels in. Then I noticed another returnee from my street in the tram, they had informed his parents back in 1941 that he and his twin brother had been shot. There was hugging and kissing and some good people who were there paid for tickets for us and the tram continued on its way. And so we reached the home of the Janković family. The reunion of mother and son was very moving, and then Dana and I continued to my house. I wanted to see my mother. Over the fence I could see that the yard was full of fruit: the apricot tree was bent under the weight, but Lady's yard was bare. I rang. A woman appeared, asking who was at the door. I asked her to come closer and explained who I was.

"You have no place here. This is my house now!" said the woman, whose husband had been one of the local traitors and had been given our house as a gift from his employers. In the meantime he had been killed, but his widow and his son continued to enjoy themselves in the Jewish house. However the woman didn't stop at that, but went on "Are your family going to return as well? God forbid!" With this the conversation ended. The gate remained closed and the woman returned to "her" house.

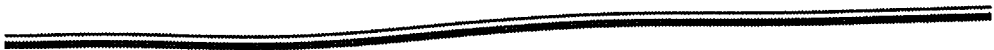
Did I hear this properly? Where was I? Was it possible that this was Belgrade in June 1945, seven and a half months after the liberation of the city?

At that moment I felt that the past had not yet passed, and that the better future I had so looked forward to had already ended.



XI

APPENDICES



APPENDIX 1

CAMPS IN YUGOSLAVIA IN WHICH JEWS WERE INTERNED \*

Place and date of establishment	Type of camp and who established it	Catchment area	Fate of inmates
<b>BANAT</b>			
Petrovgrad, August 14/15, 1941	assembly-Germans	Petrovgrad, Srpska Crnja and Jaša Tomić	at the beginning of September 1941, men were interned in Topovske šupe and killed by end of October; women and children interned on December 12, 1941 in the Sajmište camp and killed by May 1942
Novi Bečej, August 14/15, 1941	assembly-Germans	N. Bečej, N. Kneževac and V. Kikinda	at the beginning of September 1941, men were interned in Topovske šupe and killed by end of October; women and children interned on December 12, 1941 in the Sajmište camp and killed by May 1942
Pančevo, August 14/15, 1941	assembly-Germans	Pančevo	at the beginning of September 1941, men were interned in Topovske šupe and killed by end of October; women and children interned on December 12, 1941 in the Sajmište camp and killed by May 1942
<b>SERBIA</b>			
Kragujevac, May 1941	assembly-Germans	Kragujevac	executed by firing squad on October 19, 1941 in Kragujevac
Belgrade, Topovske šupe early September 1941.	concentration for men - Germans	men from Banat	shot from the second half of September to end of October, 1941 near the village of Jabuka
Belgrade, Banjica, July 10, 1941	concentration for men - Germans	Belgrade and surrounding places in Serbia	shot from end of October to December 1941 in Jajinci and other places
Belgrade, Sajmište, December 12, 1941	concentration - Germans	women and children from Banat, Belgrade, Niš, Kosmet; men and women from Sandžak, Zvornik, Montenegro, Šabac and Split	large number perished from February to May 1942, a certain number transferred to Auschwitz
Šabac, July 1941	concentration - Germans	Šabac and Jewish refugees from Austria, Germany, Poland and other	men shot on October 12 and 13, 1941 in Zasavica; women and children taken on January 26, 1942 to Sajmište where they perished

<sup>1</sup> From *Jevreji Jugoslavije 1941-1945: žrtve genocida i učesnici narodnooslobodilačkog rata*, Jaša Romano, Federation of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia, 1980.

Place and date of establishment	Type of camp and who established it	Catchment area	Fate of inmates
Niš, Crveni krst, October 15, 1941	concentration Germans	Niš and surrounding area	Men shot on February 12, 1942 at Bubanj; women and children taken, in March 1942 to Sajmište where they perished
Bor mine	Labour Germans	men from Bačka	a certain number perished in the Bor mine and on the way to Crvenka in October 1942; remainder perished in Nazi camps with a very small number of survivors
<b>MACEDONIA</b>			
Skopje, March 11, 1943	assembly Germans	Macedonia	between March 22 and 29, 1943, transferred to the camp in Treblinka where almost all perished
<b>CROATIA-SLOVENIA-SREM</b>			
Koprivnica, Danica, April 20, 1941	assembly Independent State of Croatia	various places in Croatia and Bosnia	transferred to the camp in Gospić, then some to the Jadovno camp, some to Slano and Metajno, and some to Jasenovac
Daruvar, May 1941	assembly - Independent State of Croatia	Jewish refugees from Western Europe	transferred to the camp in Gospić, then to Jasenovac - all perished
Zagreb, Zagrebački zbor, July 1941	assembly - Independent State of Croatia	various places in Croatia, Slavonija and Bosnia	transferred to the Gospić camp, and then to other camps - all perished
Gospić, June 1941	assembly Independent State of Croatia	various places in Croatia, Slavonija and Bosnia	transferred to Jadovno, Metajno, Slano, Jasenovac
Sremska Mitrovica, June 1941	assembly - Independent State of Croatia	Jews from Ruma and Jewish refugees from Europe living in Ruma	Jews from Ruma were released home after a few days, while refugees were sent to the Stara Gradiška and Jasenovac camps
Vukovar, August 1941	assembly - Independent State of Croatia	Jews from Vukovar	transferred on November 8, 1941 to Jasenovac - all perished
Osijek, Tenje	assembly - Independent State of Croatia	Osijek and surrounding area	transferred to Jasenovac in August 1942; one group to Auschwitz
Vinkovci, July 1942	assembly - Independent State of Croatia	Vinkovci, Ruma, Sid, Illok	transferred in July 1942, some to Jasenovac, some to Auschwitz
Lobograd, September 1941	assembly - Independent State of Croatia	various places in Croatia, Slavonija and Bosnia	August - October 1942 transferred to Auschwitz
Đakovo, December 1941	assembly for women - Independent State of Croatia	women and children from Bosnia, Croatia and Slavonija	from June 15 to July 15, 1941, transferred to Jasenovac - all perished
Kerestinec, May 1941	assembly - Independent State of Croatia	members of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and sympathisers from Croatia and Bosnia	one group shot on July 8, 1941, and the remainder on July 17, 1941



Place and date of establishment	Type of camp and who established it	Catchment area	Fate of inmates
Jadovno (Gospić), June 1941	concentration Independent State of Croatia	transferred from the camp in Gospić and from the Danica camp	large number killed, the others transferred to Jasenovac in August 1941
Jasenovac „Logor I“ Krapje augusta 1941	concentration for men Independent State of Croatia	transferred from the camp in Metajna	large number killed, the others transferred to Camp III, Jasenovac in November 1941
Jasenovac, Camp II, Bročice, September 1941	concentration for men Independent State of Croatia	from Croatia and Bosnia	large number killed, others transferred to Camp III Jasenovac in November 1941
Jasenovac, Camp III, (Brickyard)	concentration Independent State of Croatia (men's)	Croatia and Bosnia and surviving inmates from Camp I and Camp II	almost all killed from 1942 to 1945 – a small number managed to escape
Jasenovac, Camp IV, (Kožara) January 1942	concentration Independent State of Croatia (men's)	Croatia, Srem and Bosnia	almost everyone killed – a small number transferred to Jasenovac and Lepoglava
„Camp V, Stara Gradiška, second half of 1942	concentration for men Independent State of Croatia	Croatia, Srem and Bosnia	almost everyone killed – a small number transferred to Jasenovac and Lepoglava
Lepoglava, July 1943	concentration for men Independent State of Croatia	Croatia and survivors from the Stara Gradiška camp	transferred to Jasenovac at the beginning of 1945 and killed

## BOSNIA – HERCEGOVINA

Krušćica, end of August 1941	assembly Independent State of Croatia	Surviving inmates from the camp in Metajno and prisoners from Sarajevo	on October 5, 1941, men were transferred to Jasenovac, and on October 6, 1941, women and children transferred to Loborgrad, and then to Auschwitz
Bosanski Petrovac, July 1941	assembly Independent State of Croatia	Bihac	in September 1941 transferred to Prijedor from where a small number escaped, while others were transferred to Stara Gradiška and Jasenovac

## ZONE I

Rab, end of May 1943	assembly Italians	transferred from camps in Dubrovnik, Kraljevica, Brač and Hvar	on September 9, 1943 the inmates used force to gain their release
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## ZONE II

Slano (Pag), June 1941	concentration for men Independent State of Croatia	transferred from the camp in Gospić (from Bosnia and Heregovina)	a large number killed, others transferred to Jasenovac in August 1941
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Place and date of establishment	Type of camp and who established it	Catchment area	Fate of inmates
Metajna (Pag), June 1941	concentration for women	transferred from the camp in Gospić (from Bosnia and Herzegovina)	a large number killed, survivors transferred to Krušica in August 1941
Lopud, Gruž Kupari (Dubrovnik camp), November 1942	assembly - Italians	Dubrovnik, Bosnia and Herzegovina	transferred to the camp on Rab at end of May 1943
Kraljevica, November 1942	assembly - Italians	Croatia, Slavonija, Bosnia	transferred to the camp on Rab at end of May 1943
Brač, November 1942	assembly - Italians	Croatia, Slavonija, Bosnia	transferred to the camp on Rab at end of May 1943
Hvar, November 1942	assembly - Italians	Croatia, Slavonija, Bosnia	transferred to the camp on Rab at end of May 1943
<b>BAČKA</b>			
Bačka Topola, end of April 1941	assembly - Hungarians and the Gestapo	Sombor, Novi Sad and other places in Bačka	transferred to Auschwitz on April 29, 1944. The camp existed until the end of September 1944
Subotica, beginning of June 1944	ghetto - Hungarians and Gestapo	Subotica	transferred to assembly camp in Bačalmaš on June 16, 1944
Stari Bečej, May 20, 1941	assembly - Hungarians	Bačka Topola	in June 1941 a number released, the others transferred to the camp in Bačka Topola
Begeč, May 1941	assembly - Hungarians	Novi Sad	released in July 1941
<b>KOSOVO AND METOHIJA</b>			
Kosovska Mitrovica, August 1941	assembly - Gestapo	Kosovska Mitrovica	in March 1942 transferred to the Sajmište camp and then to Bergen Belsen where they perished
Priština, beginning of 1942	assembly for men - Italians	Priština	transferred in 1942 to the camp in Berat (Albania)
Priština, 1944	assembly - Gestapo	Priština and surrounding area	transferred to the Sajmište camp in Belgrade
<b>MONTENEGRO</b>			
Cetinje Bogdanov kraj Prison, February 1944	assembly - Gestapo	Jewish refugees from Serbia and Bosnia	in June 1944 transferred to the Sajmište camp and then to Bergen-Belsen
Podgorica (prison) February 1944	assembly - Gestapo	Jewish refugees from Serbia and Bosnia	in June 1944 transferred to the Sajmište camp and then to Bergen-Belsen

APPENDIX 2

JEWISH COMMUNITIES IN YUGOSLAVIA  
I — 1940

a) in the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities

place	number of members	n a m e	
		of president	of rabbi or eldest priest
Apatin*	61	Bela Šefer	Samuel Švalb
Bačka Palanka*	229	Solomon Štaf	Eugen Gros
Bačka Topola	254	Josef Vig	Julius Goldštajn
Bajmok*	123	Ljudovít Šefer	Mavro Jakobovič
Banja Luka ašk.	139	Moric Hercog	Sigmund Kon
Banja Luka sef.	244	Josef Nahmiljas	Mihael Atijas
Bela Crkva*	51	Josef Gros	Evgen Kraus
Bell Manastir*	—	(being established)	
Beograd ašk.	1888	dr Fridrih Pops	Ignjat Šlang
Beograd sef.	8500	dr David Albala	dr Isak Alkalaš
Bezdan*	90	dr Nandor Poper	H. Grinberger
Bihać*	156	dr Levi	Avram Atijas
Bijeljina*	245	Zadik Baruh	Salamon Levi
Bitolj*	3146	(Committee)	Avram Romano
Bjelovar	337	Dragutin Grinhut	dr D. Ginsberg
Brčko*	145	Hajim D. Salom	Leon Katan
Čakovec	404	dr Ljudevit Švarc	dr J. Grinvald
Čantavir*	66	dr Simon Lipot	Adolf Kraus
Čonoplja*	31	dr Aleks Hajdu	Makso Dajč
Čurug*	55	Šandor Lampel	V. Birnbaum
Daruvar	169	Leon Gros	
Debeljača*	148	Andor Gutman	Ignjat Rot
Derventa*	118	Moric Kabiljo	Jakov Papo
Doboj	53	Josef L. Pesah	
Dolnja Lendava	134	Moric Švarc	
Donji Miholjac*	173	Urlik Libling	
Dubrovnik	87	Josip Mandl	Salamon Baruh
Đakovo*	197	Josip Frank	Aleksandar Rot
Horgoš*	24	Marko Deneš	Ižak Abraham
Karlovac*	297	Josip Rendeli	David Majzel
Koprivnica*	358	Milan Rajh	dr Izrael Kon
Kos. Mitrovica*	116	Benvenisti Koen	
Kragujevac*	85	dr Moša Eli	
Križevci*	119	Ljudevit Štraus	Lav Buksbaum
Kula*	124	dr D. Holender	S. Šlomovič
Kutina*	132	Albert Singer	Mojsije Trilnik
Leskovac*	59	Bokor Mandil	
Ludbreg*	82	dr L. Šlezinger	J. L. Dajč
Ljubljana		(being established)	
Mali Idoš*	30	Šandor Kertes	Lipot Frankl

place	number of members	name	
		of president	of rabbi or eldest priest
Mostar	142	Bernhard Širc	David Perera
Murska Sobota*	711	Armin Hiršl	dr Lazar Rot
Našice*	229	Muško Vajs	Jakov Šmelcer
Niš	337	Bora H. Hazan	Albert Daniti
Nova Gradiška*	198	Jakov Kon st.	Andrija Trilnik
Novi Bečej*	204	G. Šlezinger	Emanuel Polak
Novi Kneževac*	69	Josif Šiler	Izrael Gelbman
Novi Pazar	297	Leon Bahar	Cadik Konforti
Novi Sad	4104	dr Ferdinand Lustig	dr Hinko Kiš
Novi Vrbas*	233	Aurel Rajh	Josip Klajn
Osijek gor. grad	2400	dr L. Margulies	dr H. Štekel
Osijek donji grad	184	Bela Herman	
Pakrac*	99	Josip Mautner	Izak Frajdes
Pančevo	403	Oskar Fišgrund	Majnhart Klajn
Parabuć*	73	Šamu Kelemen	Ernest Špicer
Petrovgrad	1267	Leopold Frajšberger	dr David Finci
Pirot*	96	Moša Levi	
Podrav. Slatina*	136	Artur Bauer	
Priština	385	Hajim B. David	Zaharlje Levi
Rogatica*	44	mr. ph. S. Papo	Salomon Pardo
Ruma*	249	Dezider Šlezinger	Vilim Goldštajn
Sanski Most*	94	Isak Atijas	Isak Papo
Sarajevo ašk.	1060	v. d. Iso Herman	dr Hinko Urbah
Sarajevo sef.	7054	dr Samuel Pinto	dr Moric Levi
Senta	595	Armin Graf	dr A. Erenfeld
Šisak*	258	dr Emil Fleš	dr Beno Hajs
Skoplje	2816	dr Avram Nisim	Moše Behar
Slav. Požega*	123	Leo Štajner st.	Mordehaj Rikov
Slav. Brod	423	dr Milan Polak	dr L. Vajsberg
Smederevo*	70	L. Tajtacak	
Sombor	945	dr Henrik Oblat	Jakov Špaser
Split	284	Inž. M. Morpurgo	Isak A. Finci
Srem. Mitrovica*	100	dr Fridrih David	Ger. Belogorski
Stanišić*	31	Bene Liht	Bela Vajs
Stara Kanjiža*	174	A. Griner	Herman Vajs
Stara Moravica*	38	Aleksandar Špajer	J. H. Frenkel
Starl Bečej	253	Rudolf Špicer	
Stari Sivac*	47	Vilim Lederer	Leo Lifsic
Subotica	4900	dr Elemir Kalmar	dr L. Geršon
Sušak	143	Velimir Švarc	Oto Dajč
Šabac*	83	dr Hajim Ruso	Nisim Adižes
Štip*	588	Menahem Levi	Meir M. Kasorla
Temerin*	63	S. Šosberger	Gerson Slovak
Titel*	80	dr Eugen Fišer	Vladimir Heršković
Travnik	261	dr Jakob Konforti	Samuel Abinun

place	number of members	name	
		of president	of rabbi or eldest priest
Tuzla	241	dr Ignjat Rozner	A. Fingerhut
Valpovo*	140	inž. L. Hupert	
Varaždin*	515	v. d. Mato Štraus	dr Rudolf Glik
Velika Kikinda	512	Maks Gutman	dr Vilim Štajner
Vinkovci*	630	dr Ignjat Lang	dr M. Frankfurter
Virovitica*	204	Edo Kajzer	Adolf Springer
Visoko*	126	Elias Kabiljo	Majer J. Kasorla
Višegrad*	93	Gavriel Papo	Josef Levi
Vlasenica*	61	Albert Altarac	Aron Altarac
Vršac	290	Hajim Sid	Mavro Salcman
Vukovar*	213	Hinko Štajner	dr Izrael Šer
Zagreb ašk.	8712	dr Marko Horn	dr Gavro Švarc
Zagreb sef.	625	Cezar Gaon	Isak Baruh
Zavidovići	117	J. Zonenfeld	Isak Kabiljo
Zemun ašk.	354	dr L. Brandajs	Geršon Kačka
Zemun sef.	115	Moreno Anaf	Isak Musafija
Zenica	195	H. Libling	Juda Finci
Zvornik*	78	Nahman Hajon	Nisim Montiljo
Žabalj*	100	Jakov Fišer	
Žepče*	58	Mošo J. Musafija	Isak Mevorah

b) *in the Association of Orthodox Jewish Religious Communites*

Ada*	350	David Hubert	David Hofman
Bačka Palanka*	50	Karl Levi	Jonaz Glauber
Bački Petrovac*	100	J. Gild	Samuel Silber
Bačko Petrovo Selo*	310	J. Sanet	
Ilok ašk. ort.*	160	Herman Štern	
Ilok ort.*	150	Lazar Štern	Hilel Štajner
Mol*	100	M. Šlezinger	
Senta sef. ort.*	850	Mozes Krajnik	Mozes Lebović
Sombor*	70	Šandor Gros	Henrik Vajs
Stara Kanjža*	35	Bernat Menzer	Salomon Berković
Subotica*	560	J. Grosberger	Mozes Dajč
Zagreb*	130	Leon Hesel	

\* – Jewish communities no longer exist

place and number of members	place and number of members
1. Ada 59	21. Rijeka 99
2. Apatin 25	Rijeka surroundings 75
3. Bač 2	22. Sarajevo 1557
4. Bačko Petrovo Selo 26	23. Senta 110
5. Banja Luka 46	24. Senta-ortodox 118
Banja Luka surroundings 85	25. Skoplje 328
6. Beograd 2271	26. Sombor 145
7. Bitolj 57	Sombor surroundings 56
8. Bugojno 8	27. Split 163
9. Dubrovnik 31	Split surroundings 19
Dubrovnik surroundings 3	28. Sremska Mitrovica 20
10. Kikinda 37	Sr. Mitrovica surroundings 13
11. Kosovska Mitrovica 33	29. Subotica orthodox 88
12. Mol 11	Subotica surroundings 186
13. Mostar 65	30. Subotica 981
14. Niš 31	31. Šid 16
15. Novi Pazar 36	32. Tuzla 78
Prizren 4	Tuzla surroundings 9
16. Novi Sad 1001	33. Vršac 31
Novi Sad surroundings 220	Vršac surroundings 2
17. Osijek 361	34. Zagreb 2080
Osijek surroundings 249	Zagreb surroundings 434
18. Pančevo 88	35. Zavidovići 25
Pančevo surroundings 13	36. Zemun 132
19. Pirot 12	37. Zenica 34
20. Priština 224	Zenica surroundings 9
	38. Zrenjanin 92
	Other places 36

place	number of members	name of president
Bačka Topola	29	Olga Vajs
Banja Luka	47	Ašer Volah
Beograd	1602	Bencion Levi
Bjelovar	12	dr Oto Kraus
Bečej	5	Zoltan Vajnberger
Čakovec	21	Elizabeta Bartoš
Daruvar	36	Marko Flajšhaker
Doboj	27	Mihajlo Atijas
Dubrovnik	62	Emilio Tolentino
Jajce	20	Flora Klem
Kikinda	4	Jelena Kovač
Ljubljana	84	dr Aleksandar Švarc
Mostar	74	Filip Kon
NIŠ	36	Peša Gedalja
Novi Pazar	10	Aron Mentović
Novi Sad	281	Pavle Šosberger
Osijek	220	dr Mavro Vizner
Pančevo	78	dr Ladislav Erš
Priština	11	Hajim Adižes
Rijeka	160	Josip Engel
Sarajevo	1090	dr Isak Levi
Senta	58	Arnold Fridman
Skoplje	54	dr Nikola Šajber
Slavonski Brod	32	Armin Berger
Sombor	61	dr Mirko Gutman
Split	115	Slavko Zvezdić
Subotica	403	Mirko Vajcenfeld
Travnik	17	Jakov Finci
Tuzla	60	Joško Vizler
Virovitica	34	Marko Vajs
Vršac	7	Pavle Vaserman
Zagreb	1341	dr Leo Singer
Zavidovići	12	Monika Musafija
Zemun	136	Josip Frank
Zenica	30	Geza Kacur
Zrenjanin	28	Ruža Tajti
Other places	208	

*APPENDIX 2* – all appendices in this chapter are taken from the “Memorial 1919–1969 of the Alliance of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia”, published to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Alliance.

APPENDIX 3

JEWISH COMMUNITIES  
RE-ESTABLISHED BY 1947

Place and number of members	Place and number of members
1. Ada ..... 59	21. Rijeka ..... 99
2. Apatin ..... 25	Rijeka surroundings ..... 75
3. Bač ..... 2	22. Sarajevo ..... 1557
4. Bačko Petrovo Selo ..... 26	23. Senta ..... 110
5. Banja Luka ..... 46	24. Senta – ortodox ..... 118
surroundings ..... 85	25. Skoplje ..... 328
6. Beograd ..... 2271	26. Sombor ..... 145
7. Bitolj ..... 57	Sombor surroundings ..... 56
8. Bugojno ..... 8	27. Split ..... 163
9. Dubrovnik ..... 31	28. Sremska Mitrovica ..... 20
surroundings ..... 3	Sr. Mitrovice surroundings .. 13
10. Kikinda ..... 37	29. Subotica – ortodox ..... 88
11. Kosovska Mitrovica ..... 33	Subotica surroundings ..... 186
12. Mol ..... 11	30. Subotica ..... 981
13. Mostar ..... 65	31. Šid ..... 16
14. Niš ..... 31	32. Tuzla ..... 78
15. Novi Pazar ..... 36	Tuzla surroundings ..... 9
Prizren ..... 4	33. Vršac ..... 31
16. Novi Sad ..... 1001	Vršac surroundings ..... 2
Novi Sad surroundings ..... 220	34. Zagreb ..... 2080
17. Osijek ..... 361	Zagreb surroundings ..... 434
Osijek surroundings ..... 249	35. Zavidovići ..... 25
18. Pančevo ..... 88	36. Zemun ..... 36
Pančevo surroundings ..... 13	37. Zenica ..... 34
19. Pirot ..... 12	Zenica surroundings ..... 9
20. Priština ..... 224	38. Zténjanin ..... 92
	Other places ..... 36
<b>Total:</b>	<b>Number of places 38</b>
	<b>Number of members 11,924</b>



## GLOSSARY

*AFZ* – the Anti-Fascist Women’s Front

*Akiba ben Joseph* – celebrated teacher from the time of Bar Kohba’s uprising against the Romans; or abbreviation for the Akiba Agudat Hanoar Haivri (Akiba Association of Jewish Youth), a youth scouting movement of general Zionists (Akiba teaches the youth in the national spirit to take part in the building of Erez Yisrael).

*Aliyah* – (Hebrew) rise, ascent. Moving into Palestine, that is, later Israel, because, according to tradition, for Jews, going to Palestine meant exaltation. Aliyah means more than immigration: it is the main ideal of Zionism and the primary goal of its realisation. It means personal participation in the rebuilding of the Jewish homeland and the individual’s rise to a higher level of self-fulfilment as a member of a reborn nation.” (EJ, 1971: 633).

*Anti-Semitism* – racial, national and religious hatred of Jews. This phenomenon can be observed from ancient times until the present day. The result of anti-Semitic propaganda was the concept of the “final solution to the Jewish question” in World War Two and the destruction

of six million Jews. The term was introduced sometime around 1880.

*Appello* – (Italian) assembly, roll call

*Appellplatz* – (German) assembly place for roll call

*Arbeitskomando* – (German) labour command

*Aron Hakodesh* – The Torah Ark, the sacred cabinet which contains the Torah scrolls in a synagogue.

*Ashkenazi* – an adjective which derives from the geographical term Ashkenaz which is what Germany has been called in Hebrew literature since the middle ages. The Ashkenazi are a branch of the Jewish people who speak either Yiddish or German, or some central European or eastern European languages. Ashkenazi, the inhabitants of the German-speaking region, who spread in migrations to eastern and later also to southern Europe, are, in some ways, different from the Sephardim, in the liturgical and lingual sense, because they differently pronounce both some of the vowels and some of the consonants of the Hebrew orthography.

*Aufseherin* – (German) woman SS-overseer, attendant

- B'nai Brith*, – an organisation which engages in humanitarian and cultural-educational work. Because of its elitist organisation and lodges, it is often identified with Masonic organisations
- Bar Mitzvah* – (literally son of law); religious coming-of-age ceremony for a Jewish man who has turned 13. It is performed in the synagogue when the boy is called out to stand before the Torah. With this act the man becomes a full member of the community, responsible for his actions before God. It is very festively celebrated in all homes.
- Bat Mitzvah* – religious coming-of-age ceremony for girls at twelve years of age. Festively celebrated in the home.
- Bersaglieri* – (Italian) high-mobility infantry unit of the Italian Army
- Blockälteste(r)* – (German) barracks chief (male or female)
- Blocksperr*e – (German) ban on leaving the barracks
- Cantor* – (Latin) (Hebrew hazan) in Jewish religious services the singer of prayers
- Confino libero* – (Italian) free confinement: free movement within a restricted territory
- Coprifuoco* – (Italian) covering up the fire, figuratively: curfew
- Daskalica* – (Bulgarian) teacher
- Diaspora* – dispersion, emigration of people, scattering; in Hebrew: *galut* (persecution)
- Endlösung (Die)* – The Final Solution; Fascist term for the systemic destruction of the Jewish people.
- Erez* – (Hebrew) country; often used as a synonym for Israel
- Gabbai* – A person who assists in the running of a synagogue and ensures that the needs are met, or an assistant to a rabbi. The gabbai's obligations might also include maintaining a Jewish cemetery.
- Ghetto* – (Italian) a part of town in which Jews lived under the orders of the authorities. Ghettos were locked up at night and because they were overpopulated life in them was unhealthy. The term was first introduced in Italy.
- Häftling* – (German) prisoner
- Hagana* – (Hebrew) defence, or Hagana acmit – self-defence, Jewish defence in Palestine organised after the first Arab riots in Jaffa in 1921. After the state of Israel was formed in 1948 it became the regular army and its name was incorporated in the name of the official army of the new state, Zeva Haganah le Izrael.
- Halutz, (plural halutzim)* – (Hebrew) a pioneer who is preparing for the return to Erez Yisrael.
- Hamisha Asar Bishvat* – (Hebrew) Holiday also known as Tu-Bishvar, Hamishoshi, Frutas or the New Year of the Trees. Celebrated on the fifteenth day of Shevat (January-February).
- Hanukkah* – (Hebrew) feast of light, it is celebrated for eight days beginning the 25<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Kislev (December-January) in memory of the struggle for liberation from the Hellenic occupying forces in the third century BC.

*Hasharah* – (hebr.) preparation for emigration to Palestine; young people prepared for work learning agricultural and trade skills. Trade courses were held in the city, while courses in agriculture were held in villages, on larger farms. There were several hasharaha in Yugoslavia.

*Hashomer Hatzair* – (Hebrew) Young guard, a Zionist youth organisation of socialist orientation. Its aim was to educate young people for the building of the Jewish homeland on biblical soil.

*Haver* – (Hebrew) friend; comrade; *havera* (fem.), *haverim* (m.pl), *haverot* (f.pl)

*Hazan* – see Cantor

*Heder* – (Hebrew) room. Heder is a school for the first level of traditional Jewish education. Sephards call this school “meldar”. “These educational institutions were founded in 63 BC in Judea, and the initiator was Rabbi Joshua ben Gamla. He introduced the obligation to select teachers for children of seven years of age and older in every province and in every city. Later, up until World War One, even children younger than seven came to the heder. The classes were held all day, from early morning until eight or nine in the evening. In three months the boys would learn the Hebrew script. On the fourth month they would start to read the Humash (Thora), and then the Mishna and Talmud.” (Danon, 1996: 216).

*Hehalutz* – (Hebrew) international organisation of halutzim; all halutzim

preparing for the aliyah would become members.

*Holocaust* – (Greek *holos*, entire; *kaustos*, burnt) the destruction of Jews in World War II by killing in gas chambers and burning their bodies in crematoriums

*Honved* – (Hungarian) literally homeland defender; a specifically Hungarian army within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, distinct from the Austrian *Landwehr*. The term *Honvéd* continued to be the name of the Hungarian military after the end of World War I and the dissolution of the empire.

*Hora* (*hava*) – (Hebrew) traditional Jewish dance

*Hupa* – (Hebrew) canopy, a part of the wedding ceremony when the bride and the groom stand under a canopy

*I. G. Farbenindustrie* – *Interessengemeinschaft der Farbenindustrie*, (German) An interest association of the German industry of paints manufacturers; an industrial concern which used Jewish prisoners as free labour

*Jugendaliyah* – (German) *Aliyat hanoar*, youth aliyah

*Kaddish* – world (in Aramaic, the then spoken language of the Jews); a prayer for the dead. “Kaddish is an ancient prayer, which was created in Palestine, from where it spread to all countries of the galut. (Diaspora). Except for the last verse, which is in Hebrew, the original language of the Kaddish is Aramaic, so it would be understandable to ordinary people who didn’t

- know Hebrew (...) The essence of the Kaddish is an expression of loyalty to God and the acceptance of his judgement, in line with the principle that a person has the obligation to express his gratitude even for the misfortune that has come upon him as he expresses his gratitude for the good." (Danon, 1996: 179, 180–181). The prayer is said by the son or by the closest relative.
- Kal** – see synagogue.
- Kapo** – (Italian.) head, chief; an inmate-supervisor.
- Ken** – (Hebrew) nest, a Zionist youth group.
- Ketuba** – (Hebrew) a written marital contract.
- Kibbutz** – (Hebrew) a farm with collective ownership of land, resources and products. The organisation of work is based on an agreement, volunteering and equality of kibbutz members. The first kibbutz, Degania, was founded in 1909. Kibbutzim also play a defence role.
- Kibbutznik** – member of a kibbutz.
- Kiddush** – Name of prayer used to sanctify the Sabbath and holidays, based on the biblical commandment "Remember to keep holy the Sabbath," Moses II, 20:7.
- Kipa** – (Hebrew) a small cap that Jews wear in the synagogue and during prayer, while religious Jews wear the kipa all the time.
- Kolkhoz** – collective farm in the Soviet Union.
- Kosher** – (Hebrew) confirming to religious regulations in selecting and preparing food (kasher: clean, permitted).
- Kvuca (mishomar)** – (Hebrew) company, an organisational unit of the ken, group, small community.
- Ladino** – Jewish-Spanish language, or Judaeo-espagnol, or judezmo. Medieval Spanish language that the Sephardim spoke and preserved. Enriched by Hebrew, Turkish and Slavic words.
- Laissez-passer (French); Lasciapassare (Italian)** – pass.
- Luftwaffe** – (German) German Air Force.
- Maccabi** – (Hebrew) a frequently used name for Jewish sports associations which were named after Judas Maccabaeus, a Jewish hero from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC.
- Madrih** – (Hebrew) educator.
- Magen David** – (Hebrew) David's shield. The six-pointed Star of David, a hexagram; one of the symbols of Judaism; today also on the Israeli flag. (a term also used is Solomon's Seal).
- Matzah** – (Hebrew) unleavened bread which is made for Pesah when no food containing any leavening or any other product fermentation is allowed for a period of eight days.
- Megillah** – (Hebrew) scroll, a short name for the biblical Book of Ester which is read for Purim.
- Menahel** – (Hebrew) youth leader.
- Menorah** – (Hebrew) seven branched candlestick; a symbol of Judaism. The menorah was adopted as the official emblem of today's Israel.
- Mezuzah** – (Hebrew) a scroll with an excerpt from the Bible which is placed on the right side of the doorpost.

- Minyan* – (Hebrew) number, the quorum of ten men over the age of 13 required to hold a service in the synagogue.
- Mitzva* – (Hebrew) religious command, a good deed.
- Moshava* – (Hebrew) settlement; in Jewish colonisation this is a non-collective farm where every person has his own land; in youth organisations it refers to a camp.
- Musulman (camp slang)* – meaning a person who is at the end of his life from exhaustion. The word probably comes from the German words Muschl (shell) and Mann (man). Meaning: a shell keeps its form even after it loses its contents.
- Numerus Clausus* – (Latin) regulation legally limiting the number of Jews who can enrol in universities and schools to a certain percentage.
- Nyilas* – (Hungarian) Hungarian ultrarightists, Fascists of the Arrow Cross.
- Ole, ola (female) olim (plural)* – new immigrants in Israel.
- Omama* – (Hungarian) grandmother.
- OZNA* – *Odsek zaštite narode (Department for protection of the people)* – Yugoslav security organisation formed during the war for counter-intelligence duties. Formed in September 1943 by the Supreme Commander it assumed the duties of the Anti-Fifth-Column Commission of April 1943. Later became the central security organisation covering all of Yugoslavia.
- Pagnocca* – (Italian) round bread roll used in the army.
- Pesah* – (Hebrew) Passover, a holiday celebrated in memory of the exodus from Egypt. It begins on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Nisan (March-April) and lasts eight days. It is also called Hag aaviv (the holiday of the spring) and Hag amatzot (the holiday of unleavened bread), because Jews must eat matzah. The holiday is celebrated according to a strictly defined ritual.
- Prefettura* – (Italian) the office of a prefect.
- Purim* – a holiday which is celebrated in memory of the Jews' stay in Persia and events described in the biblical Book of Esther. It is celebrated on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the month Adar (February-March).
- Quaestor* – (Italian, *questore*) Senior rank in Italian police.
- Questura* – Police administrative section in each Italian province.
- Rabbi* – (rav; teacher). "A common foreign word used for Jewish clerics, which was created in Western Europe from the word rabbi: my teacher, my master. In essence a Rabbi is not a clerical person, nor a priest, but one of the titles that is awarded after completing yeshivah. In Jewish communities the rabbis performed their duties, interpreted laws, even passed judgements on a non-professional basis, as authorised experts, experts in Jewish humanities. The rabbi profession, as a paid community employee in some societies and states is of more recent date." (Verber, 1988: 339).
- Revir* – (German) region, area; in the camp the name for hospital.

- Righteous** – One of the nine tasks of *Yad Vashem*, according to the Law on remembrance of martyrs and heroes passed on August 19, 1953 in Knesset, is to eternalise the memory “of the righteous of all nations who put their lives at stake to save Jews.” The Righteous is a rough translation of the expression “*Hasidei umot haolam*,” while a literal translation would be “the Righteous of the world”.
- Rosh** – (Hebrew) head, chief, leader (of *ken*, *moshava*, *kibbutz*).
- Rosh Hashanah** – (Hebrew) holiday, the Jewish New Year. It is celebrated on the first and second day of the month of *Tishri* (September-October).
- Sabbath, Shabbat** – (Hebrew) Saturday, seventh day of the week, the day of full rest, when no work is allowed.
- Seder** – (Hebrew) *seder*; order; festive dinner, an introductory ceremony to the celebration of *Pesah*.
- Sephardim** – (Hebrew) descendants of Jews who were expelled from the Iberian Peninsula in the fifteenth century.
- Shalom (Shalom Alehem)** – (Hebrew) Peace, peace to you, traditional greeting.
- Shamas** – Synagogue official who provides various services, often one who manages day-to-day affairs.
- Shoah** – (Hebrew) Hebrew word for the Holocaust.
- Shofar** – A ram’s horn used in ancient times as a signaling trumpet, and still blown in synagogues on *Rosh Hashana* and at the end of *Yom Kippur*.
- Shomer** – (Hebrew) guard.
- Shtetl** – (Yiddish) a small town or in Poland and Russia with a majority Jewish population.
- SKOJ** – Communist Youth League of Yugoslavia.
- Sokol** – Youth movement and physical fitness organisation, originating in Czechoslovakia in 1862 and eventually spreading through Poland, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Ukraine, Bulgaria Macedonia and Russia.
- Sonderkommando** – (German) special command, prisoners working in the gas chamber or crematorium during exterminations.
- Sukkot** – (Hebrew) the festival of tabernacles or booths (*sukkah*; booth, hut, tent). Once they freed themselves from Egyptian slavery the Jews wandered around the desert for 40 years and dwelt in tents. In memory of this kind of accommodation, on *Sukkot*, Jews spend seven days in huts. The festival lasts nine days. It is celebrated in autumn.
- Synagogue** – (Greek) Jewish place of worship. The word *synagogue* appears for the first time in *Septuaginta*, the translation of the Old Testament into Greek in the third century BC. and stands for community, group of people, municipality. Somewhat later the word *synagogue* refers only to a community of religious character, that is, a place in which religious services are performed. The Hebrew term *bek hakneset* also has a long history (Aramaic: *bet hakenishta*) the house of assembly, which could often be heard in Bosnia. Among

the Bosnia-Herzegovina Jews it was customary to call the synagogue "hram" or temple and kal (this last was used only by the Sephardim." (Gotovac, 1987: 11).

*Tallit* – (Hebrew) a prayer cloak worn by men during prayer.

*Talmud* – (Hebrew) learning. This is the Jewish "post-biblical encyclopaedia of specific quality, created between the second and fourth centuries. It is, first of all, a collection of comments based on various interpretations of the Bible, but it also contains comprehensive material on religious and secular Jewish customs. It contains elements of theology, ethics, agronomy, medicine, hygiene, law, history, mathematics, astronomy, and so on. The Talmud regulated the Jews' way of life in post-biblical times all the way up to the emancipation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Talmud played a crucial role in preserving Jewish national unity in the Diaspora. Because of its strictness and moral pedantry, because of its emphasised Judaecentric stance and strong opposition to the pro-zealot striving of Christianity, for centuries Talmud was attacked, slandered and forged within and outside Judaism." (Baleti, 1982. 34).

*Temple* – (Hebrew) temple, Jewish place of worship.

*Torah* – (Hebrew) the five Books of Moses which, according to Jewish tradition, are the foundation of the Jewish religion.

*Trumpeldor* – Zionist right-wing politician.

*Ustasha* – Croatian far-right organisation put in charge of the Independent State of Croatia by the Axis Powers in 1941. They pursued Nazi and Fascist policies. The Ustasha were subsequently expelled by the Communist Yugoslav Partisans in 1945. At the time they were founded in 1929, the Ustasas were nationalist political organisations which committed terrorist acts. When they came to power they also had military formations which numbered some 76,000 at their peak in 1944.

*VVN (Vereinigung der Nazi Verfolgten)* – Association of the Victims of Nazi Persecution.

*Wehrmacht* – German armed forces.

*WIZO* – acronym for: Women's International Zionist Organisation.

*Yad Vashem* – (Hebrew) "Hand and name" (yad, hand; shem, name), a monument and archive in Jerusalem on the killing of Jews in World War II which was established under the decision of Knesset in 1953 by passing a special Law on the Commemoration of martyrs and heroes – Yad Vashem. "The point of the legislation adopted is to erect an eternal monument in the minds of Jews in memory of the millions of innocent victims, fighters, of the inexpressible riches of the Jewish cultural values that were created for centuries and which were destroyed by criminal Nazism" (Alkalaj, 1971).

*Yashar koach* – (Hebrew) literally first time. In the temple it is used during the reading of the Tora, that is when congratulating on a task well done, something like 'Good work' or 'Well done'.

*Yeshiva* – (Hebrew) a high religious school attended after completion of

the first religious school (heder - Ashkenazi, melder - Sephardim). „The expression 'yeshiva' was used in Talmud for the oldest Jewish institution which primarily focuses on studying the Thora, Talmud, Jewish regulations and the development of Jewish thought.” (Danon, 1996: 217).

*Yiddish* – the language spoken by the Ashkenazi Jews from Germany, Central and Eastern Europe. “It was created based on some dialects of Middle-High German from the tenth century which had been fixed at that level of development. Later the lexis was expanded with Hebrew and Aramaic words and, later again, following the arrival in Slavic countries, also with Slavic (Polish, Ukrainian and other) words. It is

written in Hebrew script, which is specially adapted to the phonetics of the language.” (Verber, Glossary in the catalogue Jews on Yugoslav Soil, pg. 337).

*Yom Kippur* – a holy day, Day of Atonement, celebrated on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Tishri; a 24-hour long fast.

*Zählappell* – (German) the counting of lined-up prisoners at a certain place.

*Zionism* – named after the hill of Zion, where the Jerusalem temple was built; in a figurative sense it stands for Jerusalem as a religious and cultural centre of the Jews. A national-political movement which aspires to national revival and the gathering of Jews in a restored national state like that they inhabited in biblical times.



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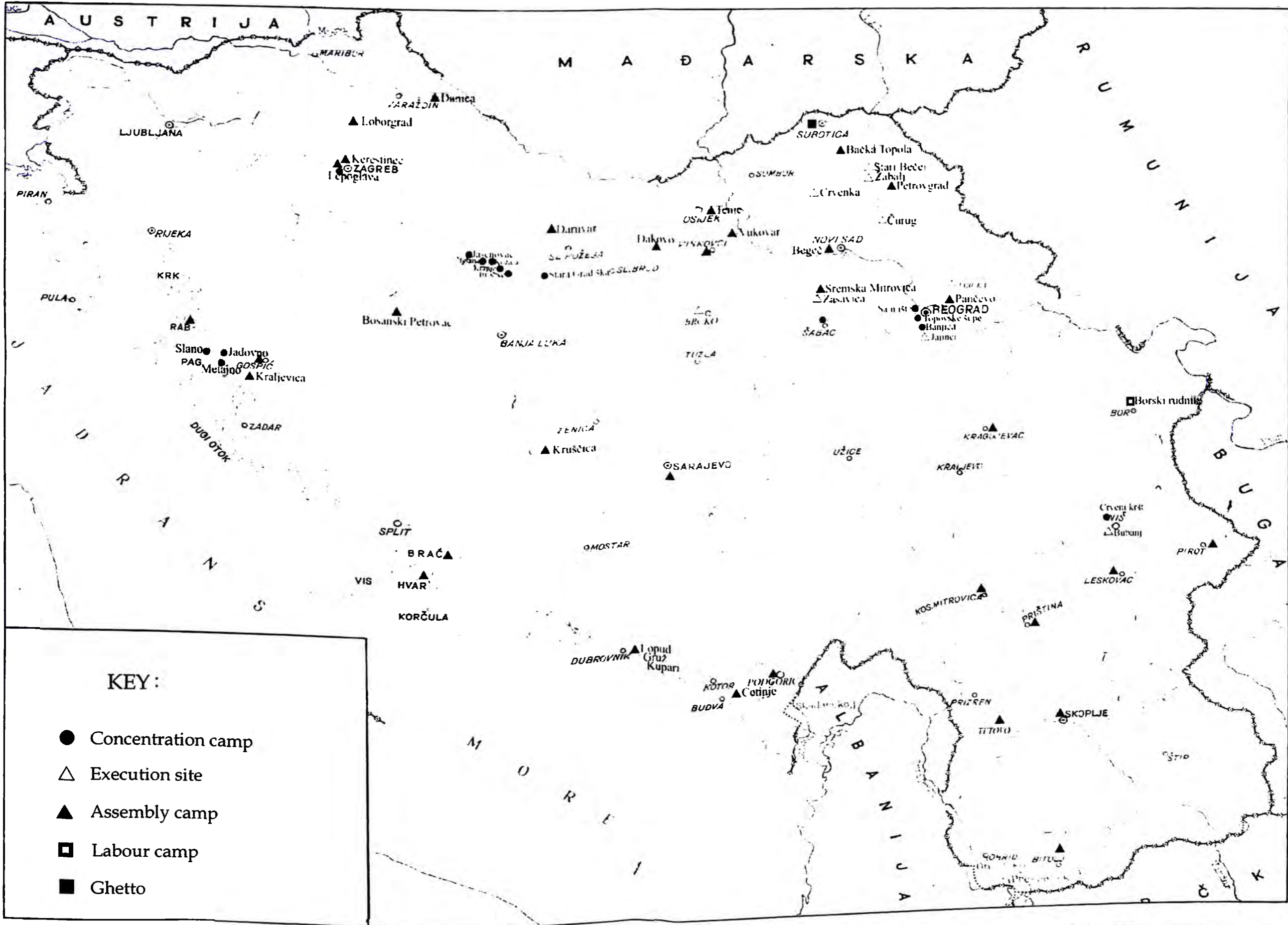
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BAČKI PETROVAC

צ'אנטאווייר ČANTAVIR

BAČKO PETROVO SELO

נובי סאד

NOVI SAD

סנטה

SENTA

קיקינדה

KIKINDA

MOL

מול

ורשאץ VRŠAC

קולה KULA

באצ'קי פטרוובאץ

באצ'קו פטרוובו סלה

בע'יי BEČEJ

NOVI BEČEJ

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