WE SURVIVED... 2

YUGOSLAV JEWS ON THE HOLOCAUST

SANSKI MOST

DERVENTA דרוונטה

טראווניק TRAVNIK

BIJELJINA ביילינה

ברצ'קו BRČKO זאווידוביצ'י

דובוי DOBOJ ZAVIDOVIĆ

זאגרב

ZAGREB

TUZLA טוזלה

VLASENICA ולאסניצה

ZENICA זניצה

VISOKO ויסוקו

SARAJEVO

ז'פצ'ה ŽEPČE

VIŠEGRAD

בלגראד

וישגראד

BEOGRAD

MOSTAR מוסטאר

סקופייה

SKOPLJE

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Banat under German administration
territories annexed by Italy
territories annexed by Italy to "Greater Albania"
Montenegro territory under an Italian governor
the self-proclaimed Independent State of Croatia
territory annexed by Hungary
territory occupied by Hungary
territory occupied by Bulgaria
Serbian territory occupied by Germany
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SOFIJA
TIRANA
TRST
Maribor
Celje
Ptuj
Kranj
Varaždin
Koprivnica
Bjelovar
Virovitica
Karlovac
Sisak
Osijek
Vukovar
Novi Sad
Subotica
Sombor
Senta
Kikinda
Petrovgrad
Vršac
Pančevo
Bela Crkva
Zemun
Banja Luka
Bihać
Gospić
Zadar
Šibenik
Split
Mostar
Dubrovnik
Metković
Cetinje
Podgorica
Nikšić
Kolašin
Peć
Priština
Prizren
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Uroševac
Kumanovo
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Bitolj
Ohrid
Kičevo
Gostivar
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Đevđelija
Pirot
Vranje
Niš
Leskovac
Kragujevac
Kraljevo
Užice
Čačak
Valjevo
Smederevo
Požarevac
Zaječar
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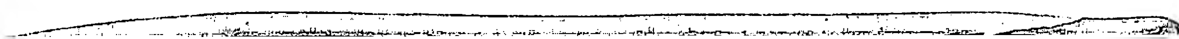

This book is dedicated to the souls of those
Jews from Yugoslavia
who lost their lives in the Holocaust

WE SURVIVED... 2
Yugoslav Jews on the Holocaust

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Editor-in-Chief
Aleksandar Gaon

Editorial Board
Aleksandar Gaon, Teodor Kovač, Aleksandar Mošić, Eta Najfeld, Luci Petrović, Andreja Preger, Eva Timar, Milinko Radević and Branka Džidić (*Editorial Board secretary*)

Translated by
Stephen Agnew
Jelena Babšek Labudović

Technical Editor
Milinko Radević

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Detail of the monument to vanquished Jewish communities at the Yad Vashem Memorial Museum, Jerusalem

WE SURVIVED... 2

Yugoslav Jews on the Holocaust

BELGRADE, 2006

The publication of this collection of memoirs by Jewish victims of persecution who survived World War Two has been made possible by the donation of Haim Mile Pinkas and his family.

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INTRODUCTION

The first volume of *We Survived* presented moving testimonies to the suffering of the Jewish people, senselessly condemned to destruction in the middle of the last century. The opening words of its introduction pointed out that the number of those who survived the terrible years of the Holocaust and are still alive today is dwindling rapidly.

The first book was well received by members of the Jewish community and has significantly enriched the literature about the Holocaust in the former Yugoslavia. The editors collected first-hand testimonies from survivors of the terror and humiliation endured during the years of persecution and of the suffering in the camps of Nazi Germany and the other countries which followed it. Nobody who opened this book could remain indifferent to this. Most of the contributors had lost their closest family and were the only remaining witnesses to all that had happened. Their published memories were bound to touch a chord in the hearts not only of the surviving Jews but also of all those around them. As we noted in the first volume, the motive for collecting these memoirs can be succinctly expressed: *Lest it be forgotten! Lest it be repeated!* It was also essential to provide a testament from the older generations of the Jewish community to the younger, and not only to them, and not only in this part of the world.

The first volume of testimonies on persecution during the Holocaust was published in mid-2001. The editorial board continued to collect new testimonies on this evil time, encouraged by the continued research and study of the Holocaust throughout the world. Together with such institutions as Yad Vashem in Israel and the Holocaust Museum in the United States, the World Jewish Congress, early in the year 2000, established a program of cataloguing the testimonies of Holocaust survivors. The group responsible for this within the World Jewish Congress continually urges Holocaust victims to contribute their memoirs to this program.

Readers of this volume will recognise the same sites of martyrdom. However the number and variety of inhuman acts points to the need for every personal story to be recorded as a new document recording this dark period of Europe's history when the Jewish tragedy reached its culmination. The innumerable and indescribable sufferings of the Jewish people, from their enslavement in Egypt under the pharaohs, through the destruction of the Jewish state by the Romans, the auto-da-fé of the Inquisition and the expulsion from Spain, reached its climax in production-line killing in the Nazi gas chambers, the ultimate example of the extreme of human depravity, as recounted by the contributors to this book.

In assembling these testimonies we have adhered to the categories used in the first volume of *We Survived*, with the addition of some new chapters and the omission of others, in keeping with the nature of the memoirs.

This book also reveals new information about the situation in the territory of the former Kingdom of Yugoslavia carved up among the five occupying powers. Because of this fragmentation of the former Yugoslavia, many people may not be aware of the local background to the events of the Holocaust in this

region. In particular it is little known that the Jews of Yugoslavia had the unique opportunity - denied to many Jews elsewhere in occupied Europe - of taking an active part in the war against Nazi Fascism. All in all there were more than 4,600 Jewish fighters, of whom about 1,400 lost their lives.

It should also be pointed out that the world at large, and even Jewish communities abroad, know very little about the sufferings of those Jews who lived in the territory of the former Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

We thank the authors of these testimonies for their courage in reliving the painful memories of the horror and suffering they endured, especially the loss of their nearest and dearest. We are also grateful to the Jewish Historical Museum and the Federation of Jewish Communities in Belgrade, both of which have given us full support by including this project in their program of activities.

Editorial Board

FOREWORD

Faced with this second volume of *We Survived*, it is important to recognize why we persevere in gathering further memoirs.

One purpose of collecting eye-witness accounts is well-known. The odyssey related in each personal history is unique, even if certain events appear to be shared in common. As each testimony is given, the story starts again at the beginning, relating a lived experience unlike any other. Every narrative is a book in itself.

By enlarging this set of memoirs another goal is achieved as well. According to our sages the written Torah belongs to *the whole*, whereas the Oral Law expresses *the particular*.*

Here the separate narratives read as if they were verbal accounts. But once stories are written down and assembled together, they change their nature. Then they bear a heavier burden, a broader one.

Recounting an individual history is an act of memory. Recording such experiences as a whole transforms the particular events into parts of a larger reality: the destiny of an entire people.

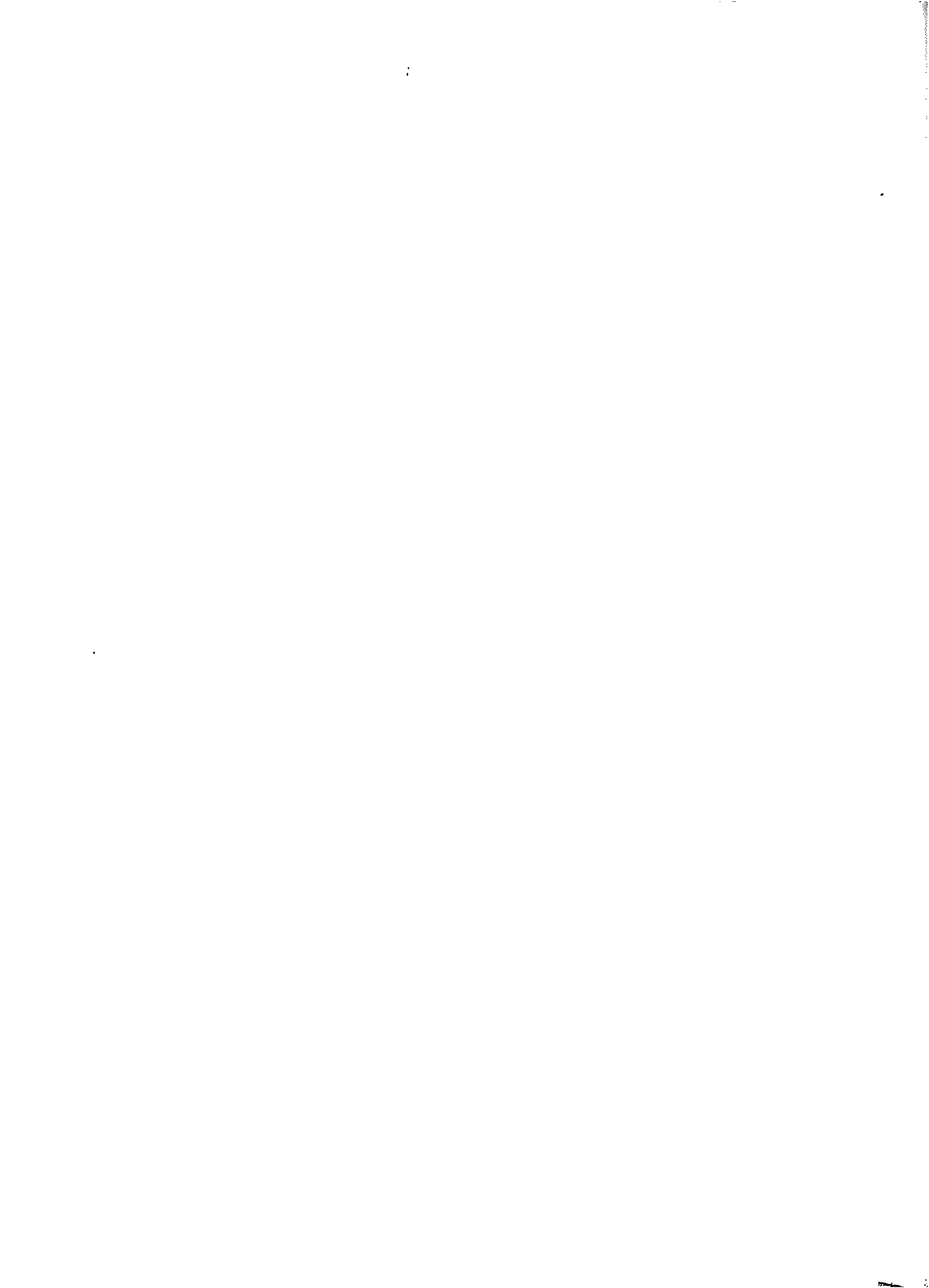
That has been our way since ancient days: retelling personal narratives that embody the experience and the spirit of a nation.

Those who toiled to assemble this volume sought out the singular stories of private individuals and then returned with these collective memoirs to enrich us all.

Yechiel Bar-Chaim

American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee
Paris, February 2006

* *Midrash Tanhuma 58*



I

THE LAVOSLAV ŠVARC HOME

Paula HIRŠLER

HIDDEN AWAY IN LITTLE HOUSES

This testimony is part of an address given by Paula Hiršler in Zagreb on December 15, 1957, at the reopening of the Lavoslav Švarc Home for elderly Jews in Zagreb. As she herself said, she was speaking on behalf of the nine elderly men and women still surviving in the home at that time. The others were Klementina and Jakob First, Ivka and Emanuel Majlender, Jakob Kon, Ida Kon, Matilda Grinvald and Mici Poper.

The original Švarc Home in Maksimir Street in Zagreb

At the beginning of 1941 there were a hundred senior citizens in the former Švarc Home in Zagreb. Of those 78 women and 22 men, only nine of us are still alive today.

Our troubles began on April 8, 1941, when the German occupiers, after entering Zagreb, sent one of their officers to order Singer, the manager of the home, to have us all moved out within 24 hours. They then took over our entire premises and everything inside.

You can imagine what a terrible blow this was for all of us. With this one order we lost our home in which we had lived happily and comfortably for so many years, confident that we would spend many more years there, to the end of our lives.

As we left our home we had to hand over all our personal bedding, all our belongings, for their officers and soldiers to use. Those of the elderly who had relatives in Zagreb moved in with them temporarily while a few of the very sick and frail were kept for a few days in the cellar of the Švarc Home. Another thirty residents were taken to houses in Rapska and Draškovićeva streets. They never returned and we never discovered what happened to them. A few of us were accommodated in a house at 3 Boškovićeva Street but, after a short time, we were moved, along with the sick and frail from the cellar of the Švarc Home, into two small houses near Stenjevac, not far from Zagreb. These little houses, standing in an open field, were provided for us by the then president of the Municipal Council, Dr Glikstal.

Lavoslav Švarc (1837–1906) in his will, dated May 4, 1905, bequeathed funds for the building of a home for elderly people

There were seventy of us living in those little houses and we were not allowed to leave them without special permission from the Stenjevac physician, Dr Pinjuh. We were short of everything, especially food, because we were not permitted to take anything with us, and the occupiers gave us nothing. We were taken care of by our community which, from time to time, brought us the essential groceries. Our period of bare subsistence in these unhealthy little houses was one of great fear and suffering, insomnia and stress, and frequent visits from the Ustashas.

They broke into our little houses one day in October, 1941, and took away Mr Singer, the manager of the home, Mrs Najman and her two children and our nurse Micika, who was an Aryan. By a stroke of luck one of Mrs Najman's daughters managed to escape, while she herself and her six-year-old son Tomica were executed, along with Mr Singer.

Late one night in November of the same year, the Germans suddenly stormed into our little houses and selected thirteen of the elderly people, including me. They took us to Jankomir, where they immediately began interrogating and torturing us. They then threw us, all thirteen of us, into a dark bunker where all we had to sleep on was a little damp straw. We had trudged on foot in heavy rain all the way from Stenjevac to Jankomir, so we all had colds. There in the bunker we went hungry for forty hours until, to our delight, one of the elderly ladies from the huts, Katica Preger, now deceased, managed to bring us some food. She had dressed in peasant clothing and bought food from the farmers.

In the bunker we lived in constant fear, our nerves on edge with the constant feeling that we would end our lives there. We were there for ten days until they finally took us back to those little houses with the other elderly people. Later we found out that we had the then Swiss consul in Zagreb to thank for our rescue from Jankomir.

Returning to Zagreb from Brezovica, 1947

We eked out a miserable existence in those little houses near Stenjevac for more than three years until, one day, we were told that we would have to move to Brezovica, near Zagreb.

On December 5, 1944, a few open trucks arrived and we were loaded onto them along with our belongings. We travelled, in the cold, rain and snow, to Brezovica, where they put us up in a very small and dilapidated house which had once been a police station. It had only two small rooms which could normally hold not more than ten people.

Our Municipal Council, realising the difficult situation in which they had placed us, built on another two rooms of about ten square metres each, so that we could be more comfortably accommodated, especially those of us who were severely ill. The municipality also occasionally brought us some food. In Brezovica we barely survived until the liberation of the whole country. We were visited there by Dr Glikstal, Kišicki and Dr Milan Švarc, who had been our ophthalmologist in the Švarc Home.

The new home, the endowment of Lavoslav Švarc, built in 1957 in Bukovačka Street, Zagreb

The worst days of our lives were just before the liberation in 1945. One afternoon Luburić's Black Legion came and told us that we had all been sentenced to be slaughtered. Fortunately, later the same night, a group of Partisans appeared and liberated us.

Even after the liberation we remained at Brezovica until April 1947 when we moved to the home which had been prepared for us at 25 Mlinarska Street, where we still live to this day, thanks to our Zagreb Jewish Community.

In the days after the liberation in 1945 we were frequently visited at Brezovica by Mr Montiljo, our president, and Mrs Blanka Doner. They asked how we were living and what we needed, often bringing us food, clothing and other items which they had obtained for us through the Jewish Community. The women's auxiliary also organised children's performances and musical programs on several occasions, so that our miserable elderly people could have some comfort and, at least for a little, forget some of the horrors of the past years as they waited to be moved to Zagreb.

These good friends, each time they visited us, would comfort us and assure us that we would soon move into better and healthier premises in Zagreb, and in the spring of 1947, this finally happened.

For us, the elderly people who had survived all the terrors and horrors of World War Two, the happiest days of our lives have been the day of the liberation in 1945, the day we moved from Brezovica to the home in Mlinarska Street, and this day, when we have lived to see our magnificent new home.

II

WITH THE PARTISANS

Silvana MLADINOV

SPLIT: PORT OF SALVATION AND PORT OF DEATH

Silvana Morpurgo-Mladinov was born in Split in 1914, to father Viktor Morpurgo and mother Marija, née Gentilli. The Morpurgo family had lived in Split since the sixteenth century and was one of the most eminent Jewish families in the city. Vid Morpurgo founded the first Dalmatian newspaper and bank. Viktor Morpurgo, Silvana's father, who also figures in this testament, wrote a book about Daniel Rodrigo and the influence of Spanish Jews on the development of trade in the Adriatic. The book was published posthumously by the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts in Zagreb in the 1960s. During the war he was president of the Jewish Community.

After finishing secondary school, Silvana graduated in law in Zagreb before returning to Split where she worked in the Primorska District administration. She spent the early war years with her husband Dušan in Drniš and Split then, after Italy's capitulation in 1943, joined the Partisans. She was seriously wounded in 1944 when the Germans bombed the Partisan hospital on Dugi Otok in the Kornati Islands where she had been working as a pharmacist. She was sent to the British military hospital in the liberated territory of southern Italy for treatment and remained there until the end of the war.

Silvana had a sister, Tina, a young graduate painter with a number of successful exhibitions to her credit, and a brother, Josip-Bepi, an engi-

neer. Her mother, her sister, Tina, and her father were taken from Split to the notorious Sajmište Camp in Belgrade on March 13, 1943, where her mother met her death. Tina was subsequently killed in Banjica and her father in Theresienstadt.

After the war Silvana returned to Split with her husband, Dušan. They had two children, Duško-David and Mirjana. She was very active in the Jewish Community in Split and, during the 1980s, became president. In 1991 she and her husband, together with their children, moved to Boston, where she died in 1997.

As soon as Dušan and I were married on October 21, 1940, we immediately went to Drniš, where Dušan had found a job as a mining engineer. The war in Europe had already begun, the Germans had overrun Poland in no time and France and England had immediately joined the war against them, but here we still hadn't grasped the seriousness of the situation. After March 27, 1941, we waited for the Nazis to react. Dušan thought he would be called up by the army, so I went to my parents in Split. The following week, on April 6, 1941, the Italians bombed Split and the Germans bombed Belgrade.

We were asleep in the cellar of our house at Špinut when we were awakened by a number of loud explosions. We thought these were just military exercises until my sister Tina ran in frightened and said that bombs were falling from foreign aircraft and that one had hit a house in Marasovića Street. A little later our neighbour, who had a radio, came to tell us that the German Army had entered Yugoslavia.

We were all very depressed. There were air raid warnings all throughout the day and we kept running into the cellar. My mother, who was not strong, found it difficult to cope with the stairs and in the end stayed in the kitchen.

My brother Bepi telephoned from the Majdan cement factory near Split where he worked as an engineer, but did not know what to suggest. Dušan was nervous as he had to return to Drniš because the general manager was away and he was responsible for production. The trains weren't running and we didn't know how to get back. Then, during the afternoon, we discovered that there would be one train to Zagreb leaving at midnight. We found it difficult to leave our loved ones and walk through the completely dark town to the station. Dušan's

Aunt Milena came with us, and was to travel on to Kosovska Mitrovica where her daughter was expecting a baby.

We waited a long time for the train to leave and finally arrived at Drniš in the morning. The station was full of soldiers and military trains. Aunt Milena continued alone and reached Kosovska Mitrovica three days after her granddaughter was born. I spent the day sitting next to the radio, but there was no news from Belgrade. They only played the march *Heroes of the Drina Corps*.

Silvana and her husband Dušan during the war years

The war didn't last long: the army collapsed and the Independent State of Croatia was established. On Easter Monday the Italians bombed Drniš. They occupied all of Dalmatia. This was a good thing for the Jews and the Serbs, both of whom were persecuted and killed in the Independent State of Croatia right from the early days. My parents remained in Split and my brother Bepi continued working in the nearby Majdan cement factory. The factory was owned by a man called Štok, to whom we were related. Racist regulations were also introduced in Split and in the whole of Dalmatia: all Jewish civil servants were dismissed from government jobs, Jewish children were expelled from schools, Jews were barred from public places, beaches and so on.

My family lived in relative peace. My father, as president of the Jewish Community, was summoned to the *Questura*, the Italian police,

on a number of occasions, but managed to establish reasonable relations with them, and with their chief, Ungaretti. He frequently interceded on behalf of refugees. Children without parents were allowed to join their relatives in Italy and many were given extensions of their permits to stay in Dalmatia. Long-term residence camps were set up. The Italian administration was quite tolerant and it was also like this on the islands of Korčula and Rab and in other places. My father was a representative of the ITAK sardine cannery, my mother continued making liqueurs and syrups which she sold to the local cafes, and my sister Tina took care of the garden with help from Bepi. In this way they managed to survive somehow. They weren't much harassed apart from a few searches in which a number of old weapons were confiscated and handed over to the Ethnographic Museum in Split by the Italians. I should mention that, after the war, the Museum director returned these weapons to Bepi and me.

In June, 1942, we went to Drniš, where we felt danger threatening us, because Dušan was an opponent of the regime and I was a Jew. We discovered later that we had escaped at the last moment, because a warrant had already been issued for our arrest. Dušan got a job at the Majdan cement factory as a mining engineer.

Italy capitulated on September 8, 1945. The Partisans entered Split and the city was free for fifteen days. One night Dušan and I were unable to sleep, wondering what would happen if Dalmatia were to be annexed to the Independent State of Croatia and if the Germans came. In the morning we travelled down to Split from Majdan and tried to convince my parents that if this were to happen they should immediately go to Dušan's mother on the island of Šolta. My family was convinced that it would not happen, that Dalmatia would be occupied by the Allies. However the Germans and the Ustashas had already reached Klis, only about five kilometres from the city centre. The defence of Split was organised immediately. Dušan became commander of a battalion, Bepi was in charge of the factory and Bepi's wife Đulijana and I went to Mount Mosor, above Majdan. Two days later I returned to the town because I wanted to go to Split to persuade my family to take refuge on Šolta. There was no transport available. I was willing to walk: it was not such a great distance, but I was afraid because the area all around Split was full of refugees, soldiers and rural people coming down from the nearby villages in search of plunder. Bepi insisted that Đulijana come with me. In the end I didn't

go, and this change of heart has tormented me all my life. I may not have been able to persuade my parents to leave, but at least I should have tried.

In the meantime the Germans bombed the Italian military camp right opposite our house in Maksim Gorki Street, which is now called Matoševa Street. My parents wrote to me – the last letter they wrote – telling me that it was terrible, that many Italians had died, that the front door of the house had been blown in by the heavy blast, that Franco, an Italian officer who later joined the Partisans and married my cousin Gabrijela Morpurgo, had come to see if they were alive and to try to help them.

A group of about thirty Jews from Split decided to leave the city and go first to the islands, from where they managed to cross to southern Italy, which had already been liberated by the Italians. In this way they were saved. Among them were Robert and Meri Hartman, the parents of my sister-in-law Đulijana, and Robert's sister Margit Paškeš. They told me after the war that before they left they had spoken to my father and to Markus Finci, who was vice-president of the Jewish Community, and had tried to persuade them to join them. My father and Markus refused, saying that it was their duty to remain with the rest of the Jews. Apparently they had been planning to move the Jews who remained in Split to Korčula or Hvar, in the expectation that the Germans would not reach Split so soon. Unfortunately, they did not have enough time.

Then the Eugene of Savoy Motorised Division of the German Army arrived to back up the Ustashas. The Partisans were forced to withdraw from Split and the surrounding area. Dušan and his battalion retreated towards Imotsko, while Bepi, Đulijana and I, together with a group of Majdan workers, set out via Majdan in the direction of Baška Voda. Bepi volunteered to fight and went to Biokovo. Later he was transferred to Vis and Komiža, where he remained until the end of the war.

When the Germans entered Majdan they looked for Bepi and Dušan and then killed all the men they found in the shelter.

Everything I have discovered about my parents in those days I learned from my Aunt Lina, my father's sister who, together with my cousin Gabrijela, was rescued by Mrs Gazarević. First she hid them and then found them a connection through which she sent them to the free end of Kaštele, which held out for another few days.

As soon as the Germans entered Split at the end of September, they arrested many prominent people, including my father, and imprisoned them in the Gripe Fortress. Tina took him some essentials, including a mattress. Each day she took food to him. During all these days before she was deported, Tina went around leaving whatever was left of the silver with friends in the hope of saving it. After the war many good people sought me out and returned the silver, clothing and some of the other things which my sister Tina had hidden away.

The Germans and Ustashas issued a proclamation calling on all Jews to report to what was then the Ambassador Hotel, which later became the Army Club. Almost all the Split Jews reported, mainly elderly people, the helpless and mothers with small children. The younger and smarter men had already joined the Partisans and the elderly had taken refuge in the hills. Many refugees managed to stay hidden because they were not known in Split.

On October 12, 1943, all the Jews were rounded up in the court-yard of the Maritime Administration Building. A neighbour told me that my mother and Tina were led away early that morning. As they passed they knocked on her window to say goodbye. They were taken away by two armed German soldiers, one on each side of them. These two quiet, sweet women were marched off as if they were the worst criminals. This image still haunts me in my sleep.

They were taken to the courtyard of the Maritime Administration Building. They had rounded up all the Jews who had responded to the summons. They were kept there until October 13, with no food or water, and then all the men and a few women, including my mother and Tina, were put on board the Bakar, whose captain was a man named Žuljević. After the war this captain's wife told me that, at the last minute, Tina had removed a gold bracelet and given it to Mrs Mondolfo. She was an Orthodox Christian and her husband, a Jewish lawyer, was eighty years old when he was taken. After the war she returned this bracelet to me, and my daughter Mirjana now wears it.

The Jews from Split were shipped to Metković while those who were not able to board the ship were allowed to return home. These were wives and mothers with small children. All of them were later taken to Jasenovac, from which nobody returned.

In Metković they were loaded onto trucks and taken to a camp at Staro Sajmište in Belgrade. We have never learned anything about my

mother's fate. As she was very frail and weak, we presumed that she died along the route from distress and exhaustion.

There were two camps at Staro Sajmište: one each for males and females. After the war we were contacted by a former camp inmate (he died not long after). Bepi and Dušan went to see him and he told them that he had been in the same barracks as my father and was with him when Uncle Eugenio died. He told them that my father was often taken out into the fenced part of the camp and that he was able to exchange messages with Tina through the barbed wire. Unfortunately all the inmates of that camp were later taken away and ended in the mass killing places.

In the registry of war crimes we discovered that Tina was taken to the camp in Banjica in June 1944, to Command 1007. It is believed that this was the code name for the gas chamber.

A Mr Pauković of Split told us about an encounter with my father. He had seen him at the Vienna railway station, cleaning carriages. He had wanted to give him something but the guards would not allow him near. Later, through the Red Cross, we learned that a Vittorio Morpurgo had died at Theresienstadt. However we do not know whether this was my father or, possibly, an Italian Jew with the same name. One thing is certain, nevertheless: nobody returned from either the first or the second group of those who were taken away.

I have written this account on the recommendation of Jozica Di Nola[1], who felt that I would feel easier after writing it. I don't feel any easier, but it has been well worth the effort so that those who come after us know what these things were like, because from many stories only various details remain in the memory: details that perhaps many people will be unable to connect together.

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[1] Jozica Di Nola wrote about Jews under the Italian occupation in Dalmatia. She worked for the Centre for Modern Jewish Documentation (CDEC) in Milan.

Aleksandar DEMAJO

ALWAYS ONE STEP AHEAD OF DEATH

Aleksandar Demajo was born in Belgrade in 1923 to father Moric Demajo and mother Alis, née Amar. When the war began he was seventeen years old and about to graduate from high school. He fled Belgrade and managed to graduate in Cetinje. His father Moric did not survive the war but was killed by the Italians in Cetinje in 1941.

He returned from the camps and took part in the national liberation struggle then, after the war, joined the diplomatic service where he spent his entire career, retiring as an ambassador.

This interview with Aleksandar Demajo was conducted by Jaša Almuli for the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University, USA.

My father was a lawyer who worked for both the Jewish community and the community at large. When the war broke out he was vice-president of the Jewish Sephardic Community, a post he held for a long time. He was also for many years a city councillor in Belgrade. I was brought up in the Yugoslav national spirit, in the SOKOL movement, from my earliest childhood but, in the years immediately before the war, I was caught up in the progressive high school movement guided

by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. During that period I was swinging back and forth between SOKOL and this progressive movement. My father and I lived alone, because I had no brothers and sisters and my mother had died just a year and a half before the war.

On March 25, 1941, my father began thinking about resigning from his position as a city councillor in Belgrade. At this time several ministers in the Cvetković Government had offered their resignations in an effort to distance themselves from the Yugoslav government's decision to join the Tripartite Pact. My father believed that, as a Jew, he could no longer be a member of the City Council under these circumstances. The Tripartite Pact was the treaty among the Axis powers – Germany, Italy and Japan. On March 25, Yugoslavia formally joined the pact. However events were moving too rapidly. Within two days, while my father was still thinking about it and telling me that he should resign, there was a coup d'état and the new government withdrew from the pact, which had already been signed. This was the direct pretext for Germany's attack on Yugoslavia ten days later. The bombing of Belgrade, early in the morning of April 6, 1945, caught my father and me in our apartment. When we heard the explosions and radio broadcasts broke off, my father immediately grasped what was happening. That morning he went to his mobilisation post in Banjica and I went to mine at the Public Health Centre where my job was to give first aid.

My father knew where my post was and, in the afternoon, he came to see me because Banjica had been bombed, there was no assembly point there and he said we should leave Belgrade immediately.

FLEEING TO MONTENEGRO

That same evening we left Belgrade. We set off towards Avala, 24 kilometres south of the city and then managed to catch a train which took us to Stalać. My father's plan was to get as far south as possible, heading for Greece. However at Stalać we heard that the line had already been cut further south by the Bulgarians, so instead we caught the last westbound train for Sarajevo.

My father was counting on us being able to stay for a while in Bosnia, where there would be military resistance because it was a mountainous area. However when we arrived in Sarajevo we realised that nothing of the sort would happen. My father learned that the Yugoslav government was nearby, heading for the coast.

From Sarajevo we continued by train to Mostar. But there the line towards the coast had been cut by the Ustashas, the Croatian collaborators. We travelled partly on foot, partly by ox-cart and finally by bus through Hercegovina, eventually arriving in Montenegro. When we took the bus at Nikšić, we heard that Yugoslavia had formally capitulated.

Our bus was going as far as the coastal city of Kotor. We arrived there in the morning, only to hear that a British submarine had left during the night after picking people up. That morning we witnessed the arrival of the first Italian motorcycle troops, the *bersaglieri*, with their plumed hats. We decided to settle down in Kotor and found a room. My father immediately went up to Cetinje, because he knew some lawyer colleagues there. Until the end of the first world war, Cetinje had been the capital of Montenegro, which then had been a monarchy with family ties to various royal and imperial houses throughout Europe. There were then some fourteen or so foreign diplomatic missions in Montenegro and my father expected to run into some of his Montenegrin colleagues from Belgrade there.

I stayed alone in Kotor for two or three days until my father returned and said we should immediately go to Cetinje because he had located some friends and acquaintances there.

In Cetinje we found accommodation in the house of a man with whom my father had an interesting connection. In Belgrade he had been the legal representative of the Italian Fiat and Pirelli companies and the man with whom we now stayed was a motor mechanic and Pirelli's Cetinje distributor. My father tried to make as many contacts as possible while he decided what we should do next. At that time the high school was reopened in Cetinje and my father had the idea that I should enrol and finish my schooling and that is exactly what I did.

THE GOOD PEOPLE OF CETINJE

The atmosphere in Cetinje was fairly relaxed. People mixed freely and talked openly about everything. Despite the presence of the Italians, there was no tension. This was the kind of atmosphere in which my father and I spent about two months until we moved into another apartment. This move was momentous for us because we found accommodation in the house of a Yugoslav officer, a retired captain, Savo Strugar. We were in his house on June 22 when the Germans attacked

the Soviet Union. Early in the morning of the same day, the Italians launched mass arrests, rounding up anyone they thought was suspicious. This included my father, who was taken to prison by the Italians. Our host, Savo Strugar, immediately realised that I was also in danger, so that day, or the next, he took me to stay with his relatives in a village. As it happened, Vlado Strugar, with whom I had finished high school in Cetinje, was living in the same house. He was later a well-known historian and academician. Savo stayed in Cetinje, waiting to see what would happen to my father in prison. After ten days he was released, but was given a document with both our photographs and orders that the document was to be used for both of us to leave Montenegro immediately. In other words to return to Belgrade and report to the police there. I should mention here that Yugoslavia was divided into zones of occupation: Belgrade was in the German zone and Montenegro in the Italian zone. It was for this reason that my father had put so much effort into trying to stay in Montenegro.

My father had believed that Montenegro would not be long under occupation and so, right from the beginning of our stay in Cetinje, he had been searching for opportunities for us to move out of the city to somewhere in the countryside where we would be out of the way. Under false names if necessary. I remember that he had spoken about this with some people who promised to find a place for us in a village in Piva, close to Hercegovina. When he was released from prison with orders to return to Belgrade into the arms of the Germans, it obviously never even crossed his mind to do so. And at that very moment he succeeded in his plan to remain illegally in Montenegro, thanks to our host. As soon as my father was released, Savo Strugar took him to another village mid-way between Cetinje and Budva, to the house of a relative of his, Luka Banović, who later became Yugoslav minister for internal affairs. After he settled my father in there, Savo set about seeing what else he could do. When he had everything planned, he came to me in my village and brought me back to Cetinje, to his small, two-room apartment in which my father and I had previously stayed, but in which two Italian officers had now made themselves at home. I spent the night in the kitchen, and the next day he put me on a bus headed for Budva. He told me that somewhere along the way my father would board the bus, but that we must pretend not to know each other and join up only after we left the bus in Budva. And so it happened. My father got on the bus somewhere, wearing a Montenegrin cap which he

never removed from his head. When we left the bus we finally spoke. He said to me "You are to go to that apartment in old Budva". This was the house of the Zambelić family, who were to give me shelter until he let me know what to do next. He went somewhere else, where his Cetinje friends had told him to go. In fact he had gone to Joko Boreta who, before the war, had been mayor of Budva. Boreta immediately gave him a connection for somewhere we could both go and settle permanently. This was the house of his best man, Rado Vučićević, a veteran of the Salonica front, who lived at Buljarica on the coast south of Budva. When my father and I made contact again we went to Buljarica and settled down there. This was during the early days of July. Our host knew who we were, he knew that we were Jews from Belgrade, but he was very conspiratorial about this among the people in his neighbourhood.

WITH THE REBELS FROM THE FIRST DAY

Suddenly, only ten days after our arrival in his house, on July 13, 1941, a rebellion erupted in Montenegro. That night we heard people outside, breaking or cutting something. They were cutting the cables on the telegraph poles. We also heard songs which immediately indicated that this had something to do with the activities of the Communist Party. By the next morning this entire village was ready to mutiny. All the men, including my father and I, set up an ambush beside the road through which the first Italian troops were to arrive. We were in the ambush, my father near the road, behind the rocks, and I a little further away, with a biggish group of people. We had no weapons – there were only a handful of shotguns among the entire group, Sometime during the morning a small column arrived, a motorcycle and one or two cars with the Italians, if I remember rightly. We summoned them from the ambush, ordering them to stop and surrender. It was my father who issued this order, because he spoke Italian. They didn't surrender immediately, there was some shooting, but they surrendered after one of the Italians was wounded. My father then went to the Lučice Hotel near Petrovac. It was very close and he knew that he would find there a group of Belgrade Jews who had arrived from Kotor. Among them was a doctor. The rebels wanted a doctor to help the wounded man.

Many years later, in Petrovac, I spoke with a Montenegrin woman, one of the owners of this hotel. She told me that when my father was

asked where I was, where his son was, he very proudly told them "He's over there with the rebels". My father returned with the doctor who treated the man and we stayed where we were, but I don't remember what eventually happened to the Italian. Later, another, much larger Italian convoy arrived and we were forced to climb a very steep and rocky mountain under machine-gun fire. The group reached the summit and crossed to the other side while my father and I stayed there, on the mountain, for about ten days. In the meantime there was a famous battle taking place on the road between Budva and Cetinje, at a place called Brajići. Together with a younger man from our group I set off in that direction, because the battle had been planned. However, not being used to this kind of terrain I couldn't walk on the rocks and my companion had to send me back. Soon after this, things fell completely apart and the Italians from Cetinje penetrated into Crmnica, a valley in the hinterland near Lake Skadar. Everyone who was there at the time took to their heels and my father and I were left to our own devices.

Now my father and I were on our own until two young Italian officers came along. Because my father spoke Italian, it was easy for him to strike up a conversation with them. He invented a story about me having a lung disease, so that we had come to Montenegro before the war began; he had brought me here for the mountain air and now we were trapped in these new circumstances. One of the Italians was a teacher, both of them were very cultured men and they were most surprised to meet a man who spoke such good Italian. These officers gave us a pass which allowed us to cross through all the Crmnica villages to reach our destination, Bar, from where we intended to take a boat to Split. This was my father's plan because we believed that there was no longer any possibility of surviving in Montenegro.

TRAGIC ENCOUNTER

It wasn't easy getting to Split. The city is a major centre in Dalmatia in a region once held by the Italians and which they had always claimed was theirs. As soon as the outbreak of World War Two presented them with the opportunity, the Italians conquered and annexed the territory. We had close relatives and some friends in Split and so father thought the best thing was to go there. We obtained passes fairly easily in Bar on the basis of the documents we had been given on the mountain by the Italian officers. No sooner had we begun this

journey when an event occurred which promised to be a pleasant encounter but instead had tragic consequences for my family. When the ship taking us to Split arrived in Budva we went up on deck. On the shore we saw a Belgrade woman with whom we had socialised in Cetinje before my father was arrested. Now he waved to her. She saw him wave, but then immediately disappeared. Shortly after they called my father's name, ordering him to report. We immediately realised that the woman was an Italian agent. While we had still been underground my father had altered the document we had been given to return to Belgrade, changing the name Moric Demajo to Morić Damjan, supposedly a refugee from Peć. When my father didn't answer the order to report, they collected the documents of all passengers on board, realising that my father's was forged after the woman identified him from the photograph in it. We were both immediately taken off the ship and, two days later, escorted to Cetinje. On the third day, without any interrogation, they court-martialled us, together with two Montenegrins from the coastal villages. The court martial consisted of three Italian colonels, and either one or two of them were from the Fascist militia. The trial lasted about fifteen minutes. There were no questions asked, because this was a show trial, a reprisal for the setback the Italians had suffered in the conflict at Brajići. My father and the two Montenegrins were sentenced to execution by firing squad while I was reprieved and returned to prison. Because the Italian queen at that time was a Montenegrin, the daughter of the last Montenegrin king, the Italians believed they could pacify Montenegro and win it over as an ally on the strength of these blood relations with the Italian royal family. This was one of the reasons why, when several members of a family were sentenced to death, they always reprieved the youngest. In this case I was not only the youngest, I was also a minor and this is what saved my life. My father and the two Montenegrins were executed the same morning the trial was held. After the war the remains of all three were moved to Petrovac na Moru, the home town of the other two victims. Their common grave in the Petrovac cemetery is still pointed out by Montenegrins for the curious fact of two Montenegrins and a Jew being buried together.

I remained in prison for some time. There were many people among the political prisoners there whom I met again later in life after they had survived the horrors of the war. My fate would probably have been similar to that of the men interned in the Kavaja camp in Alba-

nia had it not been for a strange coincidence. While I was in prison an Italian officer, the commander of the motor transport units, arrived in Cetinje. His name was Nascimbeni and, as a representative of Fiat and Pirelli, he had been one of my father's clients in Belgrade. He had apparently been mobilised as soon as the war broke out and sent as an officer in the Italian Army to Montenegro. In Cetinje he saw my father's name on a publicly-posted list of executions and, after asking about the case, discovered that I was in prison. He came to the prison to find me. I was very surprised when I was brought to the office and saw him there. I knew him because my father's business office was in our apartment. Nascimbeni arranged for me to appear before the regular military court, which dismissed the case against me for lack of evidence. I am sure that the SOKOL badge which I was wearing was seen as evidence that I was a nationalist rather than a Communist and it was used as an argument in my defence in the proceedings which were launched by Nascimbeni himself. After I was released from prison, Nascimbeni told me that I could choose any place in Italy or some other Italian-occupied zone of Yugoslavia, but that I could not stay in Montenegro. I decided to go to Split, knowing that my relatives there would most certainly take care of me. Many local people from Cetinje helped and supported me while I was in prison. I could see that they were sorry for me as a young boy who had lost his father. When I was released from prison they immediately offered me shelter and, during the couple of days I remained there, they bought me a suit and everything else I needed.

TO THE ALPS, VIA SPLIT

When I arrived in Split I went to see my relatives, who had fled from Belgrade. They had heard before they left the city that my father had been executed, but they knew nothing of my fate. I stayed with them.

There was a large group of Jews in Split who had managed to escape from Belgrade with forged documents. Some of them lost their lives in the process, but most of them managed to reach Split. This is were I came across Aleksa Čelebonović, Loni Davičo and a number of other young Jews who I had known in Belgrade. I had arrived from Cetinje in Split with jaundice and terrible eczema for which I was receiving treatment. I had planned to go with a group of young men

from Split to join the Partisans in the mountains, but my condition prevented me. About December 7 or 8, 1941, a large group of Jews was summoned to report with all their belongings at an appointed time in the harbour where we were put aboard a ship and taken to Kopar, the Slovenian port known to the Italians as Capodistria.

The Italians who received us there were very kind. They were aware that we were in danger of being killed if we were living in German occupied territory. There were no problems at all, they accepted all who came, regardless of how they arrived and what documents they carried. The only surprise came for us was when we were rounded up and moved out of Kopar. We were taken from the ship and put into railway wagons, with all the men bound in chains. There were families, men, women and children, in the train. They were taking us somewhere in Italy but we had no idea where. Suddenly we stopped somewhere in the Italian Alps, in the province of Aosta, close to the borders with France and Switzerland. Here, in this mountain resort they let us out of the train and released us from our chains. We were quite free.

We received a daily sum of money for food and a monthly allowance for accommodation. This was only a token amount, but we were free to find accommodation anywhere and any way we could. Some people had more money with them. The relative with whom I was travelling had plenty of money and rented a very nice apartment, so that for a year we lived very comfortably. The only obligation was for the men to report every day to the *Carabinieri* station for *appello*, the daily roll call. This regime was called *confino libero* – free confinement. And we actually were free, although we were not allowed to leave except in special cases and with special permission, say to see a dentist, because there was not one in San Vincenzo or for specialist medical attention. In other cases individuals could even go as far as Turin escorted by the group leader, who was elected from among our ranks. The only Jews being sheltered here were from Yugoslavia, less than a hundred of us. We stayed there from December 1941 to February 1943.

Those who had no money were able to work and earn something because the Italians were happy to hire us for odd jobs. The locals behaved very decently towards us. Even the sergeant in charge of the *Carabinieri*, the local police chief who we saw every day at roll call was very kind. He gave the impression of being very strict but in fact he was very decent. There was one episode which I shall probably never forget. One day after the roll call, the police chief read aloud to us a

letter from his son who was at the eastern front. His son wrote to him about the harsh conditions there and his father wept in front of all of us. We were the only people with whom he could find some release for his paternal feelings. His son was in an Italian military unit at the Russian front. Many years later I again passed through San Vincenzo. We visited our acquaintances from that time and they were very happy to see us again.

FROM SAN VINCENZO TO FERRAMONTI

We were confused in February, 1943, when they suddenly called us in and ordered us to get ready to leave San Vincenzo immediately, that they would take us somewhere else. We had no idea what it was all about. They put us on a train, again in chains, and took us from the far north of Italy to the far south, to the Ferramonti camp in Calabria.

Part of the Ferramonti camp

This was a large camp which could accommodate about two thousand inmates. It was not until just before we left San Vincenzo that we discovered the reason for this move. Turin was being heavily bombed by the Allied air forces and their idea was to scatter the city population, to evacuate families so that they would not be bombed. It was natural to send them to places where there were hotels, villas and other facilities available to accommodate the families. We confinees could hardly object to the decision to move us to make way for their own citizens.

In fact it was a stroke of good luck for us because by February 1943 we were already in the south, in a camp from which we were to be liberated in September of the same year. Had we remained longer in the north we would have found ourselves under the German occupation of northern Italy. Some Jews managed to flee from the region into Switzerland, but many died in the attempt.

The Ferramonti camp was set up in 1940 to accommodate Jewish refugees fleeing from those parts of Europe under German occupation. These were Jews from Czechoslovakia, Austria, Hungary and Poland. They must have also included a few German Jews who somehow managed to reach Italy.

During my time in the camp its structure changed considerably. At first it was a purely Jewish camp in which large numbers of Belgrade Jews found shelter. Most of these had fled Albania or had taken shelter on the Montenegrin coast. They had then been assembled in the Kavaja camp in Albania and from there moved across to Ferramonti. During my time there, at the beginning of 1943, there were other national groups as well as Jews. There was a small but solid group of Greeks who had come from the internment camps in Greece. They included a Greek bishop and Evangelos Averoff-Tossizza, a future defence minister of Greece. There were also Chinese and other nationalities. Then there was a group of Slovenes and later a large group of Dalmatians. Apart from those interned for political reasons or for joining Partisan units in the fighting in Yugoslavia, there were also people who had been interned in Italy for their Partisan sympathies.

The camp regime was very relaxed. The accommodation was tolerable: there were barracks for single people and others for families, with small rooms or barracks partitioned off with blankets. The main thing was that the families stayed together. There was a permanent obligation to attend roll call at set hours in the morning and evening and also snap roll calls throughout the day. Inmates were free to move around the camp. There was also a shop with basic food items. Certain staples such as oil and beans could also be bought from members of the Fascist militia who were in charge of camp security. These were usually farmers from nearby villages who had been mobilised into the police and they sold other things as well.

The camp had its own church, a synagogue and even a choir, organised by Lav Mirski, a conductor from Osijek who, after the war, was the founding director and manager of the Osijek Opera. Jews and

Slovenians made up the choir which rehearsed choral music and, on Sundays, sang in the church.

Football matches and other sporting competitions were organised in the camp. There was a school, which ensured that children didn't lose too much education. There were various courses offered and we, as part of the Yugoslav section, together with the Slovenians and Dalmatians, had an organised cultural and political life. We had an organisation which held regular literary meetings. This was one of the political activities designed to support the Partisan struggle in Yugoslavia. There were also well-organised political activities led by the Communist Party, with a number of old Communists from Yugoslavia, mainly Dalmatians and Slovenians as well as Jews. This organisation tried continually to maintain the spirit of struggle against Fascism. This was our basic goal. We had no idea how things would develop but we were always prepared for an opportunity to continue the struggle against Fascism by taking up arms on Yugoslav soil.

We were lucky that the camp was promptly liberated after the landing of the Allied forces in Sicily in southern Italy. However, in the meantime, there was a tragic event when a British plane flew above the camp and we all ran out to greet it. The aircraft suddenly strafed us with machine-gun fire and several internees were killed. The crew had obviously taken us to be an Italian military camp. This was just prior to the liberation.

When the Allies arrived, the English in fact, the camp was liberated and we had complete freedom of movement. The English endeavoured to give the liberated camp inmates the most comfortable life possible. They improved the food, clothing and other essentials, with the intention that the inmates should remain in the camp while they regained their strength and got back on their feet. In this way they would be in a better state to await the liberation of their own countries. However our organisation in the camp had other plans and we prepared to join the Partisans. We didn't know what was going on at Bari, the Italian port on the Adriatic facing the Yugoslav coast, but we planned to somehow reach the city. We thought that from Bari we would be able to cross the Adriatic into Yugoslavia and join the struggle. We travelled to Bari in a number of separate groups. We had support in this from the Italian anti-Fascists whom we met in the nearby town of Cosenza. They helped us, without the knowledge or agree-

ment of the British, to have special coaches in trains leaving for Bari. Thus we were able to take a large number of people to that city.

When we arrived in Bari we discovered that a Partisan mission had already come by boat from the liberated part of the Yugoslav coast to the liberated part of the Italian coast. This was a mission sent by the Supreme Headquarters of the Yugoslav Partisan army to make contact with the Allies. Those first contacts, despite some initial difficulties, bore fruit: there were special camps set up near Bari as collection points for all the Yugoslavs arriving there. They were coming from all directions, from camps, from prisons (some of the inmates had been sentenced to a hundred and one years), from German-occupied Italian territory and from the front in the south of the country. This is where the First Overseas Brigade of the Partisan army was established, with battalions formed on national lines.

JEWISH PLATOON

In order to demonstrate the desire of people of various Yugoslav nationalities to join the struggle in their homeland, a brigade was formed with six battalions, two Montenegrin, two Dalmatian and two Slovenian. Within a Montenegrin company in one of the Montenegrin battalions, a Jewish platoon was formed. I'm not sure to what extent this was done on the demand of the Jews themselves. At the time I understood it to be the intention of the brigade command to make it known that there was a Jewish platoon, that there were also Jews from that territory who wanted to go into occupied Yugoslavia and fight. There were 22 of us. I later tried to reconstruct a list of the men. I know that it may be incomplete, but it does exist. The platoon commander was David Štern of Prijedor. He was the only one of us who had served in the army before the war. I also remember Dr Isidor Alkalaj of Sarajevo, an orthopaedic surgeon who lived in Israel after the war. Also from Sarajevo was Mirko Haler. Then there was Šlomo Levi an engineer who, I think, came from Bitola and lived in Belgrade after the war. I seem to recall that he had lost an arm in the war and that for a time he was a member of the Jewish Community in Belgrade. He has since died. According to the reconstruction we made, a number of platoon members lost their lives, while we pre-

sume that some are still alive in Israel. There are probably also several who went to America.

There were two young Jewish men from Pisa in the ranks of the platoon. They had got to know some of our people in Bari and, having managed to cross the German-occupied territory of Italy, they were not prepared, as Italians, to stay in the south and wait for the liberation of the entire country. Instead they joined us in order to fight with us against Fascism in Yugoslavia. One of them, Claudio Paggi was killed in the Bosnian mountains fighting beside us as a Partisan. The other, Franco Lucato, had a different fate. He was taken prisoner by the Germans but, as an Italian, fared fairly well. He was in various camps and even survived Bergen-Belsen I believe. He returned to Italy and was later in Argentina and finally in Israel. Today he lives in Pisa, a retired physician.

There's a detail of our time on Korčula which is worth mentioning. I had been appointed assistant commissar of one of the Slovenian battalions, at their request. Shortly after this the entire brigade was moved from Korčula to Hvar and then to Vis, from one Dalmatian island to another and, eventually, from Vis, the brigade was transferred to the Yugoslav mainland one night around New Year, 1944. Our brigade was ordered to proceed to Drvar, where the Supreme Headquarters of the National Liberation Army was situated. It took a long time to travel from the coast to Drvar but we had only one serious clash with the enemy as we crossed the Una railway line. The territory

Common room for single men in one of the barracks of the Feramonti camp

had already been largely liberated but, as we crossed the line we noted that on one side the line was secured and guarded for the Germans by the Ustashas, the Croatian collaborators, while the other side was guarded by the Serbian collaborators, the Chetniks. When we arrived in Drvar they decided the entire First Overseas Brigade should be disbanded. We were assigned to other units which already had fighting experience. A large number of men were transferred to the First Proletarian Brigade. I was assigned to the technical platoon and remained there for some time until I was sent as a delegate to the artillery squadron of the First Proletarian Division. I remained there, even when the squadron was moving eastwards to Serbia. In the summer of 1944 I was so exhausted that I kept losing consciousness and so was sent to hospital for treatment.

After the war finished I spent some time in uniform as an officer in our military mission in Trieste, in Zone A. From there I was later assigned to the diplomatic service where I spent my entire career. I retired as an ambassador with the rank of reserve lieutenant-colonel.

Tirca GINZBERG

WARTIME ADOLESCENCE

Tirca Ginzberg, née Kraus, was born in Zagreb on June 4, 1924, to Artur and Fanika Kraus. She had two sisters, Tonka and Lea. She completed her primary and secondary education in Gradačac in Bosnia, where she lived with her family until the war. She completed commercial academy in Osijek immediately before the war.

She lives today in Belgrade. From her marriage to Dr Ervin Ginzberg, a pulmonary surgeon at Belgrade's Military Medical Academy she has a son, Igor who is an engineer and a daughter, Tamara, a biologist. She also has three grandchildren.

In 1938 or 1939 I went to Osijek to enrol in commercial academy. There I lived with the Jewish family of the dentist, Dr Rac, who took care of me as if I were their own.

There were a number of Jewish girls in my school. I became friendly with Lilika Gerek in Osijek and was welcomed by her parents. She was an only child. When I was not at school I slept at her house at least once a week. We celebrated all the holidays together. Her parents, who never allowed her to leave the house, did let her come to stay with me at Gradačac. They were wealthy people with two hotels in Osijek.

Gradačac had no electricity and we were the first to have a battery radio. Everyone would come to our house to listen to the news. We heard the news about what Hitler was doing. My aunt, my mother's elder sister, left Germany and came to Zagreb before emigrating to Israel.

I remember people from Jewish families saying "Nothing can happen to us. We're honest people. We earn an honest living. No one in Gradačac was wealthy; most of them were small shopkeepers. The only intellectual among them was my father, the pharmacist.

The Gereks were Hungarian Jews and I heard them speak about the hatred of Jews, but we girls were busy with other things. We wanted to look attractive, to be noticed when we went out. I don't remember being afraid and I never thought anything could happen to me or my parents, although I knew that my aunt who left Germany had emigrated because of her fear of Hitler.

About that time a group of Jews had come to Brčko. I think they were from Austria. Later, they all perished. A collection was taken up for them and I know that my father made a contribution. I don't know whether it was of any use, but I know that donations were collected.

I stayed at school in Osijek until 1941. I didn't want to return home so my father sent me a telegram, telling me to drop everything and come home immediately.

I returned to Gradačac at the very last minute. My father thought we would be safer in a small place than in a large town like Osijek, where the majority of people were Croats and their support for the Ustashas was already obvious.

In mid-April, 1941, the Germans entered Gradačac. The majority of the population welcomed them but the Jewish families were in despair. They knew what was in store for them. We had a house with a garden and one large group of Germans came directly to us. They made themselves at home in our house. I don't know whether they were sent by the municipality or by someone else. In any case they were billeted wherever there was plenty of room and in the better-looking houses. They occupied the entire house, leaving us a single room. They were extremely arrogant. I remember them sitting in our garden, opening champagne and drinking it. Even though it wasn't warm they undressed and took showers. There was no running water and they had to bring it in. They were happy and cheerful. They had

no idea that we were Jews but, after realising to their surprise that my parents spoke good German, they became a little suspicious.

My school friend, Mirko Baksa, was a year older than me. Later he became a prominent Ustasha, but in those days he was at school in Osijek. During the vacations we always travelled home and back to school together. One day he told me out of the blue "From today on I don't want you to speak to me. We don't know each other. I'm in the Ustasha organisation." I don't know whether he had been an Ustasha before that. All I know is that the Partisans killed him after the war.

Gradačac had a town crier. He would go around with a drum and shout out announcements. One day he read an order restricting the hours in which Jews could move around the town, ordering them to draw the curtains on their windows and wear yellow armbands. We were also forbidden from walking in some streets. I had to put the yellow armband on my sleeve. We made these ourselves. I remember that my sister Tonka had already returned from Zagreb. She wore a yellow dress and tied the armband over it. She said that if she survived the war she would never wear yellow again. I remember meeting one of my teachers in the town. He told me he was very sorry that I had to wear this sign. He was a Croat.

The district surgeon in Gradačac was Dr Bravo, a Muslim married to a Czech. I went to sleep in his house because my parents were very concerned about me. My sister, however, was very brave and stayed at home.

My father continued working until 1942, when another district commissioner came from Brčko. His name was Montani and he was a notorious Ustasha. He summoned my father to his office in the district administration offices, up on a hill in the town. When my father climbed up there, Montani said to him "Listen, you're a Jew and you're in a position to make the wrong drugs and poison us all. If you do anything like that we'll kill your entire family".

Then a Muslim who had served time in prison in Zenica for killing a man before the war came to my father's pharmacy. He had been appointed to supervise my father's work. My father had special lamps in order to see better when he was working. The Muslim asked for these lamps and furniture to fit out the Ustasha house. "I will give you anything, but these lamps are my life. I can't see without them," my father said.

To this day I remember the man leaving the house and saying "Tell your father that we will kill you all if he doesn't take those lamps down." I started crying.

"Father, what does it matter! Give him the lamps. Why should we all die for them." Of course my father gave him everything he demanded.

Then one day a man called Taslidžić came. He owned a tavern in Gradačac. There was no railway line to Gradačac and people came by bus from Modriča. It was Friday, market day, and the pharmacy was full of people. The farmers came in once a week for their purchases. My mother was preparing a big lunch. There was a chicken in the oven. Without warning this Taslidžić came and said. "Get out of here right now. I've arrived on the bus with a new pharmacist who will replace you." The new pharmacist was a *Volksdeutscher* whose name was Vajsokr or something like that.

We left everything, even the chicken in the oven and all our belongings; we only picked up our coats and left. I remember as though it were yesterday the dark blue coat which had been made for me in Osijek. We left on foot and crossed the part of the town known as Gypsy Town. We used to have Gypsies working for us and Gypsy women did our laundry. Old Rašida said "The Krauses are *sadaka*," or "upright" as we would say.

We arrived in a village called Vida and spent the night there with some Muslims. The next day we moved on and came to Trebava. It was autumn. In Trebava, the Serbian Orthodox priest, Father Savo, was waiting for us and welcomed us warmly. He put us up with the local mayor. This was a godsend for us, a warm house. At that time there were Chetniks in Trebava who were fighting the Germans. These were Bosnian Chetniks who were well-disposed to Jews.

My mother and father had a bed while we slept on corn husks. I remember my parents constantly complaining about their bed. My sister and I, being young, laughed at them. We had barely saved our lives and they were worrying about their bed. We stayed in Trebava for eleven months. Father Savo and his wife really loved us, feeding us because we had no work.

I met my husband, Ervin, in Gradačac in 1941. He had come from Osijek as part of a campaign to wipe out the syphilis endemic in the area. A group of Jewish physicians were working on this. In 1941, Ervin brought me a letter from my friend in Osijek. She had told him

that there was a Jewish family in Gradačac who would help him to find accommodation and that he would also find her best friend there.

Tirca's mother Fanika and father Arthur with her younger sister Tonka and elder sister Lea, in about 1921

So, one day, Ervin appeared together with a Dr Špicer. The latter was an elderly gynaecologist who was also working on the anti-syphilis campaign. "Where is Tirca?" Ervin asked.

I was wearing a white coat at the time because I was helping my father. "I'm Tirca," I replied.

"We have a letter for you from your friend," he said. I was very pleased about this and then Dr Špicer added:

"And this is your future husband."

My father, who was very patriarchal and very taciturn said "All I need are Jews like this to make my position even more difficult." But that's how it began.

Ervin came every day. The day we left he arrived to visit us and saw that people were taking things out of our house. He then heard that we had fled. He managed to salvage some flour. A few days later Ervin appeared in Trebava on a horse, bringing us flour. He had arrived at night.

In Trebava they gave us a small patch of earth. We planted onions and parsley and made a little vegetable garden. All this time we were living in the mayor's house and the priest's wife would always bring us something.

In 1943 the Partisans arrived and captured Trebava. They had come from Gradačac. There was an officer with them who asked us what we were doing there. He introduced himself as Petko Kamhi, a Jew from Sarajevo. We told him the way we were living and he said that we must not remain there because the Chetniks would come from Serbia and kill us. Instead, he said, we should leave with him and join the Partisans. So, in September of that year, we joined the Partisans. As far as I know, Father Savo was killed by the Partisans just before the end of the war. He had allowed the Germans to march through his parish and for this he was prosecuted as a war criminal. He had been a very good man and when I said later that he had saved our lives I was told that I was too young to get mixed up in such things.

The Partisans occupied Gradačac so we too returned home. There I married Ervin, in the first Partisan marriage in Gradačac. Dr Bravo put my parents up in his house.

When we were about to get married, Ervin and I went to the local council. There I met some people I had known at primary school and asked them if they would be witnesses to my marriage. Thus I received my marriage certificate, which I have to this day. When I returned to my parents they began weeping. They asked me to promise them I would get married in the synagogue after the war. It was very important to them.

We stayed in Gradačac for a few days and then all joined the Partisans.

I joined a Muslim brigade with the 17th Division. This brigade was formed in Gradačac. Nijaz Dizadarević, who was a very good speaker, was the youth leader. After he held a meeting, young people joined the Partisans in droves.

While I was in Trebava, Ervin had brought his mother and brother to Gradačac. His father had died in 1942. In Gradačac he rented a small cottage for his family. His mother, although quite young, was seriously ill with gout and was bedridden. Ervin worked and his brother cooked, washed and took care of their mother. When we joined the Partisans, Ervin found accommodation for his mother in the Muslim village of Srebrenik. With him was my aunt, Roza Haker, my mother's sister.

Ervin's brother Vlado, who was barely two years younger than him, also joined the Partisans. But before the Partisans came to Gradačac, while it was still held by the Ustashas, Vlado was arrested. Ervin then went to the district office and said that his brother was protected under an agreement covering the families of physicians engaged in the campaign against syphilis. They told him that a brother was not regarded as close family. Ervin fought like a lion for his brother and eventually went to Osijek. There, in the Ustasha police, he found an Ustasha who had been his friend at school. He was extremely surprised to see Ervin, who told him "You have to help me." Ervin refused to leave until the Ustasha gave him a letter for the Gradačac district asking for Vlado to be released. So in this way Ervin managed to get his brother out of prison. At the same time that Vlado was arrested, all the Jews, all six families in Gradačac, were detained.

Our unit marched towards Majevica. I came down with typhus and then pneumonia. They left me in the Partisan hospital, where I recovered from both. Meanwhile, Ervin had gone on with his unit. We were all attached to the hospital as a family. My father helped as a pharmacist, my sister taught women from the Antifascist Women's Front to read and write and I did the cooking.

The Seventh Offensive was under way. We were living in dugouts on Mt Majevica. These were holes dug in the earth and covered with branches, soil and leaves, so that they looked like the floor of the forest. The sick lay in these dugouts. I was there with my mother and my sister Tonka. The Handžar Division was operating in this area and

slaughtered whoever they found. They discovered us, too. Once we heard footsteps on the roof of the dugout and shouts of "*Los! Los!*" They demanded we come out. All the doctors and nurses came out I remember Dr Dajč, an orthopaedic surgeon from Zagreb, and Dr Han. Dr Dajč had prescribed insoles for me when I was a child. They were also working on the anti-syphilis campaign.

This is when our troubles began. They marched us direct to Bijeljina where there was an assembly camp. Here they mistreated Dr Dajč and his son. Dr Dajč was rather a small man and they gave them sacks to carry which were too heavy for them. They then threw water over them. They fell, unable to take the strain. Then we went to Brčko. The bedridden patients stayed behind on Majevica. I don't know what happened to them. The Germans came to Brčko and began interrogating us. They lined us up and immediately demanded to be told who the Jews were, to separate them. Suddenly a Muslim who had known my mother stepped out. "She is a Jew," he said, "She is the wife of the pharmacist Kraus, from Gradačac."

I didn't know this man, nor have I ever seen him again.

And then the singling out began. We were in barracks, or perhaps it was a stable. Mostly we were on the floor. Among us was Olga Lekić, a Partisan and a pre-war Communist. She was very strict and threatened everyone in the barracks: "The Partisans are going to win this war and anyone denouncing Tirca as a Jew is going to be in deep trouble." No one betrayed me.

One morning a truck came to collect those of us who had been identified as Jews. My mother managed to be very brave. Someone had given her a piece of bread and she said to a man "Take this to that girl over there." When she climbed into the truck she didn't look back, she didn't want to betray me. My sister Tonka, was with me; she had also not been identified as a Jew.

After some time the truck returned, empty, with only their belongings. We heard that they undressed them and... I don't know the details. But I saw my mother's dress among the things they brought back. Later I learned that this group was murdered by the Ustashas and members of the Handžar Division. I remember the truck and them being taken away, and the truck returning with their personal belongings. And I remember Olga saying "Don't you dare take any of those things."

In Brčko they loaded us into cattle wagons. We were to be sent to a labour camp in Germany. Our group consisted of able-bodied men and women. This was the beginning of 1944. The trucks into which we were loaded had no windows. We passed through Osijek and came to Belgrade. There they put us into the Milišić brickworks in Zvezdara. Milišić was probably the owner of the brickworks. We were in the open and my feet were hurting terribly. We were poorly clothed and didn't even have socks. There was an Italian doctor, himself a prisoner. He examined us and assessed our ability to work. He was free to move around and could even go into the city. He was a wonderful person. He gave me Ichtiol ointment, the black one, and paper bandages.

Olga Lekić was with me all this time. She was a passionate smoker. She told me "You have to ask the doctor for cigarettes". I told her there was no way I could do that. Then she told me it was a Party order and that because I was now a Communist Youth member I had to obey her. She forced me to go and ask the doctor for cigarettes. "He likes you," she explained, "and you must take advantage of that." So I went to the doctor and begged him for cigarettes. He actually brought me some. Olga was overjoyed.

The Italian doctor spoke German and we were able to chat a little. Then, gradually, he began to flirt with me. I told him that I was married, that my husband was a doctor and that he had studied for a semester in Bologna. The doctor even gave me sick leave so that I didn't have to work. We worked at Kalemegdan, where they were building some kind of wall. I stayed at the brickworks, in bed.

One day Olga told me that I had to give the doctor a letter. I protested that I could not do this, but Olga insisted and told me that it was not any ordinary letter. I had no idea what it contained. In fact she had written to the Party organisation in Belgrade and suddenly parcels began arriving for us. I had taken Olga's letter and handed it to the doctor and he had sent it on. I don't think he had any idea that it was a Communist letter.

So food parcels began to arrive. One day Olga ordered me to tell the doctor that she had tuberculosis and must be sent for X-rays. These were done in Zemun, which was then in another state. Again I protested and asked how I could tell him she was sick when she looked the picture of health. She was one of those strong Montenegrin women. "He'll do anything for you," she replied.

I went to the doctor who told me that he had listened to her chest with a stethoscope but had not found anything wrong with her lungs. Nonetheless he sent her to the hospital in Zemun. There, in the hospital, the doctor said that she had no tuberculosis and that she was in the best of health. Then he sent her back, but not to our barracks. There were a number of barracks in the camp and there was an epidemic in ours, so she was sent to another where the people were going out to work. In any case she wanted to work.

One day as we passed each other she said "Nada," – this was what they called me – "I'm off. You won't see me here again. What do you want me to tell Ervin? Do you have a message for him?"

That day a group of Communist Partisans were waiting for Olga under the Kalemegdan ramparts. She jumped down and broke both her legs, but her comrades picked her up and took her to a place where her fractures mended. Then she went to the Partisans again, to our old unit, the 17th Division. There she found my husband and told him that I was alive.

They were celebrating the New Year and asked Ervin to dinner in the headquarters. Then Branko Kađa Petrović said to him: "Doctor, you have to buy us a drink. Your wife is alive!"

"How do you know?" asked Ervin.

"Well, there are brave women who are taken prisoner and jump to freedom so they can bring good news. Your wife is fine." And that's how Ervin discovered that I was still alive.

The Milišić brickworks were on the outskirts of Belgrade, in Zvezdara. We were fenced in with barbed wire and guarded by the Germans. In the camp itself, the men and women were segregated. The food was bad, but we were not harassed. This was a labour camp, not a camp for Jews. The prisoners weren't punished for Olga's escape, they only threatened reprisals if it should happen again.

One day they took us to the main railway station and put us on a train. We passed Auschwitz, seeing it in the distance. By that time everyone knew that this was were Jews were sent. Then we arrived at an *Arbeitslager* at Welten bei Berlin, near Berlin. This is where the labour camp was. We worked in two shifts, twelve hours in the day and twelve hours at night.

It was a huge factory and very cold inside. We slept in barracks. I think there were about 25 of us in each barracks. We slept in tiered beds on straw mats.

The food was dreadful. We were given 800 grams of bread for a whole week, but this bread was no bread at all. There was more sawdust than flour in it. We also got some kind of soup. Meat was nowhere to be seen, although there was something floating in the soup. Once a week we were given a piece of margarine. No one stole food, although some people ate everything immediately because they were starving. I was able to restrain myself, but there was a young girl from Tuzla, the youngest in our group, only seventeen years old. She would always ask me "Look, you've got bread. Give me some!" She couldn't restrain herself and always ate everything at once.

The workers in the camp were mostly from Ukraine, but there were also some from Poland. Once we were carpet bombed. It was terrible, but we had bunkers where we could shelter.

I often fell asleep at work during the night shift. I remember we had an overseer. He wasn't a bad man but we had a quota to fill. I worked on a lathe. We always made the same thing. Later we found out that we were making parts of weapons. The machine kept working and we kept turning and pushing something through it.

All this time I was wearing wooden clogs, I had sores on my feet from them; I had no socks and it was very cold. They had given us blankets, but they weren't made of wool. We only had the clothes we stood up in. The camp was guarded by Germans, ordinary local people. The place we were in, Welten bei Berlin, was not bombed. We only heard the explosions from bombing targets nearby.

I worked in the factory for about eleven months. Then the Russians came and brought bread and flour. They took great care of us, making sure that we had food and freedom of movement. The works director and the camp commander vanished before the Russians arrived and we never saw them again. I don't know whether the Russians killed them or whether they simply fled. The Russians harassed the girls a lot, but they held out extremely well. Some of the girls wanted to take some kind of revenge for being in the camp. They began to steal the Germans' belongings, things like German porcelain. They tried to persuade me to take something but I said I didn't want anything. I remember that these former camp inmates once found some Rosenthal plates and, instead of washing them after they used them, they threw them away. I asked them how they could do that and they said "What, do you feel sorry for the Germans?" I tried to explain that I wasn't sorry for the Germans but that I couldn't watch them break

things. They replied that I didn't know how to take revenge for what I had been through.

Then a very pleasant-looking man appeared. I think he was a Pole, in the Russian Army. I don't remember why I approached him, but I do remember I noticed his unusual features. He looked Jewish to me. He told me he was a journalist and I asked him if they had any contact with the Yugoslav Army. "We're in constant contact," he said. What kind of contact this was I don't know, but he told me that his name was Arthur Schwarzenwelt. I was surprised and asked him if he was Jewish. He told me that he was and then I told him that I was also Jewish. He asked me who I had in Yugoslavia and offered to send a message there. I told him that I had a husband, an army doctor, but that I wasn't sure whether he was still alive. He even gave me some money, Polish money I think, and said that I should have something on me in case I needed it. I never used it.

I didn't much think about his promise to get in touch with Ervin. Ervin had heard from Olga that I was alive, but that had been a long time ago. This time he was with his unit in Slovenia and received my message there, in Russian, that I was alive and well, where I was and that I would soon return home.

On our way back to Yugoslavia we stopped in Poland because there was no transport. We arrived there by train, but I don't even know the name of the city. There was chaos everywhere.

In this place where we were put up we cooked and cleaned. The army also ate there. We stayed in Poland for four months in the summer of 1945.

We arrived in Yugoslavia, in Subotica. There we were met by Yugoslav soldiers. They thought we had volunteered to go and work for the Germans and we had no way of proving that we were returning from forced labour. They kept ordering us around, behaving as though they were the occupying army.

Then a major arrived and said he was in the 17th Division. Somehow I managed to make contact with him and told him that my husband was the commander of MedSanBat, which is what we called the medical and sanitation battalion in the Partisans. I reiterated that we had not volunteered but had been taken prisoner. Eventually they let us go.

There was a woman named Mira, from Vrbas. I told her how worried I was: "Where should I go? Who will I find?" She invited me to

spend a few days with her in Vrbas. She told me that her father was a butcher and promised I would get a bath there. So I set off with Mira to Vrbas. There was no running water, but they filled a tub for us to take a bath. Her people were Serbs. While I was there, Mira's brother returned from Dachau. He weighed 35 kilograms. After three days I decided to be on my way. "I can't stay any longer. I'll get to Gradačac somehow," I told them.

From Vrbas I returned to Subotica. At the railway station, on the platform, I found a neighbour from Gradačac, a Muslim businessman. I ran to him and hugged him. We'd never been close but he was the first person I'd seen from my town. Then he told me, without being unkind, that both my mother and my sister were dead. I had known about my mother, but not about my sister.

Somehow I reached Gradačac. Somehow I managed to get there. I have no idea how long it took me, but I changed trains again and again. When I arrived in Gradačac I found my father and another local Jew, Moric Kabiljo, who had just returned from a prisoner of war camp.

My father told me that Ervin had been in contact from Bled, where his unit was. He was commander of a hospital. Ervin wanted me to go straight there, I think he sent me a telegram, but my father wouldn't hear of it. "You're not going to leave me now? I'm all alone!"

So I stayed a few days with my father and then set off to Bled. Ervin really couldn't wait any longer.

Later I learned how my sister was killed. The last time I saw her was at Majevica. I had stayed with the hospital while she went on. She was later taken prisoner by the Chetniks and immediately executed. My other sister, Lea, who had been in Spain, was ordered by the party to stay in Paris. She had spent the whole war under a false name with no legal status. She returned to Yugoslavia in 1945.

After a short stay in Bled, I returned to Gradačac. By now I was pregnant. Then my father fell ill. So, for a while, I shuffled between Bled and Gradačac but during most of my pregnancy I stayed in Gradačac, that was where I had the best conditions. Our nanny, who had looked after me as a child had also returned. We had our own house.

My father's pharmacy was returned to him and he began to work again. We had food on the table, and I had my own bed. I assisted my father in his work. During this time, Ervin was still in Bled. Then he

had the chance to specialise in plastic surgery in Belgrade. He spent a few months there and then chose to do surgery. He began to specialise as a surgeon at the Surgical Clinic of the Military Medical Academy in Belgrade, and I moved to the city just before I was due to give birth. Here, in September 1946, our twins, Igor and Tamara were born. Apart from a few years in Skopje, we remained in Belgrade from then on. Ervin died on July 7, 1990.

Lidija VASOVIĆ

WITH THE PARTISANS IN SOUTH SERBIA

Lidija Vasović was born on August 14, 1925, in Belgrade. Her father was Majer Levi, born April 14, 1893, in Odessa, and her mother Pesija Filipina Levi, née Königfest, born September 14, 1895, in Simferopol (Russia), although according to her birth certificate both were born in Istanbul. They met and married in Istanbul and subsequently lived there. Lidija had a brother, Jakov, born July 3, 1923, in Vienna.

Her father and brother Jakov were killed by the Germans in Leskovac in 1942. According to information from the Red Cross, her mother was shot on August 11, 1942, in Jajinci, although some eyewitnesses who were with her in Banjica said that she died as the result of a beating.

After the war, Lidija attended secondary school and enrolled at university, but abandoned her studies because of poor health. She worked in the Serbian Ministry of Internal Affairs, then in the Federal Ministry of Internal Affairs until she retired. Her husband, Dragoljub Vasović, died in 1991. She has two daughters, Jelena Vasovič-Vujadinović, who was a television journalist in Yugoslavia and now lives with her two children in Israel. Her second daughter, Mirjana, is a doctor of psychology, lectures part-time at the Belgrade University Faculty of Political Sciences and has one daughter.

My family had French citizenship. We acquired this through various circumstances: my father, as a Red Army courier in Odessa, had to flee the White Guards, he managed, at the last minute to board a French ship which took him to France and he settled there.

My father and mother met in Istanbul and married there. My mother's father was a carpet merchant in Simferopol where he guaranteed a loan for a friend. However his friend failed to return the money to the bank and, as a result, my grandfather's business collapsed. Friends of his in Turkey who were also in the carpet business helped him out and so he came to Istanbul. My mother and father didn't stay long in Istanbul, but sought a better life in several other countries: Greece, Bulgaria and Romania. It was during their stay in Romania that something happened to bring my family to Yugoslavia.

Persa Levi, Lidija's mother, killed in Banjica in 1942

FATHER'S GOLDEN HANDS

My father was a goldsmith and, after arriving in Romania, he found work with the royal jeweller in Bucharest. When Romania's Princess Marie was to marry Yugoslavia's King Aleksandar, members of the Romanian court commissioned the court jeweller to make a reticule of gold and platinum thread, decorated with precious stones as their personal gift to their princess, the future Yugoslav queen. The jeweller entrusted my father, his best craftsman, with the job and everyone was delighted with the handbag my father made. The court jeweller was decorated and given other benefits and my father was presented with a large sum of money, enough for him to move to Yugoslavia. It's worth a passing mention that, many years later, a gentleman from the Yugoslav court visited our shop and, in conversation with my mother, told her that the queen was still happily carrying this bag.

My father spent some time in Belgrade as a representative for several foreign companies dealing in watches and spare parts for watches and jewellery, before setting up shop as a wholesale jeweller and watchmaker in

Terazije. He had a reputation as an honest and capable businessman and was widely respected. To this day the descendants of the businessmen of that period tell me that they have heard of my father.

Šifra JIM	40878
Prezime	Levi
Ime	Pesha - Persa
Datum rođenja	17 9 1895
Mesto rođenja	Sinferopolj
Ime majke	Vera r. Maranov
Ime oca	Vladimir
Ime supružnika	Majer
Devojačko prezime	Kenigfest
Devojačko prezime supružnika	
Zanimanje	domaćica
Mesto boravka PRE rata	Beograd
Mesto boravka za VREME rata	Beograd
Okolnosti smrti	Streljana 11.8.1942. na Banjici, Beograd.

Data on Lidija's mother in a record from the Jewish Historical Museum of Jewish victims of Fascism

My elder brother Jakov was born in Vienna where wealthy relatives of my mother lived at that time. After my parents' first child died, these relatives invited my mother to come to Vienna so that she would have assistance if any unforeseen complications arose during the birth of her second child.

In Belgrade, my brother and I attended the German school because our parents wanted us to learn the language well. We both passed the eighth grade examinations. We were members of the Jewish youth organisation Akiba, of which I treasure wonderful memories.

As a child, before the war, I had never noticed any signs of anti-Semitism. Nor did the pupils in the German school express any hostility towards me and my brother, despite the fact that we were Jews. The son of the German consul, Von Heeren, was in my class and made no distinction between us and the other children.

HOMELESS ON THE FIRST DAY OF BOMBING

We lived in Belgrade, in Skadarska Street until April 6, 1941. Our apartment building was gutted by fire after being struck by an incendiary bomb on the first day Belgrade was bombed. Our Austrian friend Mrs Galian took us in. As well as being compassionate in this difficult time for us, she wanted to repay my parents for their assistance and

understanding when her husband, the banker Galian, committed suicide after going bankrupt. They were left homeless with no one to help them, so my parents took her and her daughter into our home until they found a solution for themselves. We stayed with this family until my father procured false documents.

The Germans issued an order in 1941 for us all to report to the police at Tašmajdan. My father, mother and brother were given yellow armbands, but as I was not yet sixteen, I didn't have to wear one[2].They immediately confiscated the shop. I remember the posters in which they constantly published threats for disobedience or for ignoring the orders of the Germans and the Nedić Government. My father and brother had to go every day to do forced labour and I had to leave school, although the headmaster had begged the Germans to let me finish the year because I was the best pupil in the school. Eventually everyone passed the year except me.

My father, through the Italian Embassy, managed to procure passports in false names.

In the summer of 1941 we fled Belgrade, hoping to go via Italy to America, where we had some relatives. However we were sent back from the Yugoslav-Bulgaria border because we did not have Bulgarian visas. We had wanted to go through Struga, which then belonged to Bulgaria, to reach Italy. We stayed in the town of Lebane, near Leskovac, and waited for our friends to send us Bulgarian visas. Here we hid for four months under false names. My father became Pavle Savić, my mother Persa, my brother Jovan and I was Vidosava Savić.

ORPHANED

While we were waiting, the Partisans liberated Lebane and my whole family joined the National Liberation Movement in November, 1941. My father was in the headquarters of the Jablanica Partisan detachment. He translated the Radio Moscow news from Russian and did various other jobs. My brother was with the fighting men. When the Germans attacked Lebane with tanks, we retreated with the Partisans. Immediately after our withdrawal, my mother began working in

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2 Others of the same age claim that, although they were younger than sixteen, they had to wear the yellow armband. However they did not have to go to forced labour until they turned sixteen.

the Partisan hospital, taking care of the wounded and the typhus patients. She had survived typhus herself and so was immune. I listened to the news and transcribed and copied it, until the beginning of the offensive by the Germans, the followers of Ljotić and the Chetniks. Then I was mobilised into the Pusta Reka detachment and took

Camp building at Crveni Krst in Niš (above) and part of the interior, with guard tower (below)

part in the fighting. My father and brother went with a group of Partisans to a nearby village where they were taken prisoner by the Chetniks, who handed them over to the Germans. In Lebane, one of my

father's former clients recognised him and denounced him to the Germans as a Jew. My brother and father were executed in February, 1942. Eyewitnesses said that the Germans first shot my brother, forcing his father to watch the execution, although our father was weeping and begging them to kill him first.

My mother and I withdrew with the Partisans. During skirmishes near the village of Magaš, near Leskovac, in 1942, I was captured as I returned to pull my wounded platoon commander out of the field. I managed to pull him out and hide him in some bushes, but was caught. They took me to the assembly camp at Leskovac, where I remained until July 3, 1942. In the camp I was known as Vidosava Savić. My mother was also caught and brought to the camp soon after me. They knew she was Jewish, but they didn't know she was my mother because all the camp inmates called her Mama. From there she was sent to a camp at Niš, then to Banjica in Belgrade where, as I later discovered, she died from the beatings she received. I would like to mention that, while imprisoned, I was helped and protected by the district commissioner, Đurić, and the investigator, Ćirić, who had some idea that I was Jewish, even though I was in the camp under a false name.

As soon as I had an opportunity, I escaped from this assembly camp together with another Partisan. We were able to join up with the Jablanica Partisan detachment.

I stayed in the unit until January, 1943, when I was posted to the district Partisan underground technical unit in the non-liberated territory, because I knew shorthand and typing. My job was to record and copy news and pamphlets on a Gestetner machine, which the couriers then distributed to the people. I lived in bunkers, dugouts and partitioned stables, occasionally fleeing our pursuers when my comrades and I learned that our propaganda section had been discovered. Several times I managed to escape at the very last minute.

After the liberation of Leskovac, I became a journalist on a newspaper which had just been founded. I organised a shorthand typing course for Partisans who wanted to be journalists. I worked there only for a short time because, in November 1944, I was taken into the security service, OZNA, for Serbia. This dealt with the protection of people and property. Later it was transformed into an Internal Affairs service and I spent my entire career there until I retired.

Lea SALCBERGER

IN THE STEPS OF THE RAB BATTALION

Lea Salcberger was born Lea Abinun on May 13, 1913, in Sarajevo of mother Blanka, née Musafija and father Jakob.

She had a sister, Šarlota-Loti, a schoolteacher who died in 1928 in Mostar, and a brother, Albert-Buki, who worked in the Geula Bank in Sarajevo as a procurements officer. According to post-war data he died together with a whole transport at the entrance to Jasenovac. Lea's father, a photographer and later a travelling salesman, was killed in Jasenovac. Her mother was a milliner and during the war took refuge in Split, but was taken in 1943 to the Staro Sajmište camp in Belgrade and killed in Jajinci. About 160 members of her extended family were killed. Lea alone survived. She married Ervin-Stanko Salcberger in 1946.

Before the war she worked in the Bencion de Gaon knitwear factory and occasionally taught at the same textile school in Sarajevo from which she herself had graduated. After the war she was employed in the Ministry of Industry, in the Textiles Directorate in Zagreb, and later in the Planning Commission of the District People's Committee in Split. She moved to Belgrade in 1952 and was granted an invalid pension. She has two daughters, Slobodanka, a graduate technologist, and Borka, a mathematician and information scientist, and four grandsons.

This testimony is based on an interview with Lea Salcberger conducted by Jaša Almuli for the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University in the USA. It has been supplemented with additional material supplied by Lea Salcberger.

Before the war broke out I worked as a textile technician in a factory in Sarajevo. I had a very large family. My mother had thirteen and my father nine brothers and sisters. We all lived peacefully with much love and constant visits and observed all the holidays within the family circle, on either my mother's or my father's side.

The year 1941 brought us the war. My engineer brother was among the first group of Jewish intellectuals abducted from Sarajevo by the Ustashas. They then began to round up other Jews, men and women and sometimes even whole families. It was the winter of 1941 when my father was taken to Jasenovac. From the very day the Ustashas arrived we all had to wear yellow armbands with the Star of David. We were allowed to leave the house only between 7.00 a.m. and 7.00 p.m. Anybody who found any of us in the streets outside those hours was entitled to arrest us. The working hours in my factory were from 6.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. and it was run by the Germans so, each morning, a German soldier waited in front of my house to escort me to work, because I had to wear my armband. I worked in this way until the mass deportation in 1942.

I think I was in one of the last groups taken to the assembly point at the Sarajevo police station, where we waited for the transport. We stayed in the police compound through a whole night and day, in a courtyard, with just a little tea and food which they gave us. At one point I swore I would not go to the camp, that I would rather be killed than go there. In the courtyard there was a cellar where we went to drink water and where the toilets were. I hid in the cellar, leaving my things outside. When we had arrived at the police station, we had been told that we could take only the barest necessities with us. We had prepared rucksacks with the most essential clothes. I crouched in a corner of the cellar and waited.

After the transport left and everything was quiet, a guard came and asked me what I was doing there. I said that I was unwell, that I couldn't go, that I felt sick. This policeman was from Sarajevo. He had exceptionally blue eyes, as blue as the sky. I remember thinking "What

blue eyes he has!" In this moment of terror and waiting to be taken away, those eyes burned deep in my memory. He began to shout at me "Get out, get out!" I crossed the whole courtyard, with him at my heels, heading for the main gate. I didn't know where he was taking me, whether it was to the police or back to prison. "Keep walking!" he shouted. When we were out in the main street, which was full of people, he came closer to me and whispered "Turn into the street and walk ahead slowly." I began to shiver. I didn't understand what was happening to me. I walked slowly and then turned around. He was not there. Suddenly I could walk no further. I walked through the nearest gate and sat on a step to try and recover my senses. I didn't know where to go or what to do.

Lea in her younger days

Eventually I got myself together a little and decided to go to a family who were protected by the Germans. This was the family of Dr Alkalaj, another Jew, who the Germans protected because he worked as a doctor at the Sarajevo railway station. The railway workers all wanted him to be protected and to continue working there. I went to them and told them what had happened. His wife was very kind to me and said "You may stay here for the night, but we can't keep you longer because we ourselves are in danger from the Germans, the Ustashas and the police and we don't know what might happen to us." I spent the night with them. The next day, so that I would not be recognised, she gave me some of her dresses and a hat, and some money, and said "Find somewhere to go and something to do".

When I left their apartment I was in a real dilemma: where should I go and what could I do? Anywhere I went I would only make an unpleasant situation for other people. So I decided to return and turn

myself in and let them do whatever they wanted with me. The transport had left, which meant that I could no longer count on being deported, but they might lock me up. Then, as I wandered the city streets, I met an old family friend with whom we used to go on excursions. He was with his wife and children. He was wearing a *Volksdeutscher* uniform with a swastika on his sleeve, but we had known he was doing this in order to protect the many people he knew who were living illegally in Sarajevo. He was a Croat named Ivica Foht and he was married to a Jew. His wife was Sara Foht, née Ozmo.

When they were married she had to adopt the Catholic faith and she also changed her first name, because this was the custom in those days. Foht asked me where I was going and what I was going to do. I told him what had happened, how I had escaped and that I now had nowhere to go except back to the police. "Come to my place," he said.

They lived on the outskirts of Sarajevo in a small house with a large yard. His wife Sara welcomed me and hid me.

Foht might have worn the *Volksdeutscher* uniform, but his cellar was occupied by an illegal printing press where material for the Partisans was printed. These were bulletins and pamphlets which were distributed throughout Sarajevo. There were four people involved in this: Ivica Foht, his wife Sara (I don't remember what name she took when she converted), and their two sons. I stayed with them for five days. They were a wonderful family, although they were living on the breadline. They hid me in their house, in the cellar they had the printing press and in the courtyard they played songs like *Lili Marleen*. The Germans came and danced and sang, because as a *Volksdeutscher* it was important for him to be in contact with the Germans and prove he was their man.

Ivica Foht was a Partisan sympathiser. I even think he and his wife were members of the Communist Party. But they paid a terrible price for all their activities. They worked illegally for the Partisans all through the war and then, on the eve of the liberation of Sarajevo in 1945, one of their neighbours betrayed them. The Germans hanged them on the lampposts in the street, all four of them. That night the Partisans liberated Sarajevo and cut them down. Ivica Foht and his wife Sara were dead, but their two sons were still alive. One of them, Ivica, is alive to this day. He lives in Sarajevo and still has the scar from that rope on his neck. Through the Fohts I was introduced to a judge, I can't remember his name. I only know that he was a Croat. I stayed with him

for two days. His mother was also there and she was very kind to me. One night a railway man came and brought me an illegal pass issued in another name. "You're going to go now to Mostar and then you'll see what you can do from there," he said.

Lea Salcberger's parents, photograph from the beginning of the twentieth century

So that night he took me to the railway station and escorted me to a wagon in which sat Dr Alkalaj with whom I had spent my first night after my escape. He had come to see whether I would have any luck in Mostar. The Ustashas held all the territory as far as Konjic and from there the Italians were in charge. It was most important that I cross the border of the Independent State of Croatia and arrive in the territory under Italian occupation. I got through with no problems and arrived in Mostar. There

was an incident in the train which was both comical and odd. I had lived in Mostar for some time and had gone to school in the town. Now one of my old school friends, a Croat, was on the train.

Lea with her fiancé (1940), later her husband (1946)

"Hello Lea, how are you? Where are you going? Are you heading for Mostar?" she said to me.

"I'm not Lea, you're mistaken, my name is Ankica," I replied.

"What are you talking about? You're Lea. I know you from the mole on your leg. We used to go to school together," she insisted.

"No, perhaps it was someone else. I'm not Lea," I said, shivering with fear that she might betray me and that I would immediately be sent to prison. However she made no further comment and none of the people in the compartment asked anything. So I arrived in Mostar. Three days later I met her in the town. She apologised to me: "I didn't even remember that you were Jewish; I could have put you in a situation where you would have ended up in prison, but at least it turned out all right." We greeted each other and reminisced about our school days.

On my arrival in Mostar I reported to the Jewish Community to see if there was anything I could do to help. Everything was very well

organised in Mostar. The town was under the Italians, but they weren't hard on the Jews, which is to say they had not yet rounded them up. All the Jews living in Mostar were still free.

The Jewish Community had a community kitchen where the masses of Jewish refugees, from Sarajevo and other towns, could have a free lunch and dinner. Those who could afford it paid, but everyone there was doing some volunteer work. They washed the dishes, they cooked, waited and served the food, and cleaned the dining room. We lived like one big family. All of us had the same problems and we all felt the same way about them.

I stayed only a short time in Mostar. Very soon the Italians issued an order for all Jews to report to be transported to a camp. We didn't know which camp we would be taken to. It was no problem for the Italians to assemble us because the Jewish Community had a list of all its members as well as those who had come to the Community for help.

No one in Mostar wore armbands, because the Italians didn't insist on Jews being identified. There was no such requirement there, but everyone felt obliged to report. We went by bus to Split and were then put on board a ship. A number of Jews left the group in Split. We were given juices, some of us drinks, some other things, probably thanks to the Split Jewish Community. We boarded the ship and sailed to the island of Hvar.

On Hvar they put us up in hotels. The accommodation was very good but our movements were restricted, as to both time and place, so we were not allowed to move from one street to another. Further on there was barbed wire and we couldn't pass it. We could leave our Hvar hotel between 8.00 a.m. and 6.00 p.m. We were given food by the Italians. There again we organised various jobs, as cooks, waiters, people who cleared the dishes, cleaned the tables and floors and others who washed dishes. We made contact with locals sympathetic to the National Liberation Movement. They brought us bulletins. They also asked us to do some political work, to explain the aims of the national liberation struggle to them and how to escape what was in store for us. We struck up connections with them and worked in small groups, cells of three people, so they could not find out people's names. Everything was very conspiratorial, so that if anyone were caught they would only be able to name two other people and not the whole organisation.

We stayed on the island of Hvar until May, when we were moved to another island, Rab. We travelled by ship, boarding at night; we had

no idea where we were going or what was going to happen. They only told us that they were taking us to another camp. They gave us a little food and we arrived on Rab early in the morning. The camp itself was about twenty kilometres away from the Rab township. It was surrounded by three rows of barbed wire with guards around it. There were guard towers every ten metres with Italian guards holding their rifles at the ready. There were small, single-storey wooden barracks which held six or eight people. They told us that if anyone wanted to be with their family or friends they could arrange to stay together. I thought we would never get out of there. There was sand everywhere, about twenty centimetres deep; it all looked like a desert. Everyone went into barracks with family members or friends. People who didn't know anyone got to meet them here. And thus began life in the camp.

Lea Salcberger's service record, 1946

The first thing was that anyone who had gold or money had to hand it over to the Italians. It was better to do this voluntarily than for them to go through the barracks looking for it. Some people obeyed the order, others didn't. We were allowed to be outside at prescribed times and then had to return to the barracks. I was in a barracks with another three women and two men. The women were the three Samokovlija sisters. One had a two-year-old son. Her name was Laura Ast and the other two were Ela and Beba. The men were David Pardo and Branko Štrasberger. All of us were from Sarajevo and we got on

well together. For food we received a small bread roll to last us the day. It was up to us whether we ate it straight away or divided it for our mealtimes. For lunch we received a broth with nothing in it.

There was an illegal committee in the camp connected with some of the Italians, camp officers. I don't know the details. There too we were linked in cells. I was the leader of one cell which encouraged people to escape from the camp, to volunteer for work in the liberated territories and to fight as Partisans. However, in the end, nothing happened because the contact who was supposed to come didn't ever arrive. There were a large number of teenagers and children in the camp; groups of children were organised, say from five to eight years of age. I had a group up to age twelve. We worked with them from memory because we had no books at all. A little geography, a little history, a little mathematics, a little literature, whatever people could remember. There were twelve boys and girls in my group.

There was also a first aid course, run by Dr Špicer. Here we learnt some medical basics and passed an examination so that, one day, if we were to flee again, we might be of some use to the Partisans. But we didn't escape.

One day we heard a commotion in the camp and realised that all the Italian soldiers were leaving. Then someone in the camp, I don't remember who, shouted "Don't let them take their weapons! Disarm the Italians." Barehanded we stormed the Italians to disarm them. They began running and threw their weapons away. We didn't know what was happening. This was a day before or, perhaps, the very day that Italy capitulated, in September 1943. Meanwhile the committee was working and we were now given orders to go to their warehouses, take their food supplies and distribute them among the camp inmates. During our stay on Rab we had become so organised that we were ready to form a battalion if events demanded it. After the Italians withdrew we got into the warehouses and distributed the food. Everything was organised, there was nothing haphazard. The people stayed and waited. Across from our camp was that of the Slovenes. They had fared very badly, spending a winter on Rab, a winter which had carried off many victims. After the capitulation, when we disarmed the Italians, the colonel who was commander of the whole camp had fled. However the Slovenes and the Jews managed to catch him and bring him back to the camp, where he was killed. The Slovenes and Jews removed the barbed wire barricades and opened the gates. There was a great cele-

bration which lasted a whole day and night. The Slovenes organised their own units and the Jews organised the Rab Battalion.

The battalion commander was a former reserve officer, David Kabiljo. There were 180 men and 20 women in the Rab Battalion, all of them Jewish. We set off with the intention of working with the medical service. The underground people on Rab, who had kept in touch with the camp, came and joined the Partisans in an organised way. Because we were very poorly off for clothes and shoes, we agreed that anyone who was not going to join the Partisans, if they were young and had good footwear and clothes, should hand them over to us so that when we arrived at the unit we would look like soldiers, decently dressed, not ragged and barefoot. Some of them even carried rucksacks and a few spare things. We looked like starved zombies. When I left the camp to join the Partisans I weighed about forty kilograms. But we survived it all. We crossed by boat to the coast, where we were met by guides. These were farmers who'd gone underground and Partisans. We were in liberated Partisan territory. They met us with food and drink and allowed us to have some rest. We then went to Brlog. There we were met by a member of the Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, Dobrivoje Vidić. He greeted us and told us what was in store, so that we would be prepared. He gave us a political talk and then we rested. I think we travelled for seven days until we arrived at the unit for which we were to be reinforcements.

This was the Seventh Banija Assault Division of the National Liberation Army. This unit had just returned, decimated, from the battle of Sutjeska. Of the 1,800 troops who had gone to Sutjeska, only 700 returned. Naked, barefoot and exhausted. The Rab Battalion was to fill the holes in the unit. The name of the place was Lipe. There we were met by the division commander, Vjećeslav Holjevac. He wished us a warm welcome on behalf of the Seventh Division, prepared us for all that awaited us and said that we would stay there for a few days to rest and learn something about weapons, so that we would know how to handle a rifle.

First they divided us into units. The division had four brigades. I was assigned to the second brigade, as a signals private. They asked who wanted to go to the unit, some volunteered and the others would be sent to other companies or into the medical service or the cultural and artistic group. Then they taught us how to use a rifle, how to load and unload it. We were there for two or three days and then we went

into action with the unit. However it was much harder in the signals company than in the infantry, because signals was responsible for the telephone line between brigade headquarters and the battalion. This was a cable wound on a wooden drum which we had to unwind all the way to the battalion or company. We used them to connect the field telephones.

Why do I say that this was harder for us? Because we first had to set up the line and then, whenever the action ended, we had to lift it. We had to cross the entire distance twice as many times as the fighting men. Communications had to function because this is how the orders for attack and defence or retreat were relayed. But one thing was very difficult for me: after each action I was always on the first sentry duty. This duty was very hard, always at night and two or three hours long. Finally I complained to the commander, Đuka Arbutina, and asked why it was always me who was put on first guard duty because I was deadly tired after returning from the front line. "That's because you look the worst, the weakest of everyone," he said, "So in order for you not to die on the next march you go first on guard duty, do your turn, then you lie down and sleep." I had thought he disliked me but instead he was being considerate and taking care of me in this way. I was frightened on sentry duty. It was dark, night time, and in the snow and the cold, you couldn't see anything, you began to hallucinate: is that an enemy coming? Is that something over there?

Most of our actions were against Germans. We also fought Ustashas, but rarely Chetniks. The Seventh Assault Division was from Banija, so it operated mainly in Croatia. There were very many Ustashas and still a lot of German divisions who were being held down in Yugoslav territory by the Partisans. The Independent State of Croatia didn't have so many Ustashas to oppose the Partisans, so reinforcements had to come from the Germans. We crossed the river Lonja, which was up to my waist, carrying materials, telephones and cables. All this was carried across rivers, across railway lines, we would come close to the enemy positions in order to find out where they were going and what they intended to do.

Then we crossed into Kordun. These were very tough days: we were starving and were happy when we got corn bread and corn flour. For a while we ate oat bread which I could not stomach because it was like chewing needles. It pricked your mouth and throat and wasn't salted. We only found water here and there. When there was no running

water we drank from puddles. This was in 1943 and 1944. Here we stood up to the enemy's Sixth Offensive, which was intended to destroy us. Not long afterwards we crossed into Slavonia and Moslavina.

For nearly a month I went barefoot. There were no shoes. I wasn't the only one, many of us had no footwear. These were hard times. When we arrived in some village, people felt sorry for me and gave me rags to bandage my feet during the day, but these wore out as soon as I started walking. At night it was very cold, my feet were frozen, my toes and feet bleeding. I would go into action telling myself "Just let them kill me, don't let them wound me. Because if they do it will be worse than if they kill me straight out." However I was never wounded, even though I was in the first ranks and we went every day from one action to another, fighting the Ustasha units. The fighting during our attack on Koprivnica was especially hard and bloody.

One day the quartermaster sent me a pair of shoes. They had received a parcel from the Americans or the British, I don't know who, and the quartermaster sent them to me. They were size 44 and I wear size 36. Walking through the mud of Moslavina, my shoes would stick in the mud and my feet would come out of them. I had to bend over, put my foot down in the mud, pull out the shoe and put it on again. This went on until I got myself a smaller pair of shoes and everything was all right again.

We next went to Ilirska Bistrica in Slovenia and on towards Trieste, where we disarmed a large number of Germans who were fleeing Slovenia because they were expecting the capitulation. Germany capitulated while I was in Slovenia. I was in Zone B and remained there. It was May, 1945.

Apart from my work in the signals company, because we maintained the lines between the brigade and the company, I sometimes worked in the brigade headquarters. They asked for me there occasionally because I knew how to type and write reports. More and more often I was on duty in the brigade headquarters and began working there. They then introduced me to code. The chief of the brigade headquarters was the only one who had the key to the cipher, no one else was allowed to know it. It consisted of the numbers which replaced letters. The code was changed frequently, so as not to fall into enemy hands and allow them to find out what we planned to do. Occasionally I also helped to decipher code. I was a clerk in the brigade headquarters, a kind of semi-cipher clerk.

They then recalled me to division headquarters. I went to take a one-week course in handling ciphers. In this way I became a cipher clerk in the Seventh Division and continued on with them. I reached Slovenia, all the way to Trieste. Then came the capitulation. I was promoted to head of the cipher clerks in the Seventh Division before the war ended. I was commissioned during the war as a second lieutenant and stayed in the unit. Because this was Zone B and I was a cipher clerk I could not be demobilised, as were all the girls who worked in the medical service and the political or technical departments. I alone stayed with the Seventh Division. Life gradually became more or less normal, despite occasional fighting.

Finally, at the end of 1945 and beginning of 1946, my commander said to me, after everyone else had gone to visit their families "Go on, you go too. Go and visit your people!" Suddenly, for the first time, I realised that I had nobody of my own, that all my family had been killed. I broke into hysterical weeping, saying "If the Army lets me go I'll be out in the street. I have nowhere to go, I don't know what to do. I can't return to Sarajevo." They sent me to Bled for a month to recover. There was a hotel, the Toplice, where the Partisan airmen stayed and occasionally came for recreation. During my month in Bled I learnt that my fiancé was alive. He invited me to Belgrade so that we could see each other and decide what we were going to do. My fiancé was a Jew, known in the Partisans as Stanko Salcberger. He was from Sarajevo and had joined the Partisans in July, 1941. His brother had also joined the Partisans the same month, but was caught and returned to Sarajevo. He was tried and publicly executed in Vrace. His family was deported to camps, his brother Alfred–Fredi to Jasenovac and his parents, Katica and Leopold, to Rab together with their daughter-in-law, Paula-Beba, née Krautblat. Of all his family, only his parents survived.

My fiancé, and subsequently husband, was in the Partisans from 1941 and, from the liberation until his retirement, remained in the Army. Before the war he had worked in Sarajevo as an engineer. He retired with the rank of major-general.

Sara MANDELBAUM

IT WASN'T EASY BEING YOUNG

Sara Mandelbaum, née Finci, was born in Sarajevo on July 6, 1911, to David and Berta-Beja Finci (née Gaon). She had an elder sister, Regina, and brother, Šalom. From the camp on Rab, she joined the Jewish Partisan Battalion and the Seventh Banija Division. Both she and her sister survived the Holocaust.

She has two sons, Zoran and Zigmund-Bata, and five grandchildren. Zoran, an engineer and father of four, has been chairman of the Jewish Community in Mostar. Bata is also an engineer and has one daughter.

My parents were from Travnik. I had a sister, older than me, and a younger brother. I don't know when my parents moved to Sarajevo. My grandmother and grandfather lived with us there. My father was a tinsmith, with a business near Baščaršija. First we lived in Bijedenica, but later we bought a house in Babića Bašča. After leaving school, my sister worked in a medical institution as a clerk. Before the war she married Alfred Finci from Zovik near Sarajevo and had a son, Sabetaj.

All of my family observed Jewish customs. We were a patriarchal and devout Sephardic family and spoke Ladino at home, always staying together to observe the Sabbath. Every Purim we would wear fancy costumes. This was always an enjoyable occasion, and we children would be given money and fruit.

I remember later having a Serbian Orthodox boyfriend and my father being unhappy about this. "I want my child to be what I am now," he said. Despite this, in my heart of hearts, I was Jewish, and wouldn't have thought about changing my religion just to get married. We would go to the synagogue, where my mother, my sister and I would always wear a hat. We used to go to the big temple in Sarajevo, where my father had his own seat. When the Fascists came and destroyed the temple, that evening, my father stood in front of the portrait of his own father, saying "You are lucky not to have lived to see this."

After Hitler came to power in Germany, a large number of Jewish refugees arrived in Sarajevo. I remember once going with my sister to the theatre when some refugees from Germany were singing. They were driven from the stage when people started throwing eggs at them from the balcony, bringing the performance to an end. Politics wasn't discussed in our house, but we knew that several families with a lot of daughters were sending their children to Palestine, where they were saved. We were sorry that we were unable to go because we were not wealthy. My father had family in Belgrade, his brother Isak Finci, with his wife and three sons. They had a furniture shop and a cabinet maker's workshop in Terazije, in which the sons, Šalom, Salamon and Moric also worked. They fled with their mother to Palestine, but their father was executed in 1941.

When the Germans arrived it was terrible. For the first time my father came home early from his shop, where he still worked as a tinsmith. He told us that they had abducted fifty Jews from Sarajevo the night before. These abductions later continued on a massive scale. Jews all had to register: they would round us up at the Jewish Community and send us to forced labour. Everyone had to work for a week. A man would come and choose the people who had to go to work. I felt most sorry for my brother, who had to go to the railway station and, with the other men, carry heavy sacks. Once he hurt himself, but the Germans brought him back to work.

At that time I was 28 and not yet married. They came one evening for my brother, but he and I had already fled towards Miljacka. They struck my father on the face, demanding to know where his son was. The next day we returned. A few days later, on Sunday, my father dressed up in his best and walked out of the house. A truck came by which had been picking up Jews, so they took him away as well. My cousin, the son of my mother's brother, later told me that they had all

been taken to Jasenovac. He told me that they had forced these elderly people to dance the *kolo* and whipped and beat them into unconsciousness. My mother and I stayed away from the house that night. They had locked our house and sealed the door. We went, empty-handed, to our neighbour and from there to the house of a Jewish friend. Soon after this we paid a cousin from Konjic to send us a forged identity card for my brother and she took him to her house. He then joined the Partisans and was killed by the Chetniks at the age of 25. I never told my mother that he had died.

One day I was also locked up in the town hall. I had to give them everything, including my shoelaces and buckle. We were sent some food by a Jew whose name I never learnt. I remember there were meat balls. I wasn't there long, they let us go quite soon, but I found it very distressing.

My cousin in Konjic also sent me a forged identity card so I was able to go to her. Later we did the same for my mother, but we were cheated by the man who was supposed to bring her. Instead she stayed in Sarajevo and was later taken to the women's camp at Stara Gradiška.

Despite having the identity card, they threw me out at the Konjic station. I don't remember what name I was going under then, I was supposed to be from Goražde. My uncle was the only Jew there and was counting on the Croats to protect him. But one day the Partisans came, then the Chetniks and then the Ustashas and they took us away, back to Sarajevo. We were saved by David Hajon of Mostar. He told the Italian colonel that there was a written agreement that all the Jews in their zone were to be protected. So the Italians then paid for each of the Jews. I was even photographed for the newspaper. In this way we were lucky enough to be returned to Konjic. We had nothing to eat the whole time, but I felt no hunger. Our group consisted of my uncle, his wife, two daughters and one granddaughter, who survived and is now in Zagreb, Dr Debora.

I then decided that I should leave Konjic. Some of my relatives said that they had been abducted by the Ustashas because of me. My uncle took me to Mostar one day and, before saying goodbye, asked me if I needed anything, because there was no one there to help me. I asked him to give me a towel and a photograph of my father. Then a man happened to come along who offered to take me. I couldn't stay with him, so the next morning I went to David Hajon, who said that I should find a room and the Jewish Community would pay for it. While

I was looking for a room, I came across my friend Desa, Miloš Babić's wife. They had a tailoring business in Musala. Desa asked me to go with them to help her husband in the shop because I could sew. I gladly accepted. Desa was about my age, but her husband was a lot older. She introduced me to him by my real name and told him that I was her friend, to which he replied that this meant I was sure to be good and honest. There I sewed and ironed Italian blouses. I remember that Desa's husband gave me a bread roll when I arrived, which at the time meant a lot to me.

At the beginning of November, 1942, David Hajon summoned all the Jews to the synagogue. There they held a service and told us that everyone would have to leave Mostar for Dubrovnik, where they would be placed in an Italian camp, because Mostar had become an unsafe area. There were occasional visits from Francetić's Black Legions and the Italian Army was unable to provide security. The legions were picking up Jewish refugees, especially those who did not have permanent residence in Mostar. On November 17, all the Jews were taken to Dubrovnik, carrying just their personal effects and wearing yellow armbands with the Star of David.

In Dubrovnik we were met by the Italian *Carabinieri*, who said that we should gather into family groups. They then transported us by ship to Kupari, then to Hvar, Lopud and Vela Luka. I was alone, so I was sent with the Mostar Jews to the island of Lopud, where they put me into room 27 in the Grand Hotel. This is where I met my future husband, Mojši Mandelbaum. I married him on Lopud on February 14, 1943. We were married by a real rabbi and the wedding followed all the Jewish customs. We were all very happy. Mojši was even permitted to go to Dubrovnik, escorted by an Italian soldier, to buy wine and other things we needed for the wedding. I earned extra bread by sewing uniforms for the Italian soldiers.

In May 1943, all the Jews were sent to the concentration camp on Rab, where the conditions were much harsher. There were already a lot of Slovene prisoners there.

My husband and the other Jews organised party cells. They listened secretly to the radio and prepared an uprising in the camp. They were able to work together with the Slovenes because they were separated only by barbed wire. When they heard that Italy had capitulated, they rebelled, took up arms and met the Partisans who had come to liberate us. The elderly remained on Rab, some of the wealthier ones went to Italy, and a large number of young people joined the Partisans.

They asked us who wanted to join the Partisans. They were already well organised. My husband and I decided to go and were wished farewell by those who stayed. I felt it didn't matter if I were killed. We said good-bye to my mother-in-law and sister-in-law who had both decided to stay in the Rab camp, and left by boat.

We were organised into the Rab Partisan Battalion which was part of the Seventh Banija Assault Brigade. Our commissar was Muhamed Kalauzović, who married my friend Lenka Levi from Mostar. The two of us were together in the camp on Rab.

I remember we were always on the move. No sooner would we stop to take a rest than someone would shout "On your feet!" There were about 250 of us in the Jewish Partisan Battalion. Some of those with whom we had left the camp were no longer there: they had gone to Topusko or into refuge. I was given bandages and medical supplies. However, when we reached Karlovac, the detachment was disbanded. I remember someone making a speech, saying that, after being in the camps we were angry and ready to fight, but they separated us, they separated husbands from their wives. I wept, and so did my husband; I gave him everything except my own clothes. They told me that I wouldn't be able to carry everything once the offensive began, so I gave all the things I had to my women friends.

Food was a real problem. Sometimes in the villages there would be something to eat, but not always. I would arrive in a village and ask some woman "Comrade, do you have something to eat?" And she might give me something.

I remember us singing:

Let's join the Partisans,
Let's go to our country,
For the people, for freedom.

When I remembered how crowded we had been in the camp, this feeling of freedom meant a lot to me.

I was with the Partisans when the liberation came. I saw my husband only a few times. My first son was born in 1945, after I arrived back in Mostar. Unfortunately he fell sick with erysipelas and died. The following year I gave birth to Zoran. My other son, Zigmund-Bata is named after my husband's father. I now have five grandchildren. Two of my granddaughters and one grandson are in Israel, the other grandson is in Italy, as is Bata's daughter, and she is now married there.

Sida LEVI

PROBLEMS AND A LITTLE GOOD LUCK

Sida Levi was born in Sarajevo in 1925, to Laura and Albert Danon. She had a brother, Isa, fourteen years older, and a sister, Sara, who was four years older. The sisters were born after their father returned from spending six years in a Russian prisoner-of-war camp in Vladivostok in Eastern Russia during the first world war.

Sida graduated from medical school in Sarajevo before specialising in microbiology in Belgrade. She worked at the Military Medical Academy in Belgrade until her retirement in 1952. She was married to engineer Benjamin Levi with whom she had a daughter, Sanja, also a microbiologist, and a son, Teo, an economist. She has a grandchild from each of her children's marriages.

Sida Danon brought this testimony personally to the editorial office in Belgrade a few days before her unexpected death in March, 2002.

My father was loved and respected by everyone around him. Thanks to his friendship with the Muslims, he was able to send me and my sister to Mostar in August 1941 to stay with relatives there. Disguised as the sisters of two Muslims, we travelled from Sarajevo to Mostar which was occupied by the Italians who, at that time, were tolerant of Jews. Later my entire family moved to Mostar.

My sister and I made contact with the progressive young people of Mostar and were given various jobs. Wearing a *feredža*, the Muslim cloak and veil, I carried weapons to the Partisans. After a month I was admitted to SKOJ, the Communist Youth organisation. The Mostar Muslims with whom we were spending time gave us a lot of help, bringing us flour, sugar and other essentials. They were really kind people, progressive thinkers, and most of them had joined the Partisans. Our quiet life in Mostar lasted for about a year, until October 1942, when the Italians interned all the Mostar Jews. We were first sent to the island of Lopud, where we were accommodated in a hotel, but fenced off with barbed wire. Life was very well organised. We were given food supplies by the Italians and our women prepared meals which were wholesome and lavish under those circumstances.

Together with a handful of teachers, my sister and I helped with the school children. We also joined a choir in which I often sang solo. There were performances every Saturday evening.

Sida in Zagreb, 1945

From Lopud we were sent by boat to Rab, where the Jews from Dalmatia were interned. My first encounter with the Italian Fascists on the boat was enough to know that we were on our way to a concentration camp. There was also another camp, for Slovenians, on the island of Rab.

There we were put into barracks. The food was very poor: each day we were given beans with noodles, with no seasoning, and a piece of bread. On top of everything there was a terrible shortage of water. My sister and I immediately got involved with the Communist Youth organisation. We took a course in first aid because there were preparations under way for us eventually joining the Partisans. On September 7, 1943, we learnt that Italy had capitulated. We were told to get as many of the girls as possible together and go to the barbed wire and tell the Italian

guards that the war was finished. We asked them to release us. They did let us out and then we danced the *kolo*, the traditional Serbian circle dance, with the soldiers and together celebrated our freedom. While we were doing this our leaders in the camp, together with the inmates of the Slovenian camp, organised a raid on the camp armoury. Now all the weapons in the camp were in our hands. The camp commandant was arrested and soon afterwards committed suicide. Inside the newly-liberated, camp preparations were being made for our departure to the Partisans. A battalion was formed from the Slovenians and our inmates and was given the job of liberating the islands of Cres and Lošinj. My sister and I were attached to the battalion as nurses. Cres and Lošinj were liberated and we returned to Rab.

Then a Rab Jewish Brigade was formed. It was to be attached to the Seventh Banija Division. The trip there was long, with the danger of being attacked by the Germans and the Ustashas. After a long and arduous march we arrived in Banija to find the Seventh Banija Division already engaged in the Fifth Offensive. The women remained in Banija.

Sida with her friends Biserka and Helena in Sarajevo, 1941

My sister and I were assigned to the propaganda division. This was later disbanded and a large group of girls was sent to the Banija District Committee to be sent to Lika as nurses in the newly formed tank battalion. However this was at the beginning of the Sixth Offensive and all links with Lika were cut, so we were kept behind in Banija and sent to work as teachers in the villages. I was assigned to the village of Brubanj. This was an inaccessible place with scattered houses. The school was still being built with the donation of a local who had

emigrated to the United States. It had a roof. but no windows or doors. Night after night we could hear the wolves howling. It's easy to imagine how I felt there, at the age of sixteen and all alone. I had never been separated from my parents before. There were only a handful of children at the school, five or six, and in winter they had to walk for miles in deep snow.

My friends were at that time forming a theatrical group for the district committee in Banija. Because I had sung at Lopud almost every Saturday they asked me to join. This was a godsend for me. I immediately joined the group which acted, prepared theatrical pieces, sang in the choir and danced the Partisan *kolo*. We visited various places, including the front lines, wherever the army units were and gave performances, which really raised the morale of the soldiers.

Sida Danon with her classmates and form teacher in the fourth grade of secondary school in Sarajevo

I stayed with the theatre group until the end of the war. The conductor of our choir insisted that I should be sent to Zagreb for voice training because he believed I had a voice which should be developed. Because I hadn't graduated from secondary school I could not be admitted to the conservatoire, so I enrolled in the Partisan intermediate school where I finished seventh grade and then enrolled in the spe-

cial musical secondary school. In Zagreb I stayed at the Partisan Home in Gornji Grad. My parents had been in Banija, where my father helped in the municipal office, and after the war they returned to Sarajevo.

I visited them during one school vacation and decided to return to Sarajevo, because the Partisans had also opened a secondary school there. After finishing high school I enrolled to study medicine, because that was what my parents wanted. There was no way they could reconcile themselves to my desire to become what they called a songstress. I finished medicine in 1953 and, in the same year, married and moved to Split, where my husband, Benjamin Levi, was building the Jugovinil factory. My children, Sanja and Teo, were born in Split and, in 1958, we moved to Belgrade, where I specialised in microbiology and worked in the Military Medical Academy until my retirement in 1982. Although I never fulfilled my dream of becoming an opera singer, I was happy to sing in the Baruh Brothers choir.

My husband died in 1974 and I found myself, at the age of 47, a widow with a daughter in her first year of medicine and a son in the seventh grade of school My mother lived with me, which made my difficult life as a widow easier. My daughter graduated from medical school, specialised in microbiology and was employed at the Torlak Institute, where she works to this day. My son graduated from the Belgrade University Economics Faculty and married. This marriage produced my granddaughter Laura. Sanja presented me with my grandson, Igor, who brings joy to my life. Although I am now ill and often bedridden for months on end, each day when I open my eyes I again find solace and a reason for living in watching my grandchildren grow up. They are not yet thirteen years old.

Đorđe ALPAR

MY VOW TO STAY OUT OF GERMAN HANDS

Đorđe Alpar was born in Pécs, Hungary, on January 28, 1922, to Andras and Erzsebet, née Weiss. He had one brother, Oton (Gad), who emigrated to Palestine in 1939 and was one of the founders of the Gat Kibbutz. The family moved from Pécs to Belgrade in November 1922. Đorđe's parents also survived the Holocaust and moved to Israel in the first Aliyah. After four years of Belgrade's quarter Palilula primary school and another four of secondary school in the Second Boys' High School, he went to Mödling, near Vienna, where he finished first year of secondary technical school and was there when the German Army occupied Austria.

On his return to Belgrade he continued his education in the secondary technical school until it was interrupted by the war when he was in fourth year. In July, 1941, he fled to Šibenik and, after the capitulation of Italy, joined the Partisans. He was demobilised in 1945 and returned to Belgrade, where he become the head of public services for the city's Second District. He subsequently took charge of the directorate for the Belgrade building and timber industry. When he declared himself in favour of the Cominform, he was dismissed and sent to the Belgrade Public Services Division and later to the Komgrap building company. He was arrested on February 22, 1949, and, after fourteen months of investigative prison and three years imprisonment on Goli Otok, was released on July 22, 1953. He was again employed

at Komgrap, where he began as a technician on building sites, before becoming head of construction, then head of the Karaburma Sector, then technical director of the Standardbeton factory and finally chief engineer. In October, 1965, he was sent by Komgrap to open a branch in West Germany.

In Frankfurt he became manager of the Dikom-Bau company, where he remained until retiring on his war veteran pension on February 1, 1977.

He then continued to work on his own until the age of 80. He is now living in Frankfurt with his family.

It all began at about 6.00 a.m. on Sunday, April 6, 1941. I was then nineteen years old. I was awoken by the bombing. I walked out to the terrace, heard explosions and saw the puffs of smoke from the anti-aircraft guns. Manoeuvres, I thought. I woke my father and he came to look but we didn't know what it was. We turned on the radio and heard that the Germans had made a surprise attack on Yugoslavia, with no declaration of war. It was a reprisal for the coup of March 27 and an attempt to secure themselves from the south-east. Not knowing what to do, I decided to go to the clubhouse of the Hashomer Hatzair, the left-wing Zionist youth organisation of which I was an active member, to find out what we should do. As I walked through Dalmatinska, Knez Miletina and Dušanova Streets I saw the horrendous effects of the bombing: the milkman's horse and cart blasted to pieces on the walls of buildings, demolished houses, and power lines hanging down. Although the bombing was still in progress, especially in Dorćol, I reached the *ken*, the Hashomer Hatzair clubrooms. But, and this was worst of all, there were no instructions from anyone about what to do.

Benko Demajorović and I agreed that he should go home, collect a few essentials and come to my place and we would then flee together. Our plan was to make our way to Kotor in the hope that the British Fleet would be there so we could volunteer.

I had survived the *Anschluss*. When the Germans had entered Austria I had been sixteen. I was then at a boarding school at Mödling, near Vienna, where I was in the first year of technical secondary school. Everyone knew that I was Jewish and they chased me to smear me with boot polish and spit at me, but they didn't catch me – I ran

into the infirmary and stayed there for a week until the situation calmed down. The Jewish teachers were immediately thrown out of the school. I also saw books being burnt in the school courtyard. On visits to Vienna I saw the savagery of the Germans, and the Jewish merchants in front of their shops putting up with insulting slogans, being spat at, sworn at and humiliated. I swore then that I would do anything rather than fall into the hands of the Germans.

FLIGHT FROM BELGRADE

(Between April 6 and May 23, 1941, I kept a diary, which I later gave to the Jewish Museum in Belgrade, together with my employment record which had been issued in Dubrovnik. What I went through in this period of less than two months can be seen in these excerpts from my diary.)

I prepared to leave Belgrade. When Benko arrived, our next-door neighbour Đura Kraus also joined us. The three of us left the city at about 6.00 p.m. We arrived in the village of Kaluđerica, but there were thousands of refugees there and we were unable to find a bed, so we slept beside a pig pen.

April 7: At the break of dawn we move on and are soon on the road to Ralja. We still have some of the food we brought with us, but there is nothing to be bought anywhere. At noon we arrive in the village of Vrčin, eat a little and rest, then continue on towards Ralja. At about 5.00 p.m. we arrive in Ripanj and are given beds in our own room in the house of a farmer, Jeremija Mitrović.

April 8: We awake refreshed after a restful sleep, eat breakfast and, in the morning, continue on towards Ralja, arriving there at about 8.30. We wait for a southbound train and, at about 1.00 p.m., set off, settled in a baggage van. At Mladenovac we are joined by eight schoolboys, who get off in Adrovci the following day. Eventually we arrive in Aleksinac. The air raid alarm sounds there on April 9 and the train sets out for Stalać. We spend the night there in a primary school.

April 10: In the morning we set off, tramping through the snow, for Kruševac. From there by train to Čačak and from Čačak to Prijepolje, standing on the running-board of the wagon. From

Prijepolje we catch another train to Požega, again standing outside, and freeze. Finally, a little after midnight we arrive in Sarajevo where we spend the night.

April 11: We go to the Sarajevo *ken* to see what we should do. There are no instructions of any kind. Some people say we should go to Mount Romanija, others want to push on to Kotor, because the English Fleet is sure to come and we can go to Palestine with them. We opt for Kotor.

April 12: There are four us now, we leave Sarajevo by train at 2.15 p.m. We stop at Konjic and spend the night there. Later we learn that the train had stopped to allow a train with the royal suite to pass.

April 13: We push on by train. Again we spend some time at Vojno. Đura Kraus meets his parents there and, after speaking to his father, parts company with us. We arrive in Mostar where the father of my school friend Žarko Gačić has a construction company. We find him and sleep on straw in a shed in the company's yard. There are now seven of us.

April 14: We go back into town and discover that the railway line has been cut because of a skirmish between the Ustashas and some Communists who have been released from a nearby prison. Then the Italians bomb the town. We go back to pick up our things and discover that the house in the yard has been hit. We help clear up the rubble, then leave Mostar. Travelling in a little bus we reach Blagaj, then Nevesinje, where we sleep on the floor of a Muslim house.

April 15: We leave and meet the Krauses in the bus. We travel by bus to Gacko (tickets cost 42 dinars) and spend the night in a hotel.

April 16: We travel in army trucks from Gacko to Bileća. There we learn that Yugoslavia has capitulated. We look for transport and again find army mobile workshops which take us to Trebinje. We feel as if we are suffocating in these closed and airless vans and have to keep opening the rear door.

April 17: Army trucks again, but open this time: we head for Herceg Novi. We have a few officers with us. Just before Grahovo we come across Italian *bersaglieri* who are coming from the other direction on motorcycles. When the officers see them

they dump their pistols and take off their badges. We go down the serpentine and finally arrive in Herceg Novi. The Italians are already seizing power: they arrest the officers as prisoners of war. We spend the night on the stage of a SOKOL cinema.

April 18: We take the little railway to Zelenika. We somehow manage to get onto a train packed with sailors, some standing on the steps, some climbing onto the roof. When the train comes out of the tunnel we are all black with soot. We arrive in the port but there is not a soul in sight. Someone in our group knows that in Prčanj there is a Karmel, the holiday home of the Jewish Women's Association in Belgrade. Some of us go to find a boat to take us across, others go looking for something to eat. I am in this group. Across from the harbour we find a large steel door with a sentry box outside. We go up to it and call out, but no one answers. What have we found? It's a big army warehouse which has been abandoned by the Yugoslav Army but not yet been taken over by the Italians. We go in and find cardboard boxes full of biscuits, tins of meat, jam and other things. We also find large quantities of equipment: we take a tent, chairs, army mess kits, pots and pans. To this day I have an officer's bag and a folding leather stool from there. We take all these things to the shore, making a great heap of our rucksacks and the other things we are now carrying. Meanwhile the other group has found a two-master boat to take us across. We load everything up and set off for Prčanj. Calm sea, we pass flying boats moored at buoys and in the distance we can see warships surrounded by boats. We later learn that these ships have been abandoned and the locals are taking whatever they can lay their hands on. The day before, a captain had scuttled his warship. Finally, at 9.30 p.m., we reach the shore at Prčanj.

We unload our things, carry everything to the Karmel and prepare to sleep. There are eleven of us: Braco Alkalaj (later a doctor, lived and died in Nahariya), Marko Alkalaj (now living in Zagreb), Žarko Alkalaj (Marko's brother, also now living in Zagreb), Đorđe Alpar (now living in Frankfurt-on-Main), Jaša Almuli (now living in London), Benko Demajorović (went on to join the Partisans on Korčula and died

there), Avram Papo (died in the Gat Kibbutz), Cipora Papo (also died in the Gat Kibbutz), Finci, whose first name I don't remember and another two whose names I don't recall.

April 19: We can't stay at the Karmel because the Italians have requisitioned it for themselves so we move to the Czech pavilion. We get the things we need from the Karmel complex. We are busy all day moving, organising accommodation and in the kitchen.

April 20: Sunday. We cook for ourselves, listen to the radio, wait for the news, but there's nothing happening.

April 21: We go to Kotor to buy food. It's full of refugees from all sides. We see bundles of charred thousand-dinar notes and discover that the National Bank has been evacuated to Montenegro where they tried to burn the notes. We hear that Moša and his girlfriend Inge have gone to Belgrade to see how things are. We send a telegram to my house. The Italians are taking over everywhere. We return from Kotor with food.

April 22-24: The days pass monotonously. We go for walks and do all the usual things, go shopping, play chess, wait to see what is happening, losing that hope the English will come.

April 25: Marko arrives from Dubrovnik. He tells us that Miša Štajner is there and that there are a lot of Jewish refugees. The Italians are in power but they are negotiating with the Ustashas and will probably hand over to them. A card arrives from Moša Mandilo from Herceg Novi. Nothing happens during the next two days.

April 28: I go to Dubrovnik to see what's happening there. There I meet the Kraus family. They take me, in give me a bed and something to eat. I write to my parents: I have had no news from them. I have no more money and am looking for a job. The landlady who rents the apartment to the Krauses tells me about a building firm in Lapac which might give me a job.

May 4: I go to Prčanj to collect my things. In the meantime we all decide to go to Dubrovnik, which is where we split up.

May 9: I begin work as a carpenter. The company wants to see my employment booklet, which I don't have. All this time I have been carrying my student record from technical secondary school, which has no column for religion. Again the landlady helps me and goes with me to get an employment booklet.

I'm at the counter giving my personal details when they suddenly ask me where I'm from. "Split," I say on the spur of the moment, because most of the Jews were getting ready to go to Split if the Ustashas take over power in Dubrovnik.

May 19: I hear from my parents. They tell me that the fourth grade of my school has resumed and that they're getting ready for final examinations, so it's best that I come home and continue with my schooling.

May 23: The day before the Ustashas are to take power in Dubrovnik, I return to Belgrade.

A LITTLE LUCK, A LITTLE COURAGE

When I arrive in Belgrade I find a dreadful situation. My parents, like all Jews in the city, are registered. My father goes to forced labour, clearing rubble from buildings destroyed in the bombing. I decide not to register. From then on I live in Belgrade without papers.

I take a tram to Dorćol, although Jews are not supposed to use the trams. I go to the Jewish Hospital, which is in Visokog Stefana Street, directly opposite my school. I put on a yellow armband borrowed from my mother (the only time I ever wore it) and go into the school, into my classroom. It was as though a ghost had appeared. Everyone is astonished: what am I doing here? I announce that I, too, wish to prepare for the coming final examinations. I sit down and listen to the teacher. After finishing the day at school, I am called by my teacher, Đura Bajalović, who tells me that I had better not come to school. Instead I should prepare at home and just come to school for the examination. And that's what I do. My school friend Mile Jovanović from Umka, who they call "peasant" because he wears traditional village shoes, comes to my place and keeps me up to date with what they're learning. In this way I prepare myself for the final examination and prepare my end-of-year project.

There is a German motorised unit staying in our yard, where my father's building business is based. They listen to the radio and from this I learn on June 22 that the Germans have attacked the Soviet Union. A few days before my examination date I am told that the Ministry has prohibited me, as a Jew, from sitting the exam. My father knows the minister, Granić, and decides to go and see him and ask for an exemption. Somehow he pushes his way into Granić's office, but

when he insists on being allowed to see the minister, he has his face slapped and was thrown out. I have done my end-of-year project and prepared for the examination in vain.

In a dilemma about what to do I decide to go to the village of Babaljić Ljig, where I know a villager named Dražić. For years he has been coming to Belgrade in his cart every Sunday. He would sleep in our yard and then go early in the morning to the market, which is where my mother got to know him. I spend a week in his house. The family invite me to stay with them but I refuse and, instead, return home with food.

In the meantime my father has been in touch with an acquaintance and business competitor from Zagreb, Mr Fišbajn, who has a big contract in Šibenik and is prepared to give me a job. The condition is that I should go to Split.

Fate and chance have always played a large role in my life. The main post office building in Belgrade houses the Croatian representative office which issues permits. I go there, show my employment booklet. They want to see my birth certificate. I pretend that I have forgotten it and must go to get it. Then have an idea. I go to the Croatian military office, which is at 5 Terazije, on the third floor. There is a long queue stretching up the staircase. I wait patiently and, when my turn comes, I say that I am volunteering to join the home guard but that I would like to visit my home in Split before I go. I show them my employment booklet, according to which Split is my home town. I get an army pass and a free train ticket. I can take my things and report to the military command in Split and they will then assign me wherever they need me.

Preparations for my trip begin. My parents have resigned themselves to my departure. My father makes a small wooden chest (which I still have) which can hold all the tools needed by a bricklayer.

Meanwhile I witness a tragic event. The Germans order all male Jews to report to Tašmajdan on July 27, 1941, at 10.00 a.m. I tell my father not to go. He stays in bed, as though he is sick. I put on *lederhosen* which I brought from Austria, go to Tašmajdan and stand up on the high ground to watch what's going on below. Those who are there are being lined up in groups. Later I learn they are being sorted according to qualifications: doctors, engineers, merchants, tradesmen, students and so on. Every tenth person is removed from the group, 122 of them, and taken to be shot as a reprisal for the burning of a

truck. Among them is Raka Mandil, a 16-year-old schoolboy, a wonderful companion from the youth group of which I had been leader.

Thanks to my pass I reach Split on August 5, 1941, via Zagreb, without encountering any problems. In Split my father's school friend, Filip Kolin, meets me and his home becomes my official place of residence. It isn't easy to get to Šibenik, which has become a navy harbour, because the Italians aren't letting any foreigners enter the city. After waiting a week the SOLFAC company, which is prepared to employ me, obtains the *lasciapassare*, the official pass which allows me to travel to Šibenik. While I am waiting I walk around Split and even go swimming. Finally, on August 12, I manage to get to Šibenik by bus.

TO ŠIBENIK, ONE BY ONE

As soon as I arrived in Šibenik, I looked for a room, finding one with the Petković family, sisters Nevenka and Katica to be precise, at 149 Kralja Tomislava Street. The sisters were extremely kind and we remained friends throughout my stay in Šibenik, although I later moved elsewhere.

On August 14, 1941, I began work for SOLFAC, on construction of its new ferroalloys factory. This had begun before the war and was now being resumed. We made large concrete window frames which we mounted in the walls of the factory buildings and then installed glass panes. We worked as we were able, depending on the weather and the availability of materials. We had special passes to enter the factory. There was a restaurant in the factory where we ate and when we weren't working we took food home in mess kits. There was also a shop where we were allowed to buy food and other groceries.

Four Jewish families were saved thanks to SOLFAC, which was owned by Herman Fišbajn. First of these was his brother Janko Fišbanj and his wife Beba, who are now in Israel. Then came a married couple named Günz and their two children, Duci, now David Genez and Braca, now Josef Genez, both of whom now live in Haifa. There was another married couple, Rudi and Ester Simsaj and our family. All the men in these families worked in the factory from time to time. Another of the workers there was Moric, from Split, who later joined the Partisans and was killed. There were also a few locals. I was made a kind of foreman because of my training and experience.

Life was fairly tolerable under the Italian occupation in Šibenik. There was a kind of passive resistance from the locals, which was best seen during the *coprifuoco*, the curfew. The Italians prohibited movement in the town after a certain hour, usually starting between 5.00 p.m. and 8.00 p.m. Before the curfew time, when the Italian flag was lowered to music, the square would still be full of people out walking and then, ten minutes before the flag came down, everyone would disappear. Only a small group of Fascists would be left. There were illegal Communist Party and League of Communist Youth organisations operating in the town and Partisan units in the surrounding area. There were also a large number of Chetniks. I remember on August 7, 1942, there was a funeral for about thirty Italian soldiers and, on November 1 of the same year the Partisans blew up part of the power station. We had no power for days after this. As a reprisal, on November 5, the Fascists beat the locals and wrecked and looted shops belonging to local Jews (Druter and Berger) and arrested them. On November 6 there were again battles outside the town, with gunfire, earth-shattering explosions and, again, no electricity.

Workers in the ferroalloy factory

Through our landladies we made a large number of acquaintances, mainly among the Serbs with whom we socialised. There were also the local workers with whom we worked. In our leisure time, between finishing work and the *coprifuoco*, we went visiting, listened to the news, played cards and just chatted. In good weather, especially on Sundays, we would go swimming. We had no idea whether our friends knew we were Jews, but the main thing is that no one betrayed us. We spent a whole two years in this uncertainty, fearing all the time that we might be discovered.

In mid-November, 1941, my father, Andrija Alpar, arrived in Šibenik. He was registered in Belgrade, wore a yellow armband and did forced labour with the other Jews. When I insisted that he come to Šibenik, he procured forged papers and left Belgrade before they

took all the male Jews to the Topovske Šupe camp. He left my mother in Belgrade and managed to reach Split via Albania. There his school friend Kolin took him in. He waited almost ten days for SOLFAC to secure the employment documents which allowed him to obtain a pass to come to Šibenik. Of course we immediately let our mother know through one of our connections that our father had arrived safely.

Đorđe with his father, fitting windows in the factory building

On February 7, 1942, police agents came to my landlady to enquire about me and my origins. Because my only identification was my academic record from technical high school, which had no reference to my religion, I was required to produce my birth certificate. I was helped now by Branko Pudar, a former sergeant in the Yugoslav Army, through the daughter of the local Orthodox priest. They arranged for me to meet this priest and, because I was born in Pécs in Hungary, where there was a large Serbian minority, he issued me a certificate stating that I was a member of the Serbian Orthodox Church. This was enough for me to normalise my status and, on April 11, 1942, I obtained identity papers.

My mother, who had stayed in Belgrade, went to Vrnjačka Banja to hide. We had relatives also hiding there, Ela and Laza Lajtner from Belgrade, originally from Osijek, who had taken the name Jakšić, because they were born in Jakšićevo. My mother would occasionally return to Belgrade, hiding under a Muslim veil, to see what was happening to the house which her parents had built with so much hard work. She was unable to part from her property. She used to sell firewood and coal while my father had a construction business. On our insistence, she also decided to leave everything and come to Šibenik. She bought false papers, sent her luggage from Zemun on April 17, 1942, and arrived in Split herself on June 5. She also found accommodation with Mr Kolin, but we were unable to get her the documents

needed to come to Šibenik. She tried various ways of obtaining a pass in Split but was not successful. Then she made a very courageous move. On July 27, 1942, she got into a taxi carrying passengers from Split. When they arrived at the checkpoint in Šibenik, while the Italian was checking the taxi driver's papers, my mother, who was sitting in the back, left the car saying she was going to the toilet and vanished. She took another taxi and came to us. Soon after she arrived, on September 15, 1942, we moved into a one-room apartment in the house of a tailor named Goreta, in Crnica.

Among the many local people I met in Šibenik, there was also a young married woman who worked in a law firm whose owner had been interned after the Italians arrived. After some time we fell in love. Because she was the only employee in the office, we often met there. Because we had various documents with us (property deeds to our houses and building lots, insurance policies and so on) I put them all in a folder and concealed it among the documents and files in the overcrowded office cupboards.

Suddenly, on July 25, 1942, at about 11.00 a.m., three police agents broke into the office and began ransack it. My friend was very frightened and tried to get closer to the open window so that she could get rid of a pamphlet which she had in the pocket of her smock. One of the agents, who had been watching her closely, jumped on her and took the pamphlet. They continued their search but found nothing and left. They also searched me, took my details and ordered me to come to the police station the next day. Meanwhile they took my friend with them and kept her in custody for investigation. The next day I came to the *Questura* and was interrogated by two agents. Because I really knew nothing about the pamphlet they let me go. I learnt later that my friend occasionally mimeographed leaflets but was not herself a member of any illegal organisation. My problem now was how to get our documents which were hidden in the office so that they should not fall into the hands of the Italians if they continued their searches. They had taken the keys from my friend and locked the office; I had never had a key. I then remembered that the cleaning lady also had keys, so I found her and borrowed them. The afternoon after I was interrogated, I took a risk and went to the office, took our documents, left and returned the keys. Thus this operation turned out well.

I visited my friend several times in prison before October 31, 1942, when she was sentenced to three years' imprisonment. Shortly after this, on December 10 of the same year, she was taken to Italy to serve her sentence. We corresponded regularly until I joined the Partisans.

On April 8, 1943, at about 11.00 p.m., there was a loud knocking on our door. We opened the door and agents charged in to conduct a search but found nothing. They arrested my father, the first time in his life this had happened to him, and took him away. They next day I went several times to the *Questura*, taking him breakfast and lunch, and was interrogated along with him.

The previous day someone had sabotaged the long-distance power lines nearby and the Italians thought my father might have been involved. He was able to prove that he had not been and they released him on April 10.

When they searched our apartment we were lucky that they did not discover the hiding place where our documents and pamphlets were, because I was collaborating with SKOJ. They were hidden in the top of the door frame, which had a vent above it to ventilate the toilet. I had cut part of the top board out with a fine saw and put it back again as a cover. Our documents and leaflets were in the hollow of the door frame. The agents went into the toilet, climbed on the lavatory seat, and checked in the cistern, but they had their backs to the opening so they didn't find our hiding place. After they left my mother and I fell into each other's arms weeping from the tension of the search.

After this search, because they hadn't discovered the leaflets and I had not betrayed anyone, the youth organisation arranged to meet in our apartment. My mother stood guard and, on May 10, 1943, I was admitted to SKOJ. My induction was carried out by the secretary of the Crnica branch of the organisation, Boško Jurišić who was later arrested and shot after a break-in and raid. From that time on I was even more involved in this illegal work.

Meanwhile the volume of work at the factory was dwindling and finally, on August 3, 1943, everything was completed. I began selling fish in a fish shop and would sometimes go fishing at night. I did all kinds of things to survive.

Soon after this, on September 8, 1943, Italy capitulated. Partisans arrived in the town from the surrounding areas and began to take over. The next day there was a rally in the town square and a great

celebration of the town's liberation. But, to our great surprise, German motorised units arrived in the town three days later, on September 11, and began arresting the Partisans there. I decided to flee and join the Partisans. I left my worried parents and, with a few friends, took a boat across the bay to Vodice where we joined the Partisans.

WITH THE PARTISANS TO THE END OF THE WAR

About a hundred volunteers gathered at Vodice. We headed north and slept at Bukovica. There we were welcomed by the local people, especially the poor. We then turned towards Lika and arrived in Donji Lapac. We were welcomed by the local committee and put up in the homes of local residents, three or four volunteers per home. They brought us warm water to wash and freshen up. The next day, refreshed by food and a good night's sleep, we were allocated to our units.

I was sent to the Fourth Battalion of the Eighth Brigade of the Nineteenth Dalmatian Division. I quickly found my feet in Partisan life, thanks to my boy scout experience and that of the Hashomer Hatzair camps. We fought our first battles with the Italians during the attack on the Krško power station. The battle took place in one of the open fields full of rocks which are typical of that area. A message had to be taken from our commander to another commander on the other side of the field, across the open space. I volunteered to do it and succeeded in my task, while the bullets whizzed all around me. We took about thirty Italians prisoner on this occasion.

In the meantime we learnt that the parents of the volunteers from Šibenik had left the town to find shelter in the hills so that they would not be taken hostage by the Germans as a reprisal for what we were doing. My parents joined them, taking only the bare necessities with them. They remained on the island of Vis, where the headquarters of ZAVNOH, the World Antifascist Council of the National Liberation of Croatia, was situated. My father was engaged in building fortifications for the defence of the island, which was never taken by the Germans, while my mother worked for the tailors. After the Germans withdrew from the south of the country in 1944 and Split and Šibenik were liberated, my parents returned to Šibenik where we were reunited.

AS A PARTISAN OFFICER

Because of my good record in the fighting and my education, I was sent to a basic political course and then attached to the Livno area command to work as a technician on the building of fortifications. After Livno fell to the Germans I was sent to the Partisan unit in Mosor and appointed secretary of the unit headquarters and assistant head of the activist group within the headquarters. My unit was active in the area of Mosor and Biokovo, around Driniš, Siverica and the surrounding territory. In this area we saw the German Sixth Offensive which left a horrific sight in its wake: the entire population of the village – men, women and children – were assembled in a church and killed. The only survivors were a few individuals who were out of the village tending their herds.

With the Partisans until the end of the war.
Đorđe with his father during the war days

Later I was sent to the Third Company of the Second Battalion, first as an ordinary soldier and then later as a platoon delegate. By the order of the Supreme Headquarters on April 24, 1944, I was promoted to the rank of lieutenant and, immediately afterwards, on May 25, accepted into the Communist Party. From then on I performed various command and political functions in a number of military units. In August 1944 I was made assistant commissar of the Second Battalion

and remained in this post until the Mosor detachment was disbanded, when I became assistant commissar of the Second Battalion of the Twentieth Dalmatian Division. We took part in the attack on Knin and the siege of the town until it was taken and then continued with preparations to attack and liberate Gospić. A few days before the attack I received orders to attend an advanced Party course at ZAVNOH, in Šibenik. The course was from April 5 to May 15, 1945, and so I was in Šibenik when Germany capitulated. However the fighting continued in Yugoslavia. At the end of my course I became assistant commissioner of the First Battalion. I took part in the battles for Trieste and, after the partition into Zones A and B, I was moved to the divisional headquarters in Ilirska Bistrica. Early in July, 1945, I was assigned as an administrative officer for the political chiefs in the personnel department of the Twentieth Assault Division of the Fourth Army. I was decorated with a medal and a citation for bravery. As soon as the war ended I was assigned to the military engineering academy in the USSR. Although I met all the conditions for this, the notorious dispute between the two countries intervened and only two of the six candidates eventually went to the USSR. I returned to the headquarters of the Fourth Army and lodged a request for demobilisation in order to continue my civilian education. This application was approved and, on October 24, 1945, I was demobilised and returned to my parents in Belgrade.

My parents had travelled from Vis to Šibenik together with the ZAVNOH councillors after the Germans began their retreat from the south. They remained there for a short time before returning to Belgrade in November, 1944.

And that is how we survived the war.

III

SURVIVORS OF THE CAMPS

AUSCHWITZ, DACHAU, BUCHENWALD, BERGEN-BELSEN, TENJE AND OTHERS

Egon ŠTAJNER

LIVING TO SEE THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Egon Štajner was born on May 30, 1926, in Subotica, to father Mavro and mother Frida, née Bencion. He was the youngest of three children. Seven close family members perished in the Holocaust, including his father Mavro and grandfather Markus Štajner, as well as a number of members of his extended family.

After the war he resumed his education in Novi Sad and Belgrade. He worked in Srboteks and later at Radio Belgrade and Radio Yugoslavia, where he was responsible for the Hungarian-language program. He was then transferred to the Institute for International Politics and Economics in Novi Sad. As a senior professional officer he worked in the Eastern European Countries Division. After graduating in economics, he worked in the Serbian Chamber of Commerce and was subsequently an advisor in both the republic and federal departments for economic programming. He was also director for foreign tourism in the Globus agency in Belgrade.

He married Vera Vajs in 1948 and they had two children, a daughter Judita, a professional translator, and a son Zvonko, a mathematician with a master's degree in statistical science. He has two granddaughters. After the death of his wife Vera, he remarried and now lives with his wife Emilija, née Kostić.

I lived in Subotica until my eighth year, when my father, who was the Vojvodina representative of the JUREIFI hat factory in Sisak, had to move to Novi Sad on business in 1934. This is how I came to be in Novi Sad in 1941 when the war broke out.

CHILDHOOD

I grew up with my sister Alisa and brother Miroslav in a middle-class Jewish family. We were not religious although my parents observed all the major Jewish festivals. I received religious instruction in the Jewish primary school I attended and, after detailed preparations under the supervision of Rabbi Šilber, I sang an appropriate prayer in the synagogue for my Bar Mitzvah.

The most important memory of my childhood is my grandmother, Henrietta, who came from the Viennese Jewish family of Rosenzweig. While we lived in Subotica I grew up with her, speaking German, which she taught me to read and write. She left us and moved to Belgrade in 1933, taking me with her and enrolling me in the third grade of the primary school in Dušanova Street. I endured it for only one semester. My school friends laughed at my strong Hungarian accent and I could not endure this so I returned to my parents in Subotica.

The second thing I remember is my enrolment in Hashomer Hatzair. In this Jewish youth movement, in Subotica as well as Novi Sad, I made wonderful friends, both girls and boys, and acquired a left-wing education. I was gradually formulating my first goal in life – to move out with an *aliyah* to what was then Palestine and take an active part in building a Judaeo-Arab state. In the *ken* we learnt and sang Jewish *halutz* songs and learnt comradeship, how to share both good and bad, endurance and persistence.

The third thing was having to interrupt my education in the Novi Sad high school because of the *Numerus Clausus*, the Jewish quota. My father decided that I should learn a trade and so I was taught leatherwork by the Novi Sad master Đorđević and the tradesman Milosavljević (both of whom moved to Belgrade after the war broke out). This enabled me to survive the early years of the war.

I remained in good and friendly relations with my Serb peers and never felt any particular attitude towards me as a Jew.

The fourth thing I remember from my childhood was my sporting activities. I was a member of the Maccabi Sports Club in Novi Sad and

regularly attended gymnastics classes run by our coach, Mr Gutman. I also played table tennis there and, at the Vojvodina championships in 1939, I won third place after Harangozo and Blažon of Zemun. If there had been a play-off for third and fourth place I would most probably have come fourth, because Deža Rajh from the Hashomer Hatzair was a better table tennis player than me at the time.

WARTIME, 1941–1944

The war hit me very hard, suddenly changing everything in my life. When the Hungarian troops entered Novi Sad in April, 1941, there was a short skirmish. Two days later, when the shooting stopped, I went to the *ken* along Futoška Street. In that street, where the tramway ran, there were two human bodies hanging on each street pole, every fifteen metres. Hashomer Hatzair was banned. I could no longer meet my *haverim* and *haverot*. The Maccabi club was no longer working so I didn't go to my gymnastics classes and nor could I play table tennis.

Đorđević, my boss, left Novi Sad and I took a job as an apprentice with Šandor Tot who made suitcases.

I had to find my feet in these new circumstances. We were distressed by what was happening to us and began to organise ourselves. Almost ninety per cent of the former Hashomer Hatzair members joined the resistance movement during 1941 and 1942. I joined SKOJ in the autumn of 1941 through the elder brother of Jakov Rip, my *haver* from the Mišmar *kvuca*. My group included Jakov Rip, Bruno Hofman and Šlomo, whose surname I don't remember. Our assignment was to distribute leaflets to houses and throw nails on the roads to puncture the tyres of the military trucks which passed along them. We also collected Red Aid. Bruno Hofman and Jakov Rip were also involved in setting fire to the wheat at Rumenka, near Novi Sad.

At the end of 1941 the Hungarian police discovered the illegal resistance organisation and arrested the members. I don't know whether we were the only SKOJ group or if there were others, but they did not discover us. It was only at the end of the 1970s that I found out how our group remained safe. Our secretary, Mordo Rip, was a friend of Ljubica Bimbika-Mandel who, at that time, was a candidate for Communist Party membership. She was Mordo's connection and she herself was connected to Lederer, a member of the local Communist Party committee. Ljubica Mandel didn't betray her friend or Lederer

(who was hanged in the Novi Sad military barracks in January, 1942) and nor did she say a word about our SKOJ group. So, at a time when more than two hundred members of the resistance movement in Novi Sad were arrested and given long prison sentences, I and the other members of this group were spared.

JANUARY, 1942

About fifty members the Hashomer Hatzair were caught up in the wave of arrests in 1941 when Jewish men between the ages of 20 and 50 in Novi Sad were abducted and forced into labour. We heard that they were made to pull rusty nails from planks with their bare hands and endure other humiliations. This nightmare was still with us on January 21, 1942, when the Hungarian Army began its notorious raid in Novi Sad. The Great Raid also swept through Žabalj, Čurug, Nadalj and other places around Novi Sad. The massacre was carried out methodically. On the first two days of the raid the soldiers attacked the houses of the wealthiest people. First they demanded that all jewellery and cash be handed over. After they collected all that they killed everyone, entire families: men, women and children. Wherever they went they left behind them death and devastation. There were firing squads operating in yards, in front of houses and at the sports grounds of the Novi Sad Athletic Club. On the second and, especially, on the third day, the Hungarian troops went from house to house looking for Jews. On the third and last day they rang the bell of our house. This was about 10.30 in the morning. The seven of us, my father, mother, sister, brother, uncle and aunt with a year-old baby and I, came out of the house. There were just a dozen or so people in the street. They took us from Zrinyi Ilona (now Petra Zrinjskog) Street towards the Novi Sad Post Office, then along Železnička Street to the Bristol Hotel, where we turned off into the Strand road. It was very cold, 26° Celsius below zero. We were moving very slowly, stopping in front of each building and the soldiers would ask the doormen and householders about Jews. If they discovered there were any there, they would drive them out into the street. The column grew and grew. Soon there were eighty or ninety of us walking down the Strand road. After we passed what had been a road underpass and arrived at about 200 metres from the entrance to the Strand, we were passed by two army trucks laden with corpses. Many of the people in our column were horrified, some of them

screaming and weeping. At about 2.30 in the afternoon our column stopped about 250 metres from the entrance to the Strand. A column of about forty Jews came walking towards us from the opposite direction. In the first rank we recognised a friend of my mother, Lilika Paunc. The soldiers ordered us to turn around and follow this column. They took us to the former SOKOL House where we were ordered to sit on the floor. They kept us there until about 8.30 p.m., checked our identities, told us that if we "behaved ourselves, everything would be all right" and then allowed us to go home.

While we were in SOKOL House we learnt that the soldiers had led off five people at a time from the column at the entrance to the Strand. They interrupted the killing while they were unloading the corpses from the truck. Later, after the raid, we found out that the people who were taken to the Strand were ordered to undress to their underwear then to kneel on a plank in front of a hole in the ice. They then fired bullets into the back of their heads and threw them into the water. In the spring, when the ice thawed, there were hundreds of corpses floating down the Danube towards Belgrade.

My brother and I calculated that if the raid had gone on for just another hour or so we would no longer be alive. There were nearly a hundred and fifty people in the column of survivors. I'm not sure about this but I think that there are now no more than a dozen of the Jews from that column still alive.

At that time the Jews were taken to forced labour. Those of military age or older were taken to the eastern front for military service. There they dug trenches and did various kinds of dirty work. In general, all trace of them was lost. The law on wearing yellow armbands in Vojvodina was not adopted in Hungary until March, 1944, when the Nazis occupied the country and the government was taken over by the Arrow Cross, headed by Ferenc Szalasi, the Hungarian Nazi. As well as having to wear this sign, Jews were forbidden to enter public institutions, restaurants and so on. The deportations soon began. Jews were taken to assembly centres (the Sloboda Hotel in Novi Sad, the Mill in Subotica, the camp at Bačka Topola and other places) and from these to Auschwitz. My brother, Miroslav-Fric, was at that time in a Hungarian prison in Vac, condemned to several years imprisonment, while my sister, Alis, was hiding in Budapest with forged documents. Of my immediate family, only my father and mother were sent to Auschwitz, but very many more of my extended family met the same fate.

Immediately after the Great Raid, my father sent me to Budapest all on my own. I was barely 16 years of age. My Uncle Albert, who lived in Budapest, rented a maid's room for me near the Western railway station and found me work as an apprentice with a handbag maker. After that I hardly saw him and was left to my own devices. At first I had very little money, just enough to survive. My wages were so low that I was unable to both pay my rent and feed myself. In the beginning I reduced my food intake to baked pumpkin which I bought in a bakery on my way to work. I had learnt almost everything in my trade while I was still working for Đorđević, so I decided to give up my apprenticeship and began working as an unqualified tradesman for several handbag makers in Budapest. By working day and night I could earn more money. I remember that, as an apprentice, my wages were about 320 pengoes a month but, from the beginning of 1943, I earned 720 pengoes per week, which was a pretty considerable amount. By way of comparison, my father made 1,000 pengoes per month for keeping the books in a Novi Sad company owned by a Jew.

During this period I spent a lot of time with my brother Miroslav who moved to Budapest shortly before me and found employment as a messenger in an exclusive shop for fashionable off-the-hook clothes. I loved him a great deal and he influenced my work until he was arrested in November 1942.

In August 1943 I returned from Budapest to Novi Sad where, with the financial support of my parents, I set up my own handbag business. All the master tradesman in Novi Sad, knowing that I was reliable and skilled at my trade, gave me work. I also got jobs from the German Majer, the Czech Šmolka, and the Hungarians Boros and Sandor Tot with whom I worked for a short time as an apprentice. Buying materials with my own resources, I manufactured wallets, briefcases, ladies' handbags and so on for myself and sold them to the owner of the department store in the main street of Novi Sad, making excellent money. From one day's earnings I could afford to buy custom-made boots. I also helped my parents out.

In the autumn of 1943 I again joined the resistance movement. I was secretary of a group whose members included Marta Štark, a Jew and the sister of Egon Štark, who was serving a prison sentence. There was also Mirko Šenberger, who had been jailed once and released a

few months later. He was also a former member of Hashomer Hatzair. Also with us were Miša Šenk, who had been imprisoned in 1941 and already served his sentence, and Karlo Feldšer, known as Felo, both former members of Hashomer Hatzair. My connection was Jozsef Fistes, a Hungarian printer. Our job was to collect the Red Aid, to study Marxist literature and to prepare for joining the Partisans. In March, 1944, after my father was deported, I began looking for opportunities to join the Partisans. I didn't sleep at home. Early in April I established a connection with Smilja Aćimović, who was a member of the Novi Sad city committee of SKOJ, and settled the day for my departure with her. About four days before the scheduled date I met Miša Šenk who told me that he was leaving to join the Partisans in a couple of days and suggested that I go with him. Because I had already set the date for my own departure I told him, and perhaps this was a little pretentious and vain, that I had my own connection and my own arrangements to leave.

Two days after this meeting, Mirko Šenberger asked to meet me. Without thinking much about it I went to see him. It was a brief meeting. He told me that it would be a good idea to sleep at home that night, that "Verica Vla, who is being persecuted" would come and spend the night with me "because I was not compromised". I did as he asked me. Verica Vla didn't arrive, but the Hungarian agents did. At 3.30 a.m. they broke into my apartment and arrested me. They took me to the Great Hall of the former Officers' Club in Novi Sad, on the bank of the Danube. The hall was full of people they had arrested. They were sitting about two metres apart from one another. Among the detainees I saw my connection, Jozsef Fistes, Mirko Šenberger, Marta Štark and other people I knew as friends of Fistes.

The Hungarian agents interrogated me three times. The last interrogation included a confrontation with Šenberger. They asked me to confirm one of his accusations about a woman professor of Hungarian nationality. During the interrogation I was beaten and tortured. They beat me with batons and tortured me with electricity. They wanted me to corroborate the allegations made by my friends who had been arrested and interrogated. I didn't betray anybody. Later, in September 1944, I was sentenced to four years in prison by a tribunal which sat at Bačka Topola.

During my time in the Officers Club the agents didn't interrogate the detainees on Sundays. One Sunday the Hungarians whose job it

was, under the supervision of a sergeant, to see that we didn't talk to one another, began collecting donations from us for the Hungarian soldiers who were fighting on the eastern front. They appointed Marta Štark and two of her comrades to take up the collection. They were followed around by a Hungarian soldier. When they came to me I stood up and, from a small pocket in my trousers, took out a two filler coin and handed it to her. Marta laughed out loud. When the sergeant asked why she was laughing she answered loudly "Because he gave two fillers". Hearing this many of the detainees joined in the laughter. The sergeant punished me with "catching flies". This meant I had to stand beside the wall on one foot, hold both my hands above my head and continually open and close them. At every sign of fatigue a rifle butt was smashed into my back. I caught flies for a long time until eventually someone else who needed disciplining replaced me. Barely two minutes after I was replaced the agent in charge came into the hall. He asked the sergeant why my replacement was being punished and was told that he was undisciplined. When he heard this explanation, the agent took the detainee with him and beat him so badly that he was returned to the hall wrapped in a blanket.

Early in May, after the enquiry was finished and the report signed, the Hungarian police transferred us to an SS concentration camp near Bačka Topola. There, in a large room reserved for men, I found three mattresses with my father's name and surname on them. This was how I knew that my father, together with other Jews from Vojvodina, had been in this camp before me and that from this camp he had been taken to Auschwitz where he was suffocated in a gas chamber.

DACHAU

As the Soviet Army and the Yugoslav National Liberation Army began approaching Bačka Topola, the camp was evacuated and the inmates transported to Komarom, a small border town in Western Hungary which looked out over what was then Czechoslovakia. The Hungarians brought inmates from other prisons here to the dungeons of the nearby fortress. There I encountered a number of comrades who had been arrested and sentenced as early as 1941. The Hungarians handed all the prisoners from Komarom over to the Gestapo at the beginning of November, 1944.

We travelled for two full days in cattle wagons, with no food or drink. The men were sent to the Dachau concentration camp, while the women were first held in a place called Alah, then transported to Bergen-Belsen. Of our group of about two hundred men, only about twenty survived. There were more survivors from the women, about fifty of them.

A Dismal Task. *From a collection of drawings by France Audoul, a French prisoner, No. 27933 in the Ravensbrück camp, which she made on paper stolen from the SS*

As soon as we arrived in the camp we were forced to stand on the *Appellplatz*, the assembly ground, for three or four hours. It was cold and drizzling. After two days of being transported in cattle wagons this was easier to endure. We approached the camp administration in groups of five. They confiscated anything we had which was valuable, in my case a gold ring which my grandmother had given me for my bar mitzvah and a gold chain. We were recorded in the prison register. By an extraordinary coincidence, Dr Eva Čavčić (née Cuker) once

brought me from Yad Vashem a paper containing our names. Hers as she was giving information about women at Alah and mine when I was registered at Dachau.

After registration we were taken to the showers where they shaved our heads and then drew a line down the middle of our scalps to make us more easily recognisable. Then we were sprayed with jets of hot water. They then disinfected us with a solution (perhaps chlorine or lime). This burnt us terribly, in the armpits, around our genitals and anus. Finally we were given our prison uniforms: trousers, a shirt and cap. Every prisoner was given the number with which he was registered in the administration. Under the number they sewed the identification of the group. A red triangle showed that we were political prisoners and a narrow yellow ribbon above it identified us as Jews. From this moment, as far as the prison authorities were concerned, we ceased to be human beings and became numbers. The only personal belongings we were allowed to keep were our shoes. Mine were stolen that same evening because I left them under the bed where I slept. Until the liberation I wore wooden prison clogs.

The camp consisted of two rows of thirty barracks. Each was divided into four two-room sections with a washroom which had several toilet seats and washbasins. In each room there were three tiers of beds. When we arrived in Dachau our group of prisoners was packed into two rooms of a barracks section. There was a blanket on each bed. We weren't cold. We slept close together, body to body. We rose very early, perhaps at 3.30 a.m., I don't remember exactly. Then we stood in front of our barracks, ten or more in a row, while the *kapo* kept counting and recounting us. Some time later we were given our first meal, what they called "Hitler coffee". The morning roll calls and standing in line were what passed for daily exercise. Our food consisted of a litre of soup with bones at midday and half a litre of soup without bones for dinner. In addition we also had a daily ration of bread which kept getting smaller and smaller until, by April, it completely vanished, along with the evening soup.

MY FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH THE HOSPITAL

The German criminal who was *kapo* of our section drew up the first list for what they called the *Arbeitskommandos*, the labour par-

ties. My name was on it. But there was a rule in Dachau that, to protect the camp against epidemics, any prisoner with a temperature above 38° Centigrade was to be sent for an examination at the hospital. This consisted of a number of barracks in which the rooms were all wards for various illness. Each had beds in two tiers. The medical personnel were inmates, doctors from the occupied countries of Europe. These doctors had to treat patients, especially those who were admitted to the hospital, according to the rules of the German authorities, which had been drawn up by German SS doctors.

It was thanks to this regime in Dachau that I survived the Holocaust. I arrived in the camp with tonsillitis and a high temperature. I was immediately sent to the hospital and thus avoided going out with the *Arbeitskommando* to which I had been assigned. Nobody from that group returned alive! When I returned to the barracks after, I think, four or five days in the hospital, I did everything to give myself a high temperature. I ran around the small space in front of the barracks, sat sweating in the snow and on the cold concrete. I came out of the baths all wet in the cold wind and so on. I succeeded and, a few days later, probably in early December, was admitted to hospital again with pneumonia and with a temperature over 40° C. They treated me with great care. When they discovered that I spoke German, they brought me a book to read, B. Traven's *Das Tottenschiff*, (The Death Ship). I read it during my second, three-week stay in hospital.

MY HEROIC DAY

I returned to the block at the end of December 1944 or early in January 1945. I think that Dachau was then under quarantine. The *Arbeitskommandos* were no longer being sent out. The hems of our clothes crawled with lice. Twice a day we had to undergo stringent delousing as they attempted to exterminate the vermin. The food was more meagre, and the elderly and exhausted prisoners were dying in the block. Theire bodies would then be washed and a label with their number attached to the big toe of the right foot. They were collected and taken away every day. Again I made every effort to return to the hospital and again I succeeded. The doctors found that I had a middle ear inflammation and needed an operation. The doctor who examined me was a well-known surgeon from Budapest. When he discovered that I spoke Hungarian, he addressed me as "son". I prepared for my oper-

ation by asking another inmate who had already had surgery what kind of pain I would have to endure. He described the operating procedure to me. I was too weak to be given general anaesthesia, so the doctor trepanned my skull with an inadequate local anaesthetic, talking to me during the operation, asking me to hold my head still. I managed not to cry out once during the procedure. Afterwards the doctor congratulated me: "I've never had a patient like you before!" As soon as he said this I burst into tears. I wept for about ten minutes, all the time saying through my tears:

"Doctor, I don't want to cry, I don't even feel any pain, but I can't stop."

"Never mind, son, you just cry to your heart's content."

After the surgery my temperature fell. The doctor was pleased with my recovery. However I had problems with the male nurse, a Pole. When I asked for a bedpan he refused to bring me one, saying: "I'm not going to wait on a Jew. If you want a bedpan, go and get one yourself". I didn't reply. Two days after the operation, still very weak, I got up and helped myself. It was very cold, January 1945. Again my temperature soared. The next morning when the doctor visited and saw that I had a high temperature he asked me what was going on. I told him about the way the nurse had behaved. He made no comment, but summoned the nurse to the doctors' room and beat him. The whole ward heard his screams. A few minutes later the nurses from the laboratory came and took my sputum for analysis. Then, after an hour, I was taken from the section for ear problems to the ward for tubercular patients. This time, instead of three weeks, I stayed in hospital for a month and a half. Even better, I was put on a "fortified diet" and no longer lost weight. Most important of all was the fact that I was lying in hospital during the period when typhoid fever raged through the Dachau barracks.

I left the hospital on March 1, 1945. I was returned to the block and, when I arrived, I could hardly believe my eyes. There were barely thirty inmates in my section. There were no more morning roll calls, no more *Arbeitskommandos* and no more regular food. Most of the men in the block were French and Belgians who received parcels from the International Red Cross. I remember one of my companions in the barracks who was a very obese Czech. The others looked at him as a marvel and would feel his belly. A few Russian officers and I were in the most difficult position. We received no parcels and, as the days

went by, we were given less and less food. From April we no longer received bread and the daily food was reduced to half a litre or a litre of soup. Every night we would hear heavy artillery. We felt that the end of our suffering was near and in this way it was easier for us to endure the hunger which tormented us more and more. By the middle of April our barracks shook from the artillery fire.

LIBERATION

On April 22 or 23, the SS men took us outside the walls of Dachau. Each prisoner was given a paper sleeping bag and a food parcel the size of a shoebox from the International Red Cross. First they put us into passenger coaches and then, when we arrived in Munich, they moved us to the freight and cattle wagons.

We had no idea where they were taking us or why. It was only in 1998, 53 years later, that I found out (after a visit from an associate of a Munich institute which was researching the history of Dachau) that, on Himmler's orders, they were taking us to be shot. Luckily this transport, with about 2,500 people (according to the researcher there were 5,000 of us) didn't reach its destination. It was blocked by the advance of the Allied armies. The power lines had been cut and the electric locomotive of our train stopped near the river Isar. On the right bank of the river was the village of Seefeld and on the left, Mittenwald. The troops escorting us weren't SS, or at least they didn't wear SS uniforms. First they drove us to Seefeld, then returned us to the bank of the Isar. A number of prisoners, myself included, tried to get away from the transport. We planned to climb a hill about 150 metres high and hide in the forest to wait for the liberation. The guards shot after us. Exhausted as we were, one Pole and I managed to climb the hill and took shelter in a wooden hut.

It wasn't easy staying alive through the following day and night. First our hut was visited by German officers and soldiers with pistols and rifles aimed at us, as they fled before the rapidly advancing Allies. Every ten or fifteen minutes there would be new German officers and soldiers. They saw us, they could have killed us, but they didn't. Secondly, the Allied army swept the terrain before them with mortar fire, which kept getting closer and closer. The grenades whistled and fell close about us. Only when the mortars moved away from the hut did we realise that we had also survived this danger.

We waited for the dawn to break. Then in the morning we came down from the hut to the road along the river. There, on one side of the road we found white, and on the other side black American soldiers. Reaching the group of white soldiers I said the only thing I could think of in English: "How do you do?" One of them muttered something and went to the trailer of his jeep, took out a tin of ham and eggs and pushed it into my hands. I looked at him and gestured that I was thirsty. Again he turned around, went to the trailer, took out another tin, poured hot water into the contents and handed me a tin full of hot cocoa.

FIRST DAYS OF FREEDOM AND HOMECOMING

The American military authorities sent the camp inmates to a barracks not far from Mittenwald. There I again met my comrades from Komarom and stayed with them in one of the rooms. In the attic we found German military uniforms which we put on, throwing our camp clothing away. We moved around freely in and out of the barracks, as much as our strength permitted. We were also given tobacco rations, a packet or two of cigarettes each week. We had some problems with the food. The Americans allowed us to take our meals in the army canteen. The starved camp survivors threw themselves on the strong and greasy food but their exhausted bodies were not able to cope with it. Only three or four of us out of the total eighteen didn't end up in the hospital. Half of the group died after the liberation, just because of the food. I have to admit it wasn't my intelligence, my moderation or any other virtue which saved me. I went to the canteen along with my comrades but, at the very entrance, was sick from the smell of the food. I couldn't go in.

We resolved our food problem in our own way. In the barracks compound we found pits where potatoes were stored. In the room where we slept we had a stove and we found spices in the attic. We exchanged our cigarette rations with the Mittenwald locals for large tins of beef. Willy Gross from Budapest and I cooked potato and beef soups.

On my second day in barracks, when I weighed barely 42 kilos and was still wearing my prison clothes, I was walking around the yard and saw Karlo Feldšer, one of my companions from the Novi Sad Hashomer Hatzair. He was well dressed and looked exactly as he did

when we used to spend time together. I approached him, happy to see him and addressed him by the nickname which only his close friends knew: "Felo! Felo!"

He stopped, stared long and hard at me and finally asked "And who are you?"

"But don't you recognise me? I'm Jehuda!" I replied, tears running down my face. With that, he also broke down. We embraced and talked for a long time. Among other things, he told me that he had been in the army barracks at Garmischpartenkirchen and that Eli Ordentlih and his younger brother were also there. They were also from the Novi Sad *ken*. He told me that in the barracks there were many liberated Partisans from various camps. They formed "Tito's Company". Motivated by this news, I left the barracks outside Mittenwald a month later, when I had gained some strength, and went myself to Garmischpartenkirchen to join the company.

I returned to Yugoslavia, to Novi Sad, together with Feldšer, Eli Ordentlih and the members of Tito's Company in the middle of August, 1945.

Eva LEVI-JOVOVIĆ

LIBERATION IN AUSCHWITZ[1]

Eva Levi was born on January 25, 1924, at Žabalj in Bačka. Her father, Dr Julije Levi (born 1884), a lawyer, was killed in Bečej during the Great Raid and her mother, Riza Levi, née Gutman (born 1896) died in Birkenau, together with her sister Vera (born 1930). In the Holocaust she lost twenty members of her immediate family.

She was completing the seventh grade of secondary school when the Hungarians occupied Bačka and matriculated during the occupation, in June, 1942. She graduated from the Medical Faculty of Zagreb University in May, 1951, and immediately began specialisation in bacteriology at the Public Health Institute of Serbia. She was appointed assistant professor of microbiology and parasitology at the Medical Faculty of Niš University in 1961 and worked there until her retirement, since when she has continued to live in Niš.

Eva Levi-Jovović is an honorary member of the Academy of Medical Sciences of the Serbian Society of Physicians. In 1958 she married Ivan Jovović, a lawyer and former inmate of the Goli Otok prison. She has a son, Dragiša (born 1961).

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[1] "When the Soviets arrived in Auschwitz on January 26, in three camps they found only 2,819 invalids and the majority of these camp inmates they managed to cure." (Ward Rutherford, *Genocide: The Jews in Europe, 1939-1945*. Ballantine Books, New York, 1973)

My father was the eldest of seven children of a small village merchant in Gospođinci, about twenty kilometres from Novi Sad. He attended six grades of primary school there before his father decided he should commute to secondary school in Novi Sad. He matriculated in 1904 and enrolled at the Faculty of Law at Budapest University. Because of the high cost of living in Budapest he continued his studies at the Faculty of Law at the university in Koložvar (now Kluž) in Romania. After graduating and completing his articles he passed the Bar examination in 1912 or 1913 and set up a practice as a solicitor in Žabalj. In 1914 he was mobilised into the Austro-Hungarian Army and sent to the Russian front. He was in the fortress of Przemysl when it was besieged in 1915. The siege continued for several months before the city fell to the Russians and my father was taken prisoner. Przemysl is about 250 kilometres from Auschwitz as the crow flies. If I were a believer I would call this the finger of God or the finger of fate.

As the eldest son of parents who were already of advanced years and having many concerns about his younger siblings, he twice tried to escape from the prison camp. After his second unsuccessful attempt he was sent to the Asian part of Russia, to Krasnoyarsk, and from there to Siberia. There he spent the hard years of the birth of the Soviet Union. Not until 1921 did he leave Vladivostok to return home by ship. Back in Žabalj he reopened his solicitor's office and married my mother in 1922.

My mother was born and raised in Žabalj, where she finished primary school and what was then called junior high school. From her early childhood she had to help her mother with the domestic chores because my grandmother was running the shop after the death of her husband. There were more obligations when, during the war, my mother's sister came to her grandmother with three small children, aged one, three and five, because her husband was at the front.

I had a sister, Vera, six years younger. As a child she caught every possible contagious disease (measles, chickenpox, rubella, diphtheria and scarlet fever), all of which resulted in the weakening of her heart muscle. Despite this she was always cheerful and a good student.

Our family lived very modestly. During the spring and summer when the rural Vojvodina people had no time to engage in lawsuits, my mother had to work magic to meet all the basic needs of the household from the extremely modest income my father brought in.

I still remember one morning there was just enough milk in the house for three cups. Two were for us children obviously and, while I was preparing my books for school in the next room, I accidentally overheard our parents each insisting that the other take the third. My mother knew that my father would be kept at the court long into the afternoon and my father didn't want his wife to miss out on this very modest breakfast. Because of this I could never understand some of my school friends when they boasted that if they didn't feel like milk for breakfast they would pour it down the drain when nobody was looking, in order to avoid arguments. We were a happy and harmonious family.

I completed primary school in Žabalj and the first two years of secondary school in Bečej, sitting private exams. Because my sister had begun primary school and would be starting high school in four years, we moved to Bečej in 1936.

Life went on as usual, although we kept hearing more and more about the difficult position of Jews in Germany. Some distant relatives of my mother, having fled from Hamburg, came to Žabalj and told us about the harassment and problems they had experienced in Germany. One evening my father came home from a lecture on this theme given by an official of the Union of Jewish Religious Communities in Belgrade. I remember the words he heard at this lecture, which did little to hearten us.

"The Jews in Austria also said that what was happening in Unter den Linden Street in Berlin would never happen in Vienna. Don't think that what Jews are now going through in front of Stephansdom in Vienna may not happen one day in Knez Mihailova Street in Belgrade." I have to point out, though, that we had never experienced any anti-Semitic provocations in multinational Vojvodina before the war began.

At home we observed Jewish customs to a moderate extent and never did any serious jobs on Saturdays. While we lived in Žabalj, where there were ten or so Jewish families, my father went to the synagogue on Fridays to make up the *minyan*, the quorum for the service. We did, however, strictly observe Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and the first two days of Passover, when the entire family would go to my grandfather in Gospođinci for Seder evening. At home we also had little saving boxes where we put money to buy land in Palestine.

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The beginning of the occupation found us in Bečej, where the Hungarian troops marched in on April 10, 1941, with no particular resistance. "Hungary is certainly a legal state", my father said, trying to reassure us. Just how far that was from reality at the time is shown by the fact that, as a Jewish solicitor, he was immediately banned from practising his profession. He was sent, at the age of 57 years, to forced labour in our town but, after a few weeks of being mistreated there, was allowed to go home. In order to earn something he began to give lessons to less successful secondary school students. He taught mainly Latin because, under the Hungarian occupation, this was one of the major subjects in classical secondary schools.

He was abducted from our home on January 10, 1942, when the Great Raid began in Bečej. This was the operation carried out by Hungarian Fascists to destroy the Šajkaš Partisan detachment which also served as a general measure to persecute both Serbs and Jews. We learnt later that several hundred people, after being brutally tortured, had been murdered and their bodies thrown under the ice of the frozen Tisza river, at the lock where the Danube-Tisza canal joins the river. The temperature was 40° Centigrade below zero.

My mother, sister and I survived the Great Raid but now, as well as attending school regularly, I had to take over my father's private lessons because, in the extreme mid-winter, we were left in the house with very little firewood and even less money.

My sister and I continued to attend school. We endured various degrees of harassment, but I finished seventh grade of high school and matriculated with excellent grades in June, 1942.

The next two years or so were relatively peaceful. My sister continued her schooling and my mother took in two Jewish boys after the relatives with whom they had been living died in the Great Raid. I continued giving lessons and during the mornings, when my students were at school, I would do the shopping to spare my mother from anti-Semitic insults and provocations.

In the middle of March 1944, we suddenly noticed that at every checkpoint there was now a fully-armed German soldier as well as a Hungarian. The German Army had flooded into Hungary and the relatively tolerant Hungarian government was replaced by members of

the Nyilas, the ultra-right wing Arrow Cross. It was obvious that nothing good lay ahead.

One day, early in April, a Mr Varga visited us. This gentleman, with his wife and son had moved from Sarajevo to Bečej in 1942. They were Seventh Day Adventists. Mr Varga believed that, as a Hungarian, he would be better off in Bačka. However his son, although Hungarian, spoke the language very badly. After he was given many poor grades in school, his father came and asked me to teach him. With the greatest effort I managed to get him through and the boy succeeded in passing the year. The following year they moved to Vrbas. Then Mr Varga, knowing what lay ahead for the Jews, came to Bečej and offered to take me and my sister to Vrbas by pretending that he was related to my mother. He thought that Vera was old enough not to betray her origin. When my mother and I put this idea to my sister she rejected it out of hand, saying that she wanted us to remain together to await our common fate. To this day I can't forgive myself for not having been more resolute. I should have forced my sister to go with Mr Varga, particularly because the liberation of the whole of Bačka and Vrbas was only six or seven months away.

The Germans, backed up by the Hungarian Arrow Cross (or perhaps it was the other way around), were very fast, thorough and efficient. Within just a month they collected all the Jews who had survived the Great Raid, the men who had not been taken to labour camps and even those people whose parents had converted to Catholicism after World War One. We Jews didn't see such people as one of us. We were first taken to the synagogue in Szeged, then they kept us in the yard and storehouses of a factory in Baja and eventually, on May 29, we arrived in Auschwitz. Mengele immediately selected my mother and my sister, who had turned fourteen on May 21 in Baja, for the gas chamber. I, being able-bodied, was sent to Birkenau.

How can I describe our suffering in Auschwitz without repeating the same stories which have been told so many times already? Slave labour under the scorching sun and in the freezing November rain, food which didn't meet even our most basic needs, humiliation and the destruction of the last remnants of human dignity, hours of standing in ranks for counting at the *Zahlappell*. All of this accompanied by the fear of Mengele's visits and the possibility of being sent to the gas chamber. This has all been described in the memoirs of the survivors as well as by literary figures such as Erich Maria Remarque in his

Spark of Life. So instead I shall present some of my thoughts about things which were not at all clear to me at twenty years of age. Nor are they today, when I am well into my eighties.

Why did the German SS need the unthinkable, unnecessary, insolent lies which they hurled at us from the very beginning. "Don't carry your suitcases, just write your names and addresses on them so we can send them to your homes", they said, as they threw us out of the wagons in which we had been transported to the camp. When we asked them why they were separating us and when we would see our relatives after the first selection, their reply was "As soon as tonight. It wouldn't be proper for the young girls to bathe, to shower, together with the children and the older men."

Nor could I understand the crudity and arrogance of the older camp inmates. I don't mean the German women criminals, but the Jewish women who were sometimes put in charge of a block. On one occasion, when she was in a good mood, I put this question to Marika from Czechoslovakia, who was the *Blockalteste*, the head of our block. Her reply was succinct: "For the past two years you've been sleeping on feather pillows while I suffered in Auschwitz."

Eta, the Polish Jew who ran our block, would often beat us mercilessly for the slightest of reasons. One night, when we returned from work, we found the Germans in an uproar, running in all directions. We waited for hours to be counted and for our festive "march" past the camp orchestra to go to our barracks. It was not until about midnight that we were allowed to return to the barracks. Eta met us, tears streaming down her face (and tears in the camp were a very rare occurrence). "I thought you wouldn't come back," she said. We forgave her everything because of those tears. Later we learnt that this abnormal waiting and the counting and recounting had been because the *Sonderkommandos*, the Jews specially chosen to work in the gas chambers and the crematorium, had rebelled. These people took the bodies of the dead from the gas chambers, searched them for any hidden jewellery, took their rings, pulled out gold teeth and transported the corpses to the crematorium. After working there for three months they were also poisoned by the Zyklon B gas so that they might not live to be witnesses. This, to my knowledge, was the only rebellion that happened in the camp, but I believe that none of the rebels remained alive. Their only satisfaction was that, in the course of their mutiny, they managed to kill a few SS guards.

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At first I had strength and the will to live and I held up fairly well until October. But as the cold and rainy weather settled in, I began to grow weaker. Our clothing consisted of only one set of underwear and our dresses, which we kept on at night so that they would be dry by the morning. On still nights we could occasionally hear distant artillery fire and, occasionally, there were "visits" by the Allied bombers. As I was no longer able to stand on my feet, and the selections and gas chambers were no longer operating (the Germans had destroyed the building in order to leave no evidence), I was admitted to the camp hospital on December 8, my mother's birthday. The food in the hospital was even worse, but the rest and the fact that I was no longer exposed to the rain helped to improve my health. Despite this, when the liberation came (I saw my first Red Army soldier on January 27, 1945), I was still in such a terrible condition that they wanted to photograph me as an example of a living skeleton. I eventually escaped being immortalised in this way because they found another woman who was in an even worse condition.

Transportation home did not begin until March. Crossing Czechoslovakia, Romania and Banat (Bela Crkva and Vršac), I arrived home in the middle of May.

I was again in Bečej, the war was over and I, by mere chance, had remained alive, alone, without my family.

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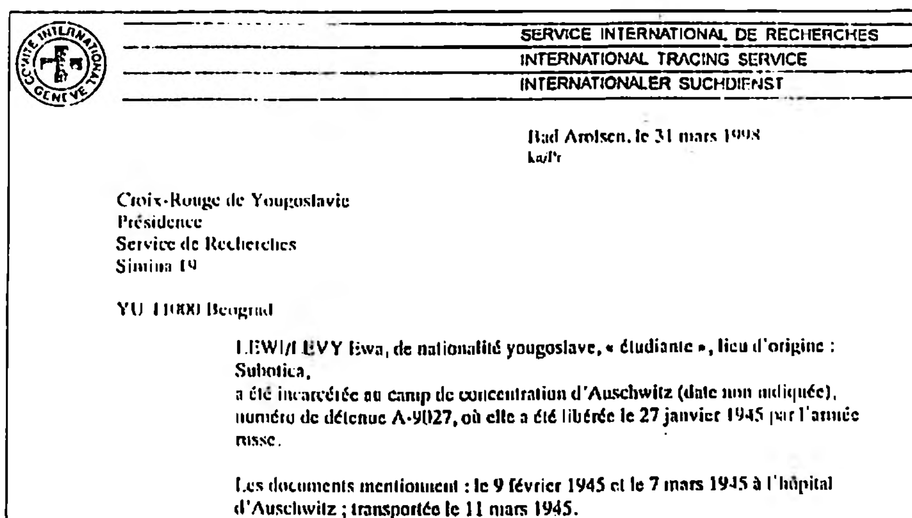
Finally, I would like to mention a few incidents connected with the suffering of Jews under the Fascist regime, although some of these took place twenty years after the end of the second world war.

The first happened in May, 1945, the first week after my return to Bečej. There was a memorial service for all the victims of the Great Raid and, although it was very difficult for me, I went to the lock on the Danube-Tisza canal. As I walked through the town I noticed posters in the windows of some shops with excerpts from the interrogations and the sentence handed down at the time on the local dogcatcher who had been involved in killing people in the Great Raid. In his statement he named people whom he had killed on January 10, 1942 and whose bodies he had pushed under the ice: "Engineer Edo Bulat (reserve captain,

the last military commander in the retreat of our army who, after the collapse escaped and returned home in order not to be taken prisoner); Boško Petrović (bank clerk, before the war he had the highest rank of any reserve officer in Bečej, lieutenant-colonel, I think); Braca Davidovac (just graduated from secondary school, or perhaps already at university, the elder son of Velinka Davidovac, the owner of a large estate in Bečej) and an elderly Jewish solicitor whose name I don't remember."


SERVICE INTERNATIONAL DE RECHERCHES
INTERNATIONAL TRACING SERVICE
INTERNATIONALER SUCHDIENST

Bad Arolsen, le 31 mars 1998
ka/Pr

Croix-Rouge de Yougoslavie
Présidence
Service de Recherches
Simina 19

YU 11000 Beograd

LEWI/LEVY Ewa, de nationalité yougoslave, « étudiante », lieu d'origine : Subotica,
a été incarcérée au camp de concentration d'Auschwitz (date non indiquée), numéro de détenue A-9027, où elle a été libérée le 27 janvier 1945 par l'armée russe.

Les documents mentionnent : le 9 février 1945 et le 7 mars 1945 à l'hôpital d'Auschwitz ; transportée le 11 mars 1945.

Letter from the International Tracing Service in Bad Arolson, Germany, confirming that Eva Levi was an inmate of the Auschwitz camp

This elderly Jewish solicitor was my father, the only Jewish lawyer seized on January 10, 1942.

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In 1960 or late 1959 I was sent by the Union of Veterans to Frankfurt am Main to negotiate with representatives of I.G. Farbenindustrie for compensation of former Auschwitz prisoners. I should immediately point out two things:

- The Germans explicitly asked to speak to a former camp inmate because, as they said, they did not want to talk to politicians.
- I have never been particularly active in the Union of Veterans. I joined the organisation of veterans of the liberation war only when the division for former prisoners and internees was set up.

I was accompanied on this trip by Dr Smiljanić, an advisor to the Union of Veterans who was well versed in compensation issues. One free afternoon we visited the German antifascist association VVN (*Vereinigung der Nazi Verfolgten* – the Association of Nazi Persecution Victims). We were received very cordially. Their representative began explaining that not all Germans had followed Hitler, as was demonstrated by the fact that about 400,000 Germans had also passed through the concentration camps. I said that I felt sorry for anyone who had been in a concentration camp and mentioned that perhaps their struggle in Germany may have been even more difficult because they were fighting their own government whereas we in the occupied countries were fighting Fascism and an occupier and these are never welcome. I presented statistics to them as an objective criterion: of about 60 million Germans in pre-war Germany, only six or seven per thousand had been in concentration camps, while in Yugoslavia, 1,700,00 people from a total population of 14 million people perished, more than 12 per cent. As for European Jews in general, of approximately nine or ten million, according to various sources, between 4.5 and 6 million people died, between 50 and 60 per cent.

It is obvious that the gentlemen in VVN accepted and remembered my thumbnail calculation because, about forty years later, in May, 1999, I received from the same association their best wishes ("*Viele herzliche Grüsse an Frau Prof. Dr. Eva Levi*"). This was sent through the Faculty of Law at Niš University which had contacted VVN during the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia in order to provide objective information to the German public about these events.

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In the mid-1970s, the Union of Veterans organised a tour of Auschwitz. As far as I remember the occasion was the opening of a memorial pavilion in honour of Yugoslavia. During the tour of our pavilion I noticed on one wall a photographed section of the list which the Germans fastidiously kept while prisoners were being tattooed. My name "Eva Levi – Yug. A 9027" (the camp number tattooed on my left forearm) was underlined in red ink. I wanted to photograph this detail but my hands kept shaking and I had to ask my good friend Zora Raković, now deceased, to kneel down so that I could rest my camera on her shoulder. Later many of my colleagues and associates at the

Medical Faculty in Niš told me that they had seen my name in Auschwitz during their stay in Poland and their tour of the concentration camp.

After the Yugoslav pavilion we toured the other pavilions. It was the Polish pavilion which left the deepest impression on me. In it, as in a series of shop windows, were exhibited piles of hair, suitcases on which the owners had written their names and addresses on the orders of the SS, piles of clothing, spectacles and orthopaedic appliances. I looked at all this in silence, fervently hoping that I should not discover something that may have belonged to my late mother or sister. When we came to the last exhibit, with children's toys (I had at home a son who was then three or four years old), I was overwhelmed by an attack of sobbing such as I had never before experienced. My friends led me from the pavilion and, for me, the tour was over.

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"Forgive we must, forget we must not," they say. But can we forgive the death of millions of people poisoned or suffocated in the gas chambers or killed in the heavy bombing of women and children in undefended cities, people who starved or froze to death in Leningrad under siege or the approaches to Moscow? Is the mere memory of evil sufficient for it never to be resuscitated? I am not a pessimist by nature because if I had not always had some flicker of optimism I would certainly not have survived Auschwitz. But is merely remembering, not forgetting, enough to prevent the vampire of evil from rising again?

Vera OBRADOVIĆ

FROM SOMBOR TO UPPSALA

Vera Obradović was the second child of Dezider and Julia Rip (née Breder). She was born on February 8, 1922, at Bezdan. Her older sister Ružica was born in the same town on September 10, 1914. In 1923 the family moved to Sombor.

Vera lost her sister, Ružica, a young doctor, on March 25, 1942, when she was hanged in Kolašin. She lost her mother immediately on her arrival in Auschwitz on May 2, 1944. Her father died in the Wüstergierdorf camp, in Silesia, in June 1944. Vera, the only surviving member of the family, returned to Sombor in 1945 and married Branislav Obradović the same year. They settled in Belgrade where she graduated from the Belgrade University Economics Faculty. She spent her entire working career in Belgrade.

I lived in a happy, stable family in the beautiful town of Sombor, famous for its broad streets and a wealth of greenery, parks and flowers. The town was also known for its many cultural monuments. It was very much a town for students. During my time at school there was a Teachers' College with boarding facilities, a secondary school where my sister and I spent eight years, the Commercial Academy and several primary schools. Between the two wars, many Jews from the surrounding villages and neighbouring countries came to live in Sombor.

Before the deportation there were more than 1,200 Jews in Sombor, of whom 836 were murdered. There was also a large synagogue and a separate temple for Orthodox Jews.

At school, I was the only Jewish pupil in the class. Even before the outbreak of World War Two, anti-Semitic excesses had begun to emerge in the school. In the higher boys' classes there were students from the surrounding villages which had a predominantly *Volksdeutsche* population. The majority of them were already oriented towards the National Socialists.

At the time there were still may things emerging which I didn't understand. Nor did my parents acquaint me with the political situation, wanting to spare me from evil thoughts and deeds. However there was one incident that indicated something very serious was going on. I remember that Dr Gergelj, my uncle Dr Rip and Mr Brajer gathered in our house. I think this was in 1939. They withdrew into the living room and talked behind closed doors for a long time. After this meeting all of them looked very gloomy. It was only after the war that I learnt that they were a group who had been chosen by the Jewish community in Sombor to go to Bezdan taking medicines, food and other necessities to help the Jews living in barges on the Danube. These were refugees from Germany and Austria who wanted to reach Palestine by travelling down the Danube and across the Black Sea. Because my father and uncle had grown up in Bezdan, they were chosen for this group helping the refugees. They applied for resident permits for these unfortunate people but, apart from humanitarian and medical assistance, nothing could be done for them.

I matriculated from high school in 1940 and enthusiastically set off for Belgrade where, that autumn, I enrolled in the Medical Faculty of Belgrade University. By October that year I was forced to abandon my study because the *Numerus Clausus*, the Korošec Law, had come into force and under this no more than five per cent of students enrolling at universities could be Jewish. Thus, for me, began the time of persecution, suffering, arrests, plunder and murder.

My only sister, Dr Ružica Rip, just out of medical school, was arrested in February, 1941, and taken to the notorious Glavnjač Prison. She was arrested at Belgrade railway station because she was carrying some compromising material printed in Sombor. She and I lived at 28 Lamartinova Street, close to the clinic. This is where Ružica used to live as a student and, later, as a young doctor. After her arrest the noto-

rious Special Police agent, Kosmajac, visited me with two other agents. He interrogated me but I really had no idea who had given the material to Ružica nor who she was supposed to deliver it to in Belgrade. I later found out from my sister that, even while being beaten, she had not betrayed anyone. Kosmajac slapped my face so hard that I staggered and fell into the arms of my good landlady, Marija. I was allowed to visit my sister in prison, with an agent present. Every day I took her lunch from the canteen for Vojvodina students. My sister was released from prison three days before the attack on Belgrade.

Ružica and I were together in Belgrade when the city was bombed on April 6, 1941, and it was not until the end of April that we returned to Sombor. In May Ružica returned to Belgrade at the summons of the Communist Party, of which she had been a member since 1939. However she had to leave the capital because her prison file had been given to the police and she ran the risk of being arrested again. She fled to Montenegro.

After the uprising in Montenegro, Ružica moved from Podgorica to Kolašin. She was the only doctor in the Komski detachment and she treated the wounded, organised a hospital in Kolašin and conducted courses for nurses. The Chetniks captured her at Crkvina, where she refused to leave the wounded. She was taken to the Kolašin prison and condemned to death. She was hanged on March 25, 1942. We heard about this tragedy the same year, but not the whole truth, just that Ružica was no longer alive. My parents had already learned of their daughter's death before they were deported to the camp.

NO FAREWELLS

During the Hungarian occupation my father was frequently taken into forced labour. The Germans entered Hungary on March 19, 1944, and at the beginning of April he was taken to Bačka Topola, then to Baja, then to Auschwitz and from there to Wüstergierdorf. The last time I saw him was at Bačka Topola on April 29, 1944, where I also spent a night in a wagon on my way to Auschwitz. I managed to get in touch with my father. I gave him the food which we had brought with us from Sombor the previous day. He took the news that my mother and I had been taken to a camp very hard. We barely managed to exchange a few words because he was continually begging me to arrange for him to meet my mother. I didn't even say goodbye to my father and was already hurrying to get my mother. However the guard was deaf to my

entreaties and wouldn't allow us to leave the barracks. We were not able to say goodbye to my father who stayed behind waiting for us.

Early in the morning of April 29, 1944, we left Bačka Topola in wagons, headed for Auschwitz. My mother was 49 years old. While we were in Sombor, they had selected women from 15 to 45 years of age for work. So that we could stay together, my mother said that she was 45. Unfortunately we remained together for a very short time. On May 2 we arrived in Auschwitz. There we were met by an SS doctor with an entourage of SS men. Later we learnt that this was Dr Mengele. Our transport, the first from Hungary, numbered about three thousand people. We were divided into two groups. I was on the side which was to go directly to death, to the gas chamber. A German moved a few of us younger girls to the other side, which meant that we would live for some time longer. After they separated me from my mother I called out to her at the top of my voice "Mama, come over here!" She came to our group and we held tightly to each other, but she was the sixth in the rank. I didn't know that the Germans used ranks of five to count. I discovered this later when we stood for hours at dawn every day and again on return from work while being counted. When the German came he asked who was sixth in the rank. My mother was taken back to the other group. She was killed and cremated the same day. I never said goodbye to her either. Each time I was the last one my parents saw. I survived, but 48 members of our immediate and extended family perished.

DODGING DR MENGELE

I had been in Auschwitz since May 2, 1944, and had been through the entire procedure of admission to the camp. They tattooed the number 81113 on my left arm. After quarantine I was assigned to work in Union-Weberei. This was a workshop working for the military industry. Early in August I fell ill with typhoid fever and was admitted to the hospital, which was a barracks for infectious diseases. There was no treatment, no medicines. I don't know how I managed to get well, as I left the hospital early because of the frequent selections. I was helped in this by a woman doctor from Sombor who I knew only as Ibika. I was put into the *Schonungsblock*, a special barracks for convalescents and escaped the selection in the hospital, but Dr Mengele came to this block as well. I saved myself by jumping through the window and remaining hidden until he had finished his selection.

In the infectious diseases block were those who had scarlet fever, diphtheria, typhoid fever and other contagious diseases. Many who recovered from one contagious disease would catch another, unless they were already immune, and would die very quickly. Those convalescents who managed to survive the infection were forced to give blood for the manufacture of vaccines for the German soldiers. Dr Mengele was tireless; he kept making selections, except when he was occupied by his "scientific research", which was always experiments *in vivo* and with twins. He was always running around the hospital, selecting the weak and the sick and sending them to the gas chamber. He had nothing to gain from this category of the people selected. With the newcomers it was a different matter: they took their gold and other valuables. But Mengele wasn't even satisfied with this booty. At one time he allegedly said *"Bei der Familie Wallenstein ist viel mehr Gallenstein, als Edelstein"*. (The Wallenstein family have more gallstones than gemstones).

Late in the summer of 1944, Birkenau was visited by an international commission of the Red Cross. The camp was cleaned up thoroughly and decorated with flowers and lawns. There had never been so much as a blade of grass in Birkenau because no sooner would one grow than it would be eaten by the camp inmates. Now there were no piles of corpses in front of the barracks, nor were the crematoriums working, although previously they had been operating day and night. The guests walked through this Potemkin village. To enhance the image of the camp idyll, women inmates who were still strong and looked human were chosen. They were sweepers (*Stubendiest*), clerks (*Schrieberinnen*) and others. They were dressed in new, striped camp uniforms and given scarves for their heads, clean and washed. The women's orchestra played some pleasant music. We, the rest of the inmates who remained in the camp, were locked in the barracks, confined to the block (*Blocksperre*) because we were skin and bones, *Musulman*[2] they called us, and we were not to be seen. The international commission of the Red Cross walked

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[2] Camp slang for someone who was at the end of their life from exhaustion. The expression probably comes from the German words *muschl* (mussel) and *mann* (man). The meaning is that the mussel keeps its form even after losing its content. In Serbian literature the expression *musulman* is often corrupted to *musliman* (Muslim)

through the camp and, perhaps, did not want or did not dare to see the reality of the camp. Those of us who were closed up in the barracks weren't allowed to even make a sound, let alone speak out and tell the truth about the suffering and murders for the rest of the world to know the truth about Auschwitz-Birkenau.

FROM CAMP TO MINE

After a selection on October 28, 1944, I was transported from Auschwitz to the Bergen-Belsen camp. I arrived early in November and spent about seven weeks without working. We whiled away our days in the barracks with the bare minimum of food. I arrived in Bergen-Belsen together with Eva Timar-Balog.

In mid-December we were taken to Braunschweig to clear rubble in very difficult conditions. Eva and I were together until we were separated at Braunschweig in February, 1945.[3] Without Eva I was terribly lonely. She had been sickly and weak and we all believed that she had been picked out for transport at a selection for the seriously ill. I was sure I would never see her again. Of the handful of women from Sombor remaining, she was the only one I said goodbye to or, rather, it was she who said goodbye to us. It was a great joy for both of us to meet again in Sombor, at the end of September, 1945.

I remained in Braunschweig for some time. We cleared the rubble in the centre of the city, half-naked, starved, in the snow and freezing wind. We slept on bare concrete in a stable for the horses of SS officers.

At the end of February, 1945, we were again crammed intc the cattle wagons and sent to the Beendorf camp, which was located in a salt mine. There was salt everywhere around us, nothing but salt: floor, ceilings walls, an enormous hall, eight hundred metres underground. There was a military plant for the manufacture of aircraft parts in the mine. We worked the night shift, twelve hour shifts. We travelled about 45 minutes each way from the camp to the mine. Both before and after work we stood for hours to be counted. We slept in shifts in three-tier bunks – the night shift slept during the day and the day shift at night. We were lowered down the mine by two lifts, in two stages, because we had to travel more than eight hundred metres down. The lifts took a long time to come. From the

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[3] See *We Survived...* , vol. 1, pp. 103–104

lifts to the enormous working halls we went through narrow salt corridors. There I worked on a lathe for the first time in my life. I weighed no more than thirty kilograms and was covered in lice and scabies. Always hungry, constantly tired, I shivered in my thin dress. We were forbidden to talk along the way, particularly in the hall, while we were working. If one of the *Aufzeherinnen,* the women SS overseers, saw us talking they would just take our number and later, back in the camp, we would get a terrible beating.

UNRECOGNISABLE – EVEN TO MYSELF

As the Allied troops approached Beendorf we were again loaded into cattle wagons, on April 8, 1945, and travelled to the north of Germany via Magdeburg and Wittenburg to Hamburg. There were altogether about 750 women and more than 2,000 men on this withdrawal and several hundred of them were Jewish women. Between April 8 and May 2, one in every five of the 2,770 camp inmates died.

Dr Ružica Rip, Vera's elder sister, hanged in Kolašin in 1942

In Hamburg were accommodated in military barracks. The city was in ruins. We were again put into wagons but now there were only fifty women in each. We were surprised by this and even more so by the fact that our guards were now German Army veterans from the world wars. Near Padeborg we crossed into Denmark. There Swedish Red Cross representatives took charge of us and put us into nice, clean wagons. We were given a warm welcome with sandwiches! We arrived the same day in Malmo, Sweden. This was May 2, 1945, the same date as our arrival in Auschwitz and the anniver-

sary of my mother's death. From this point on we were taken care of by the Swedish Red Cross. We had been saved by a member of the Swedish Royal Family, Count Folke Bernadotte.

When we arrived in Malmo we were exhausted, tired and starving, because along the way we had had hardly any food and had only seldom been given water to drink. The Swedish Red Cross people separated us according to our nationalities: the French were in the majority, followed by the Poles, Czechoslovaks, Hungarians and so on. Of all these women I was the only Yugoslav. I no longer belonged to the Hungarian contingent, because I had been given the chance to choose for myself. I was so weak that they had to carry me to the bathroom. In Malmo they placed us under very strict quarantine in the Tennis Stadium. After bathing and delousing we were given clean, new clothes. I was under constant medical supervision because my life was hanging by a thread. There were large mirrors on the walls of the Tennis Stadium. When I passed these and looked, I felt as if I was seeing a familiar face, but in fact it was myself whom I didn't recognise. They sent me to convalesce in Osby in the southern Swedish province of Scania, where I gradually became my old self, because my body was able to accept the food I ate. Someone from the Yugoslav Embassy gave me some money to help me. He told me that in Sweden, especially in Uppsala, there were a lot of former Yugoslav prisoners. These were our prisoners from Norway who had been helped by good people to cross into Sweden.

ALMOST LIKE HOME

After convalescing in Osby, I accepted the invitation of some Yugoslav comrades and went to Uppsala. The day after I arrived there, they told Mr Hugo Valentin, professor of history at the University of Uppsala, that a former prisoner who had survived Auschwitz had arrived. He immediately wanted to meet me, because the horrors of the camp had been published in stories and photographs in the Swedish newspapers. The Swedes had not been to war for a hundred and fifty years and were horrified by the pictures and the stories told by the women inmates who had survived. The professor asked by telephone for me to be immediately brought to his apartment.

There they met me with open arms and said "From now on you will be our dear child." I had no reply for their kindness, but my tears fell in floods because I had again felt parental love. These wonderful

people became my foster parents and I addressed them as Uncle Hugo and Aunt Fannie. They had three daughters, two were married and the youngest, Susanna was the same age as me. Uncle Hugo found me a job in the Biological Institute where refugees from Germany and Austria mostly worked. At the Institute I made friends with many friendly people. Uppsala is a lovely city, similar to my home town of Sombor, full of parks, greenery and flowers and home to many school children and students. Uncle Hugo enrolled me in the Biology Faculty of Uppsala University. I was unable to enrol in the Medical Faculty, which was what I wanted, because foreigners needed special permission from King Gustav V. I was given a stipend equal to my salary in the Institute. I kept in close contact with Uncle Hugo and Aunt Fannie until they died. They continued to take care of me, often sending me parcels. When Uncle Hugo died, the Jewish Community in Uppsala wrote about his good deeds in their bulletin.

Meanwhile I had the opportunity to send a radio telegram to Yugoslavia. I wrote to my great love from my school days and he replied that I should return immediately and that he was waiting for me.

FINALLY IN SOMBOR

We Yugoslavs, about 1,200 men and women, were included in the first transport and, on August 24, 1945, we left for our homeland. I didn't arrive in Sombor until September 10. Of my own family I found no one in Sombor except my uncle, my father's only brother, the physician Dr Nikola Rip. In Novi Sad I found my cousin, Irena Fišer, née Ungar. She had also survived Auschwitz.

I was unable to enter my house because the City of Sombor had taken it over as an old peoples' home.

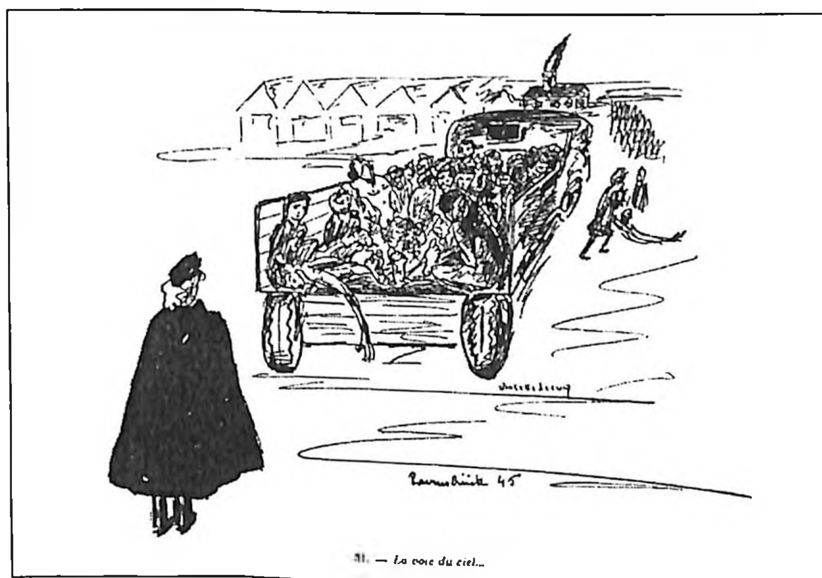
When we were forcibly abducted from Sombor, our house had been immediately occupied by the head of the counter-intelligence service, a notoriously evil Hungarian by the name of Istvan Bodi. Before Sombor was liberated he loaded everything in the house into trucks: furniture for six rooms and the full equipment of the house. He took everything with him to Hungary, to the village of Bacsalmas. My neighbours told me about this when I returned to Sombor. I applied for a passport and permission to travel to Bacsalmas to get my things, but our authorities would not permit this. I didn't get a passport and so was unable to make any attempt to collect my family's stolen property.

After my return to Sombor I was approached by a complete stranger who introduced herself to me and told me that during the war she had lived in Kolašin as a teacher. The Chetnik authorities there had ordered her to take the primary school children to watch the execution by hanging of Dr Ružica Rip.

This horrifying and painful information left me fainting. I didn't know where I was or where I should go. Although I had been hardened by all kinds of misfortune, even five concentration camps had left me quite unprepared for such sadism. I had thought that my sister had been shot or perhaps killed in battle, because she had joined the Partisans in order to attend to the wounded. My sister Ružica, at barely 28 years of age, was the only woman doctor whose life ended in such a cruel way.

In October, 1945, I married my first love, Branislav Obradović, with whom I still live in a happy marriage after 56 years.

After my marriage I studied at the Economics Faculty of Belgrade University. After graduating I worked in the Federal Statistics Bureau and the Federal Health Protection Institute in Belgrade.



Road to Heaven

From a collection of drawings by French Resistance member Violette Lecoq, prisoner no. 24571 in the Ravensbrück camp

Suzana CENIĆ

TWINS AND EXPERIMENTS IN VIVO

Suzana Cenić was born on June 2, 1925 in Sombor to Josip Vitenberg and Margita, née Perlštajn. She had a twin brother, Mirko, and a sister Vera, born in 1926. She was the only member of the entire family to survive.

After the war she completed Commercial Academy and, in 1949, began work in a roller bearings factory in Belgrade. After her marriage to Živorad Cenić, both were sent to Brčko, where they stayed for eighteen months and where their daughter was born. The family later returned to Belgrade. Together with her husband, Suzana took a job in an automobile plant in Rakovica, where she worked until her retirement in 1981. She has one daughter, Svetlana Zdravković, and two grandsons, Mirko and Miloš.

We lived very happily in our family home in Sombor until 1941, when our problems began with the Hungarian occupation. I had been involved in the work of the Jewish community for some time as a young girl, but I didn't really enjoy it because I was very lively. My brother, and for a time my sister, also helped in the community.

As far as I remember there had been no destruction or damage to Jewish buildings and other property in Sombor up to 1941. However on April 13, 1941, real chaos began, in retaliation for an alleged Chetnik

attack on the Hungarian Army. They began to kill Jews and Serbs and take them hostage and, from our gate, I watched them carrying the dead to the Serbian Orthodox cemetery. That night my brother was in the town and was caught. Despite our fears for him he finally returned. Needless to say there had been no attack, it was all concocted to justify the brutal crimes the Hungarians committed. These were Hungarian occupation forces whose police wore feathers in their caps. From that time on there were limitations on the kind of work and education available to Jews.

In 1942 or 1943, my mother and father were arrested and thrown into prison. My father was released after some time but my mother remained in prison and returned only immediately before we were all taken to a concentration camp. They had been arrested because my mother had tried to have some Jewish boys released from prison where they were being held as Communists. She had attempted to do this through a Hungarian friend of my father, who appears to have been an informant.

We three children stayed at home alone. I went to see where our parents had been taken. My grandfather, my mother's father, didn't want to be involved, so I went alone to the Municipality and later to the police before I finally found out where they were imprisoned. I pushed my way through to the head commander who looked at me in amazement, this girl who told him that she had brought food for her parents. Because I was rather persistent, he eventually allowed me to take them food in prison. Every day I took them three meals. These were usually made from geese brought to us by nearby farmers. We were a moderately well-off family. We had a yard full of old iron, which my father traded. Just before the war began he set up an iron and metal foundry. Until 1941 he was able to work alone but later had to employ someone so that the business would be under a non-Jewish name. They looted our property, not in 1941, but in 1944.

The Germans occupied Hungary and we began wearing the yellow star. Then the arrests and abductions began. I used to go to town wearing the yellow star with no fear. I was naturally defiant, but my father was very afraid when I went out at night. I had a boyfriend, my first love, and I used to go out with him. I never noticed the attitude of the non-Jewish population to us because we lived in a rural area where there had never been any problems. Our neighbours continued to treat us exactly as they had always done but, being deprived of school and

other things, it was no longer the same. As soon as my father was released from prison, he was taken to a labour brigade, somewhere in the area, but our entire family was again together in 1944 when they took us to the camp.

In April 1944, we were told that we had to be ready early in the morning, with just a few personal belongings, for the whole family to leave. Our rucksacks were enough for our few things. My rucksack was heavy as we walked so my brother helped me to carry it.

They first took us to Bačka Topola, to a camp with a very large number of people. We spent a night there and this is where something happened which was to make me stronger and able to overcome my infantile streak. As a girl, when I had heard people talking about somebody's death at the table, I used to put down my knife and fork, unable to eat. This night, in the camp, I heard a noise behind my back, a strange gurgling, just as my mother was serving us food. Asked what it was she replied that two women had poisoned themselves, deliberately, nobody knew who they were. When I heard this something in me revolted, and I went on eating.

Suzana (second from right) with her parents, twin brother and sister. Of the whole family, she alone survived

From there they loaded us into cattle wagons and we left. My grandfather and grandmother were not with us. They had gone to

Budapest in 1942 and, in this way, saved their lives. We didn't go with them because we believed we must remain together. My brother even made boots and clothes and wanted to go and join the Partisans. He even had a connection through which he could do this. I begged and beseeched him, insisting that the three of us must stay together. If I had let him go, if he had joined the Partisans and been killed, I would have known why he had given his life. As it is, I don't know why he died, or even where or when!

We travelled for four days without the wagon being opened, with no water, no food, nothing. It was terrible. I hope no one ever has to live through such a thing again! Before we set out on this road with no return we had heard stories about suffocation with poison gas. One night, I remember, we stopped at a station where we heard a terrible hissing noise and I thought that the cruel guards who were escorting us had released the gas. I almost had a nervous breakdown. People were also dying in the wagons and the stench spread everywhere. I would like to forget these things and I have tried to forget them and because of that, to this day, I'm not sure exactly how everything happened.

We arrived at the loading ramp at Auschwitz. As soon as the wagon doors opened they started shouting "*Los, los!* Get out! Throw everything down in a pile. This all suddenly reminded me of the things which were happening before we left on this horrific journey, things from Erich Maria Remarque's book *Nothing New in the West*, which I had read. All these white scarves and wires reminded me of it. And at this moment I was passionately determined to survive all this. Of course we threw all our belongings out of the wagon and began marching in a column.

At the point where we stopped, Dr Mengele came and did his usual selection, separating us to the left and right sides. One side meant the possibility of somehow surviving while the other led directly to death. My mother went to one side, my father to the other, Mirko to a third. Vera and I were together. We had the impression that this was not so terrible, the older people go to one kind of job, the young people on the other side to another job. I don't remember thinking anything in particular about it. First they took us for showers, then to have our hair cut and after that we were tattooed. I was given No. 81257 and my sister 81256. I don't know what number my brother had. However, as a twin, I was separated out. Doctors, engineers, carpenters and boot-

makers were also kept aside, giving the impression that people were really going to be put to work.

From this distance I see it all through a haze up to the point where they threw us into a barracks which had probably once been a stable for horses. The barracks was enormous and I think we all fitted into one. There were beds on which we lay, nine to a bed. We were packed like sardines, head to foot. The beds were filthy and full of bedbugs. It was true horror. We were given one mug of liquid food daily, and this mug was passed from mouth to mouth. We were in quarantine. I remember once while we were still there I was ordered to fetch the food and we brought in enormous vats which needed four people to carry them, two in front and two behind. I was wearing wooden clogs. I'd wrapped my feet in an old woollen sweater and just at this moment it came unwrapped. I stumbled and spilled the whole vat. I should thank my fate for having kept me alive at that time because it was a terrible thing for a vat of food to be thrown away. I was lucky this time, I wasn't beaten. Beatings were a daily occurrence.

One day they came from an improvised clinic to fetch me. Dr Mengele was there. This was the first time I had seen my brother since we arrived. I was very happy to discover my brother was in the male camp but, at the same time, sad because I didn't know what had happened to my mother and father. I was very hungry. They gave me a piece of bread spread with marmalade which calmed my stomach a little. I asked my brother if he knew where our parents were and he told me he didn't know. Little by little, however, I learnt the truth. And why there was smoke gushing from the chimney of a nearby barracks day after day. In my early days there I had no idea what the smoke was. It was only later that we found out that it came from a crematorium, a building where the dead were burned. The smell of the bodies being cremated was unbearable. It surrounded us day in day out for months, because the crematorium operated around the clock. But people can get used to anything. The camp was surrounded by high voltage wires: there was no escape.

When they took me to the hospital barracks I was separated from my sister. In the hospital I met a little Slovak girl who was the only Jew in this barrack. There were also a few Yugoslav girls and I was assigned as a messenger and given my own room, like a nurse. I remember one day, because I had a cold or something, I couldn't get out of bed. Mengele kept coming to this barracks for inspection and he would select

those who were no longer able to work for cremation. He found me lying in bed. I didn't know what to say to him. Silence. At the moment he passed my bed I raised my head. "Why are you in bed?" he asked. He ordered the block orderly who was walking at his side to pull me out of bed, get me dressed and keep me from lying in bed. This meant that he wanted to keep me, as a twin, to the end of his research. One day I was standing outside my room when Mengele and his team came through again. As he passed me he dug his hand in his pocket, took out a sweet and gave it to me. I was dumbfounded. Micika, the Jewish doctor who was standing opposite me signalled me with her eyes that I should accept it and so I did. Everything I was given I took to my sister, Vera: a clove of garlic, even this sweet.

It was my job as a messenger to take blood and urine samples for testing. Mirko was in the other camp but we managed to see each other often. I even arranged to help carry a patient to somewhere else in the camp so that I could see him. I was already finding my way around. In the clinic I was given what was supposed to be diet food which was delivered regularly and in fairly decent quantities, quite enough for me, so that I weighed 63 kilograms. The day we arrived, all the women in our transport had their hair cut up to their ears, but were not shaved to the skull. We didn't declare ourselves as Hungarians but as Yugoslavs, this was important to us because we were there as a nation of our own. We were set apart from the Poles, the Hungarians and all the others. The third month after we arrived in the camp I acquired a Serbian-Polish dictionary and learned quite a lot of Polish. When the Polish girls asked me where I came from I said that I was from Yugoslavia.

"How come you can speak Polish?" they asked.

"Well, I learned it," I replied. This showed how much it means when you know a language. With Mengele I spoke German, because we spoke German at home and I knew the language very well. I could also speak some Hungarian and English, for which I had had private classes from 1939. Also, my mother and grandfather were in America for a number of years and when they wanted to discuss something secretly in our presence they would speak English. The melody of the language was already in my ears. It seems to me that I was able to learn languages very quickly. I didn't speak Yiddish, although we are Ashkenazi. I think my grandfather spoke it but my grandmother didn't.

Mengele conducted his experiments and tested his results by examining blood, head and eyes. The main thing for me was that he

allowed me to live. The moment he no longer needed a patient he would inject them with air and kill them. I have no physical deformities as a result of these tortures, probably because this cruel scientist didn't send me for any treatment. There were far too many of these treatments: he injected people with various bacteria, almost anything that crossed his mind. I remember that we even had an intelligence test and that I achieved an above average score.

One day Mengele asked me my name and I told him "Vitenberg".

"And who did you get this surname from?"

"From my father."

"And where did he get it from?"

"From his own father."

I never suffered from the fear which other people had of him. I was brave and I behaved accordingly. My knowledge of languages helped me a lot.

"Did you have a boyfriend," he asked.

"Yes, I did."

He was at that point preparing to take blood from my vein. He was wearing an enormous rubber apron and in his hand he held a syringe and a rubber tube. I looked at him and asked if it was going to hurt me.

"Did it hurt when your boyfriend kissed you?" he replied.

At that point I stretched my arm out for him myself and thought "Let him cut me: I 'm not going to say a word!"

The preparations he performed in front of me to finish me off psychologically didn't yield the desired result because, even if he had cut me I really wouldn't have said a word.

Mengele was a handsome man in his forties. He was a doctor and, because they were obsessed with the sick idea of multiplying and advancing their nation, it is likely that the experiments to which we were subjected were connected to this obsession. He sent the results of his experiments to Berlin but I have no idea what happened to them after that. He worked with twins, triplets and quadruplets. He had an assistant, a Jewish doctor called Ena, a very beautiful woman. He was always accompanied by the SS men, the block commanders. I don't know how many people were around him. I've already forgotten all of it. Once we had a visit from Swedish Red Cross activists; they took a few people away with them and saved their lives. The day before they arrived there was cleaning and painting going on all over the camp, but there wasn't a single blade of grass or a tree. Once we were taken

somewhere far from Auschwitz and came upon grass and meadow flowers. This made us very happy and reminded us that everywhere in nature, all around us, there was something beautiful and alive.

After the hospital I was moved to the knitting plant. There were a lot of us here but the job was much easier. From sweaters and various materials we made gloves, socks and similar articles. I managed to get my sister moved there, so that we were together. I tried to help our prisoners and camp inmates as much as possible, pretending not to see if they took something out with them. It seemed that the SS woman in charge of us noticed that I was skilled and hard-working: several times she asked me to repair her silk stockings, because I could do this rather well. I should say here that, even in the most brutal circumstances some human inclinations can't be hidden. I think that, for my age, I had a great deal of knowledge about life and human behaviour because I had read a lot of books and learned from other sources, so it wasn't difficult for me to conclude from the behaviour of this SS woman that she was sending, at least to me, lesbian messages. She used to give me white bread, chocolate and so on, but after she noted my resistance she stopped. I remember she gave me a beautiful Thuringian sweater from Austria. I also remember asking my brother Mirko across the fence to get me some boots. "What, in here?" he asked, outraged. But youth has its own ways and the next day I got the boots I wanted from her. When I think about it today I realise it was really very unusual.

Meanwhile the English were bombing us hard and sometimes during an attack we had nowhere to go so we hid under the tables with stools over our heads. In the middle of one of these bombing raids a new transport arrived. I happened to be outside with a woman who recognised her sister with a child in the column of new arrivals. They recognised each other. It was terrible, because the woman with me knew where her sister was headed, while the sister had no idea she was going to be poisoned by gas. There were many such moments. Time dragged during the head counts. We would wait for the first star to appear so that we could eat our piece of bread. Suddenly we heard the roar of trucks. Gypsy children and adults were being collected and taken to the crematorium. The children began screaming and calling for their mothers in all the languages of the world. It was terrible. This happened on Rosh Hashanah.

It was the late autumn of 1944 and they were bombing us mercilessly. The Germans were afraid of the bombs and hid themselves

away. Once they took us to another part of Auschwitz. I was in Birkenau and there were brick buildings in the other part and everyone was in a state of alarm. I was at the head of the column, right behind one of the SS men and I heard him ask "Where are they taking us?"

"Into the crematorium," said another, and opened the armour-plated door. We saw large demijohns of cyanide, but this place had already been abandoned, they had probably been using it at a time when they had no other gas chambers. When he opened that door I thought it was the end for us. However, our fear lasted only as long as the air raid alarm. When the bombing stopped, we were led out of the gas chamber alive.

My brother worked in the *Bekleidungskammer*, the clothing warehouse. I spoke to him across the wire just before we left, on the evening of January 17, and he told me that he had collected about 700 grams of gold for us to escape. Nobody knew that the following morning we would be sent on the Death March. Those who were able to stand it remained alive, but many fell by the way or were shot by the Germans.

At dawn on January 17 or 18, 1945, when the Russians were invading, those of us from the knitting works were taken deeper into the heart of Germany. They dragged us as far as Bergen-Belsen. Behind us we saw the *Katyushas*, the Russian Little Katie rockets. I don't know how many days we trudged through the snow and ice. One night when we stopped somewhere, we climbed up into an attic. I took my shoes off, one pointed man's shoe and one ankle boot, both different. Sometimes we would hear the Russians pushing forward and expected the end to come very soon. The end came, unfortunately, in Bergen-Belsen only after three months, we were not liberated until April. In the meantime I had recovered from both typhus and typhoid fever. My sister was the first to come down with the illness and then me. I think the British liberated us on April 15. They wanted to take my sister to a hospital to convalesce, but she begged me not to let her go.

"We've been together up to now, let's stay together to the end!" When I realised that she was really in a very bad condition I let her go to the hospital. At the time it was the only correct decision. Today, unfortunately I still regret this because the way everything turned out I still don't know what happened to her. Later I was taken to the cemetery where they buried those who died from illness or exhaustion, enormous long tombs with stones, numbers and names, but I never found

where she was buried. It was only a few years ago, when we were working on a monograph on Auschwitz, that I discovered a card in the Yugoslav Red Cross saying that she had died on April 29. For the first time I learned the date of her death. I don't know whether it is correct or not. I expected to meet my brother Mirko. He told me that if anything happened on that April 17, we should meet again at home. In Zagreb something did happen to me, but this was later.

When the English liberated us they took us to another camp. There we were deloused and, as I stood under the shower, I had the feeling that there were millions of lice crawling all over me. As you picked one out, the others would keep coming back, millions of lice in the hair and all over the body, black lice in the hair and white on the body.

In this camp, because of a chance encounter, I ran a convalescent hospital. When I was moved from Bergen-Belsen to Bergen, I was sitting on some kind of straw mat in an enormous hall. From 63 kilograms my weight had now fallen to 28. I wondered why they were bringing these straw mats. An officer came in and came to me, asking what I was doing there. I told him I was sitting and waiting to see what was going to happen here. He told me that it was going to be a hospital and I asked him if I could work in it. He was a Jew and understood from our conversation that I was also Jewish. The hospital was being set up by the Yugoslavs. I was given a job working with the local German women who had been mobilised to help, and with doctors. I played the big boss. I used to go with the English to the English mess hall to eat. We were taken over by a Yugoslav committee of former officer prisoners. They were very well organised, in fact the Yugoslavs were the best organised nation. I was proud of this. Because I was very thin they gave me all the best food to help me recover. Two months later, after the Yugoslavs were taken to the sanatorium at Bad Rehburg, between Hanover and Hamburg, they took me to visit our former Yugoslav patients. All of them recognised me while I didn't recognise any of them. They were gaining two or three kilograms a day, eating six meals daily. I was coming along gradually.

Four months later I arrived in Zagreb. The Yugoslavs ordered the return after establishing communications. We first thought we would be going via Paris and I was very happy about this. We were taken to Celle in wagons and again I was wearing the Red Cross sign. With me was my friend Cecilija, a medical graduate from Osijek who was work-

ing as a doctor and met her husband when she returned. One day in Zagreb I was sitting, thinking about God knows what, when a woman who was also wearing the Red Cross sign walked up to me and asked whether I knew if there was anyone from Sombor with us. I replied that I was from Sombor and she asked me if there were any Perlštajns in the group. I told her that my mother was a Perlštajn. It turned out that she was my mother's first cousin. She took me with her, fed me and took care of me. Then a friend of mine from Sombor arrived. I knew that his sister had died a day or two before the liberation. When he asked me what had happened to her I told him I didn't know. I couldn't bear to tell him that she was dead. Later he said to me "You know, I didn't want to tell you but now I'm going to. Your father was killed in the transport." They had been together. He told me that there had been a fight inside the wagon, my father's arm was broken, then his eye was gouged out and he was thrown out of the wagon. Then I also told him that his sister had died.

People from the Jewish Community came to the Zagreb fairground to see who had returned. They had accurate figures. I was also given the list and saw that none of my family were on it. This was a terrible blow to me. The International Red Cross also had no information about my brother. I knew that Vera had died, I knew that my mother had been cremated and I now knew that my father had been killed, but I still knew nothing about my brother. And I still know nothing today. Of the whole family, I alone remained.

Josif VESEL

AUSCHWITZ - BUCHENWALD - THERESIENSTADT

Dr Josif Vesel was born on December 21, 1927, in Novi Sad. His father, Daniel (born 1904), died while on forced labour in Ukraine in 1942. His mother, Katarina-Estera (born 1903) and two younger sisters, Ela (born 1931) and Irena (born 1932) were killed in Auschwitz in 1944. He and his eldest sister Blanka (born 1929) were the only members of the family to survive the Holocaust. Blanka emigrated to Israel in 1949 (Lea Lederer, Nathanya Kibbutz), where two of her children, five grandchildren and a great-grandchild still live. Dr Vesel spent his entire career working in the clinics of the Medical Faculty of Belgrade University. He retired in 1993 as a professor and director of the Psychiatric Clinic.

His wife, Cvetana Šmid-Vesel, is a retired neuropsychiatrist.

I attended the Jewish primary school in Novi Sad from 1934 to 1938. I remember my wonderful teachers, Fan, Boroš and Rabbi Kiš. There were Serb, Hungarian and German students at the school and I don't remember any nationalist or religious excesses there. I was on friendly terms with everyone throughout the occupation and after the war. Between 1938 and 1941 I completed three years of secondary school and also enriched my life in the *ken* (Hashomer Hatzair). My

role models were the outstanding youth leaders, *menahels*, Šragaj Vajskopf, the *rosh* of the *ken* and, later, the *rosh* of the Shaar Haamakim Kibbutz, J. Levinger-Bimbać who, before the *aliyah* learned the cabinet-making trade in the same workshop where I was to learn it during the occupation; Šimon Miroslav Štajner and Jošua-Robert Najman. I would particularly emphasise the positive formative influence on me of by the *menahel* of my *kvuca* (year of 1927) – this was Aron-Teodor Kovač, now retired professor of internal medicine in Novi Sad.

Of the *haverim* and *haverot* from the *ken*, I would first mention two who were with me in the concentration camps the whole time. There we continued our companionship, and supported each other through distressing times, which certainly helped me to survive. One of them, Hugo Rot, who became a psychologist and publicist in Belgrade, is no longer living. The other is Aleksandar Rozenberger, now professor of neuroradiology in Haifa. Of the others I shall mention some who remain in my memory as young boys, between twelve and fifteen years of age, who had great ambitions to be kibbutzniks in what was then Palestine: Eli Ordentlih, now an expert in fisheries in Israel; Jakov Felčer; sisters Judita and Marija Šenberger; Bruno Hofman and his sister Hermina; Hana Lihtner and her brother Mikica; Ivan Gros; Mira Šenberger-Pašić, a university professor in Belgrade, now deceased; Egon Štajner, a journalist and publicist in Belgrade, Ruben Lederer-Eldar, medical corps general and professor of neurology in Haifa; Jichak-Đura Remer, with whom I learned a trade during the occupation, now an FAO expert in milk production in Israel, and; Eugen-Moša Verber, Judaist, writer and actor from Belgrade, now deceased. I was at the last *moshava* at Selce (Slovenia, 1940). With us was *Haver* Hilel who had come from what was then Palestine to teach us about kibbutz life. In our *ken*, along with many interesting activities, we also played various sports. Our Community provided us with a large gymnasium.

Prison photograph of Josif Vesel

I was not aware of the dangers for Jews although, in a way, I had been warned. In the autumn of 1940, because of the Korošec Law (*Numerus Clausus*), my sister was not accepted in the first year of secondary school. We were first seriously warned about the dangers by my *menahel*, Aron Kovač. Several days after the war began on April 6, 1941, but before the arrival of the Hungarian Army in Novi Sad, he summoned all the members of the *kvuca* to his apartment. He told us that we were going to part as *Shomrim*, and told us what had happened to the Jews in Poland from 1939 to 1941. He advised us on how to survive.

Between April 6, 1941, and April 26, 1944, I was unable to attend school because of the *Numerus Clausus*. Instead I learned my trade. Some days I worked as a porter, pushing a cart in the Temerin and Futog markets and so helped my mother to feed us. At the end of 1941, my father, Daniel (born 1904), was taken to forced labour. His surviving comrades told us that he died in Ukraine.

In January 1942, during the Great Raid, my mother and we four children were taken to the SOKOL building where we sat all day in a hall. From time to time they took groups away from the back of the hall. We were sitting in the front part and missed out on "our turn". In the evening we were released to go home. It wasn't until a few days later that we discovered the fate of those who had been led away in groups and killed on the frozen Danube.

Josif Vesel from his days as director of the University Psychiatric Clinic, beneath the portrait of his mentor, Vladimir Vujić, after whom the clinic was named

Germany occupied Hungary on March 19, 1944, and set up a puppet government. Through the extreme right-wingers, those obedient to the Germans had become the masters of life and death for about half a million Hungarian Jews.

My mother and we four children were interned in a collection camp in Subotica on April 26, 1944. A few days later we were moved to another camp at Baia. A little later again we were handed over to the SS men and thrown into closed cargo wagons. We were transported north in inhuman conditions. I shall never forget the words of one of the oldest men in the transport, Mr Rotbart: "Only those who manage to endure slave labour will survive."

We arrived in Auschwitz on May 30, 1944. First they took the corpses of those who had died on the way out of the wagons. The first victim in our wagon was an elderly gentleman who suffered from diabetes and treated himself with insulin. Then followed about sixty of the blackest minutes of my life. As we came out of the wagons we were formed into a long column. All along the column the SS men were shouting, the dogs were barking, men in striped prison clothes were watching us with dull eyes, not answering our questions. We came to a podium on which an SS officer was standing. People said later that this was Mengele, I didn't know. From there the column separated into three new columns. The officer on the podium, the master of life and death pointed with his finger that my eldest sister, Blanka-Lea (born 1929) should cross to the left column for women able to work. Then he sends me with his finger to the right column for men able to work. My mother, Katarina-Estera (1903), and my two little sisters, Ela (1931) and Irena (1932), were clinging to one another. The three of them were sent by the master of death to the third column, the road to the gas chamber and crematorium. After that day, of the six members of my immediate family, only my sister Lea and I remained to fight for our lives.

I spent only a week in Auschwitz, in quarantine, from May 30 to June 6, 1944. While there we learnt from the camp inmates how the concentration camps functioned, about the gas chambers and the crematoriums and other facts of camp life.

We were taken on June 7, 1944, to the Buchenwald concentration camp near Weimar. I spent another few days in quarantine and was given my prisoner number, 58977. On June 15 I was moved to one of the Buchenwald divisions, the *Kommando Troeglitz Rehmsdorf*. Unlike Auschwitz, which served mostly to implement the "final solution", killing in gas chambers, the principal aim of Buchenwald was slave labour (because of the lack of German labour force). Death here was a consequence of poor food and exhaustion. What was needed for survival was a combination of factors, the right genes, a meaning for

life, physical condition, immunity and the support of friends. I've already mentioned that my two childhood friends, Hugo Rot and Aca Rozenberger, and I always helped one another. Survival often depends on an accident or an immediate choice between two options. For instance, I exchanged my boots for ordinary shoes and along with that got an easier job. After a few days we all received wooden-soled shoes. On another time I fell ill with vitamin C deficiency; my gums bled and my teeth were loose. We were all afraid of going to the hospital, remembering Auschwitz and the fate of men incapable of working. I was saved by the fact that I spoke fairly good French. I applied to the head of the hospital, Jean Dulac, a French professor of medicine, who accepted me in the hospital for a few days to replace a male nurse. This was enough time for me to cure my scurvy. Everything I did was with the knowledge and support of the head of the room, Walter Himmelschein a German social democrat and ambassador from the period of the Weimar Republic who had spent many years in prison.

Photograph from 1948. Back, left to right: Hugo Rot, psychologist and publicist; Dr Josef Vesel, neuroradiologist; Aleksandar Rozenberger, university professor in Haifa. Front, left to right: Pavle Bek, pharmacist (in Israel); Neurologist Ruben Lederer, head of the Israeli Army Medical Service (general and university professor) and Yitzhak (Đura) Remer, FAO expert in milk production in Israel

On another occasion, in a similar situation, I was helped by the medical assistant, Josef Fleck from Brno. In 1966, when I was at the Congress of Psychiatrists in Brno, I tried to find Josef Fleck and learned that he had died but that until his death he had been Brno's leading politician.

Just before the end of the war, in the land of "perfect organisation", strange events began which looked more like chaotic disorganisation. Because of the conditions on the fronts, every train, every wagon was precious for troop transports. However the "final solution" had priority. Concentration camp prisoners, *haftlinge*, in the west of Germany were being transported to the east and vice versa.

Between April 10 and 15, 1945, we could already hear the roaring of the guns on the Western Front. We thought that liberation was on the way but, on April 15, we were loaded into open cargo wagons. There were about fifty prisoners sitting in each wagon, with two guards in the middle. Along the way the train was bombed by the Americans so we continued on foot. We arrived in the Sudetan town of Leitmeritz. The whole town was decorated with flags for Hitler's birthday on April 20. The same day we reached Theresienstadt. This was the famous assembly camp, a reservoir for prisoners for Auschwitz and also a Potemkin village for journalists and the Red Cross of the neutral countries. Theresienstadt was faithfully described in Herman Wouk's novel *The Winds of War.*

The bombing of the train brings me to an extraordinary incident. At the beginning of 1945 we saw hundreds of American bombers every day. The British bombed at night. The aircraft flew over the camp and one of their targets was the nearby Brabag synthetic fuel factory. We saw these aircraft as "ours" and thought they heralded our freedom. We heard that in the carpet bombing they hit an English prison camp near the factory. In our camp we had no shelters, although the guards had a bunker watchtower. One day our camp was also hit in the carpet bombing. While we shivered in the barracks a thousand-pound bomb put a hole in the roof. Luckily it only grazed the main roof beam, slightly changed direction and didn't explode. We were extraordinarily afraid through all this. As I have already mentioned, our train was hit when we left Buchenwald. On that occasion we were bombed by the Mosquito dive bombers with their special bombs which burst horizontally and wounded many of the prisoners.

Many years later, in 1999, I found myself in the path of American bombers for the third time. I had severe psychosomatic problems during the bombing of the buildings in Nemanjina Street and especially when the Television buildings were bombed. Three times I was in danger and despair, each time as what the NATO glossary calls "collateral damage".

Lea-Blanka, Josif's sister and the only other member of the family who survived the Holocaust. She later lived in Israel

On May 9, 1945, when we woke up we discovered there were no guards in the Theresienstadt camp. We heard the roar of the tanks and for hours watched the Soviet tanks and soldiers with rucksacks riding on them. They didn't stop in Theresienstadt. The war in Sudetenland didn't finish until May 15, 1945, the same date as in Yugoslavia. After the tanks passed the logistics units arrived. These organised food for us. Doctors from the medical unit found that there were men with typhoid fever. Theresienstadt was divided into two sections, separated by barbed wire. The women doctors assembled us in ranks and felt everyone's foreheads with the palms of their hands. Anyone with a temperature went into the hospital part of the camp and was treated. I wasn't ill so I remained in quarantine in the other part of the camp. Hugo Rot fell sick, but recovered quickly and then we talked every day through the barbed wire fence. Aca Rozenberger wasn't with them because he had escaped with a group during the bombing of the train. We were in quarantine in Theresienstadt from April 20 to June 10, 1945 and on June 10 we left Theresienstadt for Novi Sad, where we arrived on June 18.

After the repatriation I passed the trade examination in carpentry. I didn't take a job because I had been given a government bursary to finish the fourth to eighth grades of high school. I graduated from the Medical Faculty of Belgrade University thanks to my stipend and even more thanks to the Jewish student residence in Kosmajska Street in Belgrade. This was a unique student residence. Most of the students had survived the Holocaust and had no other home than the one in Kosmajska Street. We lived like a large and happy family. My sister, Blanka-Lea Lederer, barely managed to survive the Holocaust in Bergen-Belsen. She and her two-year-old daughter Mira (Mira Havia, Tel Aviv, Nave Salom 60), emigrated to Israel. Blanka has since died. Her two children, five grandchildren and great grandchild live in Israel. Her son and two grandsons live in the United States.

Andrija DARVAŠ

WAR YEARS

Andrija Darvaš was born in Subotica on April 2, 1928, to father Stevan, from Stari Bečej, and mother Irma, née Szenta, from Vilany in Hungary. When the 1941 war began, he was in Belgrade in the third year at the Third Belgrade Boys' Secondary School. He lost his parents, grandmothers, uncles, aunts and most of his relatives in the Holocaust.

After the war he enrolled in the sixth year of secondary school in Novi Sad and matriculated in 1948. In the same year he began studying biology at the Belgrade University Faculty of Natural and Mathematical Sciences, graduating in 1953. He obtained employment and the possibility of post-graduate studies at the Republic Institute for Health Protection in Sarajevo. In 1964 he was awarded a doctorate in biological sciences for a dissertation on human parasitology. Shortly afterwards he was nominated assistant professor.

In 1970 he moved to Subotica where he worked at the Public Health Institute until his retirement. He held the title of senior scientific associate at the Medical Faculty of Novi Sad University. His wife Olga is a retired biochemist. They have one daughter, Sanja, a physician specialising in microbiology.

Andrija Darvaš has dedicated this memoir to his wife, Olga, because, as he says, she made it easier for him to bear these mem-

ories and endure them throughout his life. He sees his daughter as the sole guardian of his memories and his roots.

THE LAST BAR MITZVAH IN PRE-WAR BELGRADE

Saturday, April 5, 1941, was a beautiful sunny day in Belgrade. All the members of our household were up early for last minute-preparations for the arrival of visitors. It was the day of my Bar Mitzvah.

The preceding lessons with young Rabbi Kaufman had paid off: in the synagogue at 19 Kosmajska Street, the ritual unfolded according to plan. The synagogue was fuller than usual. Relatives, friends of different faiths, including our German neighbour, filled the seats. Everywhere you could hear "*shkajah*" My father's eyes were on me as I came down from the *Torah* with the *thalit* around my neck.

The house was full of guests until after midnight. I sat in an armchair with my legs crossed to show off my first long trousers.

We were woken early on the morning of the next day, April 6, by the screaming of the *Stukas* and the exploding bombs. In the cellar of our high-rise building we held anxious discussions with the neighbours about whether the basement could sustain a direct hit. My father was reassuring my mother, grandmother and me.

After the first wave my father went to report to the army while my mother, grandmother and I sat, now in the cellar, now in our apartment, depending on the German Air Force. Finally our German neighbour advised us to evacuate into the countryside. There were quite a few rural people from the surrounding villages with horse carts, offering transport and accommodation outside Belgrade, for a solid payment. We took the opportunity to go to the village of Starčevo in Banat, near Pančevo.

The days passed and the pace of the war picked up. The *Wehrmacht*, the German Army, was now stationed in Pančevo. We felt helpless, not knowing what to do. In fact our situation had became dangerous because we had no rational explanation for why we continued to stay in Starčevo. We declared ourselves to be Hungarians but there were immediate suspicions about our Hungarian identity. We dared not go back to Belgrade precisely because of who we really were. It seemed as though only a miracle could save us and that's what actually happened: my father appeared.

My father had been taken prisoner as a soldier. After he was captured the Germans carried out a selection of the prisoners on ethnic lines. People from the "allied nations", Hungarians, Croats, Bulgarians and so on, were set free, provided they had proof of their nationality. The verification wasn't very thorough. My father declared himself to be Hungarian and, thanks to his surname, his mother tongue and his "Aryan" physiognomy, he was released from the prison camp and given a pass by the German military command, ensuring him freedom of movement "on the way to his domicile". He came to Belgrade, learned from our German neighbour where we had taken refuge and found us. My father immediately tried to assess the risk of continuing to live in Starčevo. The same day he returned to Belgrade, found the rest of the family and established contact with the Hungarian military office in the occupied city. Two officers, in exchange for a large amount of money, agreed to smuggle us in an army truck to Bačka in the Hungarian occupied zone. They obviously had no idea who and what we were.

Two days later our host from Starčevo drove us to the port of Pančevo. My father nonchalantly waved his pass and we boarded the ferry to Belgrade. We landed in Belgrade and passed through ranks of German soldiers and local police without being stopped, just a casual glance at my father's pass.

The Hungarian Army truck was waiting, as agreed on, in the port. They put us under the tarpaulin and we were on our way. At Petrovaradin the Ustashas tried to search the truck. The Hungarian officer refused this and ordered his soldiers to cock their rifles. The Ustashas gave up. The little boat bobbed across the Danube and we arrived in Novi Sad, in the Hungarian occupied zone. We continued our ride to Srbobran (Szenttamas) where my father's brother had a timber business. We were all overjoyed to arrive: we had been saved, at least for the time being.

The Hungarian military truck then returned to Belgrade and brought the rest of our family, together with all our household effects into the Hungarian occupied zone. For cash, of course.

HUNGARIAN OCCUPATION

In the Hungarian occupied zone (as in the rest of Hungary), the attitude of the authorities to Jews was still relatively tolerable in 1941. In comparison, that is, with the Independent State of Croatia and occu-

pied Serbia. Through the corrupt bureaucracy we secured false documents and legalised our residence in Srbobran. My father worked in my uncle's timber store and I attended the fourth year of high school.

I remember the occasional beating in those days by jingoistic Hungarian boys who, in groups and on me, proved their racial superiority and demonstrated their patriotism.

In the evenings the family would sit around the radio, drawing hope from the BBC broadcasts. In fact there was no reason for optimism. The German troops were advancing on the Soviet Union, Allied ships were being sunk, Europe was overrun and England was being destroyed by the *Luftwaffe*.

January 1942 was exceptionally cold. The mercury seldom rose above minus 20° C. The schools were not functioning. Almost all activity in the small town had come to a standstill and people left their houses only in the case of dire need. Then one morning this sleepy atmosphere was disturbed by the town crier's drum. He announced that there were a number of prohibitions in force until further notice: no leaving the town, no leaving houses, no use of telephones, no sending messages and so on. Anyone breaking these bans was threatened with a court martial, there would be raids.

We were disquietened, but not afraid. We had already heard something about the ban on travel to Novi Sad and some localities in Šajkaška where, according to the official announcements, "isolated bands of Chetniks have been successfully liquidated". No one could suspect that, behind this euphemistic formulation which was presented in such a way as it was hardly noticed, lay thousands of murdered Bačka Jews, Serbs and Gypsies, men and women, children and old people. We interpreted the word "raid" as meaning an organised pursuit of people who breached the public order. We didn't see ourselves as being in this category and so did not feel threatened.

To my knowledge no description of the Great Raid in Srbobran has ever been published. This is how it was for me:

At about midday, four policemen, armed with rifles and fixed bayonets, entered our home. They searched the apartment, ostensibly looking for weapons. Then everyone in the household, my father, mother, my father's brother and sister, my two grandmothers and I, were escorted to the local school. In one classroom they carried out a personal search and officially confiscated my father's and my penknives. Unofficially, our watches, fountain pens and the contents of

our wallets also went into the already bulging pockets of the policemen. They robbed us casually, with no visible compunction.

The people who had been brought in before us, about a hundred of them I think, were facing the wall and standing motionless. Every movement was punished with a blow from a rifle butt. After being "searched" we were sent to join the others. Throughout the day they brought more and more people and the classroom soon filled up.

In the evening they began separating the "guilty" from the "innocent". The selection was done by a "commission" of local Hungarians. Each one of the people detained was called out by name and made to stand in front of the teacher's podium where the commission sat. According to the scenario they had planned, the "innocent" were to go to "the small room" and the "guilty" to the "big room".

Andrija Darvaš as a boy

Most of the detained Serbs were charged with being "Chetniks" or "volunteers". The criteria were not explained and the charge was at the same time the verdict (the big room). The qualification "Jew" was enough in itself to be sent to the big room. Along with a few Serbs, my two grandmothers (both about eighty years of age) were the only ones among the Jews present to be sent to the small room.

A line of soldiers stood between the "courtroom" and the big room. They beat and kicked those who were "convicted" as they made their way to the big room. All of them, women and children included, were bleeding all over by the time they reached the room, some of them on hands and knees.

Night fell. We stood without moving and listened to the machine-guns on the dais being cocked from time to time. The soldiers were amusing themselves.

In the middle of the night they brought from somewhere an elderly retired teacher (his name was Rozenberger or Rozenberg). He was well-known and well-liked in Srbobran. In his old-fashioned tailcoat, with his monocle and gaiters, he looked like someone reincarnated from the time of the Emperor Franz Joseph. He always carried his hearing aid with him, a largish trumpet which he held to one ear. He was welcomed with a resounding slap in the face and fell, breaking his monocle and dropping his ear trumpet. He was unable to hear a single question and so could give no answers. They beat him and then beat him again, shouting "You're the teacher who mistreated our Hungarian children at school!"

The old teacher didn't understand a word, but kept repeating, his voice softer and softer: "Gentlemen, what kind of misunderstanding is this? I am a teacher." Finally he was quiet and they took him away. Nobody ever saw him again.

The following day they took us to the railway station, loaded us in wagons and took us to Bačka Topola. We were interned in a camp between Bačka Topola and Bajša and there we spent the next three months.

In May, 1942, they released us without explanation. We returned to Srbobran and, for some time, lived under official police supervision, which meant obligatory reporting to the police station. Eventually even that stopped. My uncle and father reopened the timber business and resumed work. I wasn't able to continue my regular schooling and was registered as having abandoned school. Just the same, as a part-time student I passed the fourth year secondary school exam in Budapest in 1942 and the following year I passed the fifth year exam in Debrecin.

The period from our return from the camp at Bačka Topola until March 19, 1944, was a time of relative safety for me and my family. The timber yard supplied a living while I prepared my exams with no tutor and enjoyed reading novels. The BBC was stirring up our hopes night after night. Allied squadrons kept flying overhead. The only disturbance came when my father was visited by an army recruiting officer. Jews in Hungary didn't do military service in the armed forces but were mobilised into labour battalions. This meant physical labour in military or industrial facilities or clearing minefields on the eastern front –

mostly with their own bodies. They were required to serve in their own civilian clothes wearing only a military cap and a yellow armband. Their commanders were Hungarian officers or non-commissioned officers who treated them extremely cruelly.

My father served a few months of his time as a batman to an officer. He polished his boots and sword, washed and ironed his underwear and took care of his gambling debts. When they parted, the officer shook his hand and said "Son," (he was about twenty years younger than my father!) "If the Jews were all as decent as you this long-suffering motherland of ours would have prospered!"

But my father's "decency" was to bring us close to financial catastrophe.

PRISONER NO. 58179

On March 19, 1944, the German Army occupied Hungary. Power in the country was taken over by a government willing to implement "the final solution to the Jewish question" in Hungary. The existing anti-Jewish laws were supplemented within days with new provisions. Regulations were passed on the sequestering of Jewish property, the obligation to wear the yellow star, restrictions on movement in public places, a ban on travel and so on.

My uncle's timber yard closed down, we wore yellow stars and, at my father's suggestion, my mother and aunt made seven rucksacks, one for each member of the family. At night, surreptitiously, my father and uncle moved some of our belongings to our neighbours' houses while other things were buried. The days passed in gloom and the nights in insomnia. Our wireless had been seized as soon as the German troops arrived.

On April 26, a number of Hungarian gendarmes walked into our house. They found us at the table, having lunch. "Finish your lunch in peace," they said. "It's your last lunch at home." They made an inventory for the confiscation of money and jewellery and a list of food in the house.

Finally they sealed the doors and then escorted us to the assembly point for the Srbobran Jews. Two policemen walked ahead and two behind us. The reaction of the people we passed varied: some laughed and pointed, some looked solemn, others pretended not to notice, while some turned off into a side street before they reached us. Only

one Hungarian, an acquaintance of my father's, walked up to us, greeted us and shook hands, wishing us luck.

Late in the afternoon we were taken under escort to Bečej on a horse cart. The Bečej Town Hall was the assembly centre for all the Jews of middle Bačka. The shouting of plainclothes policemen shattered the night as they demanded we hand over any money we had hidden and threatened to shoot us.

The next day we were taken by rail to Szeged where they accommodated us in the already overcrowded synagogue. We sat on the floor to reserve a place for the family to sleep. The more resourceful tied rope between the pillars and hung blankets, clothes or towels preserve the illusion of privacy. The guards didn't come into the synagogue or the yard. They guarded us from outside.

The Szeged Jews were still in their own homes. They were given the duty of feeding us. Every day at noon, under the supervision of the guards, they brought us food. They knew that their own freedom was temporary and brought us the best cooked food in more than adequate quantities. Some kind of management system began to be set up in the synagogue: order was maintained.

Different categories of prisoners began to emerge.

The older generation seemed crushed. They passed their days exchanging dark forebodings. Many of them became apathetic and withdrew into themselves.

The devoutly religious stayed together. They prayed at regular times, performing ritual movements.

The younger generation, between the ages of 16 and 20, very quickly adapted themselves to the new situation. People quickly struck up acquaintanceships and associations according to inclinations, mostly on an intellectual basis.

My group sat in a corner of the yard and discussed Freud or Adler, or someone would read to us, translations of Baudelaire or Geraldi. Almost everyone had brought a book with them. One of the boys, his name was Kalman, had a violin and would occasionally interrupt a violent quarrel with the sounds of a Monti *Csardas*, masterfully performed. We didn't accept the objective reality and instead enjoyed our intellectual banter.

It was a mixed company and mutual sympathies soon arose. Secret smiles, lingering handshakes, embraces in dark corners, discussions about life. Later, some drew strength – and survived – thanks to these

last moments of tenderness. Some evoked these last days of intimacy as they died, as their last thoughts.

After about twenty days we were moved from Szeged to Baja, to a former furniture factory. The atmosphere became tense and dark forebodings hovered among us. There were ideas of something very bad ahead. Various rumours circulated including the one that "they kill you with gas over there". Nobody believed it, but the tension edged up.

After six or seven days they took us to the railway station where a long line of freight wagons were waiting for us. So were the German soldiers. We began to board the train.

We were afraid, but the Germans seemed good-natured. They were unarmed, polite, even affable. They carefully helped elderly people climb into the wagons. There was no hurrying, no swearing or ugly language. And so thousands and thousands of people went to their death without panic, accompanied by *"bitte"* and *"danke"*.

The wagons were locked from the outside and the train set off. The bars on the windows were interwoven with barbed wire. Through them we watched our Pannonian Plain go by. Shepherds were tending their flocks and pitching stones at us. The wagons rang when they hit.

Our final farewell to Hungary.

There was a bucket in the wagon which we used with an incredible feeling of shame. Two or three times the train stopped. The soldiers would form a semi-circle around the train, machine-guns at the ready. They allowed us out of the wagons to empty our buckets within the semi-circle and relieve ourselves. The elderly, children, women and men were squatting, their eyes downcast. The Germans barked commands. Not a trace of their former politeness.

We had no idea where we were or where we were going. The names of the stations sounded Czech or Polish.

After about three days of travel, we saw through the windows a large camp of barracks buildings and people in striped prison clothes. The train slowed down and eventually stopped. The wagons were opened and we were met by lines of soldiers, their weapons at the ready. The soldiers were holding back dogs which were barking furiously and pulling at their chains. The commands rang out: "Don't take your belongings with you; they will be brought to you by truck! The elderly and sick should wait for the Red Cross vehicles to take them. Men form up on one side of the platform and women on the other side!"

Dozens of camp inmates in striped uniforms were putting us into ranks, according to the orders. They were silent, they wouldn't answer questions, but one of them would occasionally whisper through closed lips: "Choose work!"

One of my grandmothers could barely walk and we left her to wait for transport. She was afraid and felt abandoned, but my mother reassured her and promised we would be reunited soon. My other grandmother, mother and aunt walked away and stood in line with the other women. We watched them as long as we could.

The column of men moved forward and, eventually, each of us stopped before an SS officer. From photographs I saw later, I believe this was Dr Mengele. With his baton, he carelessly waved me to the right side. My father, my uncle and I all went in that direction, into the column of younger and stronger men. They took us to a building where we had to strip naked. They shaved all the hair from our bodies. Then we went into a shower room through one door and, after showering, came out through another door. There we were given some underwear, prison clothes, caps and shoes with wooden soles. Before we dressed they painted some liquid in our armpits and around our genitals. "It's for the lice," they said. Then we were taken to an empty concrete room where we sat without moving until the morning. We were supervised by two older prisoners. They beat one of the newcomers to death, casually, because he was "undisciplined". Several times the silence was interrupted by the arrival of prisoners, messengers, wanting to know if there were any twins among us, promising excellent accommodation and food in the hospital. We were envious of the twins, not knowing they were to be guinea pigs for Mengele's research.

In the morning they accommodated us in barracks with wide four-tier beds of wooden planks. Each bed served for ten prisoners, as long as they lay on their sides.

We learned from the older prisoners that we were in Poland and that the camp was called Auschwitz-Birkenau. We asked about the section for older women. One Polish prisoner nonchalantly pointed at the thick smoke gushing from a high, wide smokestack. "There they are, they're coming out!" We didn't understand him. We asked two other prisoners as they passed:

"What are they burning? What is this cloying smell?"

They laughed bitterly. "Don't you recognise the smell of your relatives?"

Only then did we understand. We were in shock. I couldn't even weep. My emotions were completely numbed. The process of transformation from a man to a prisoner had begun. The process in which ethical and moral standards, along with emotions, give way to the biological instinct for survival. It is a process, but it advances, fast and inexorably.

The days followed one after another. They didn't register us and we weren't given a personal number which was the usual procedure after the selection. The older camp inmates saw this as indicating that we would be transferred to another camp which would take over the function of the main camp. In fact we had been brought to Auschwitz only for the purpose of selection and the culling of those who were of no use.

Meanwhile I was getting used to sleeping on the boards, using my shoes as a pillow and standing still for two or three hours each morning and evening for roll call while they counted us. I was also becoming accustomed to the camp food: half a litre of "tea" or "coffee" in the morning, half a litre of soup made from mangel-wurzels or grass at midday and, in the evening, a piece of bread and margarine the size of a little finger. The tea and soup were served from old washbasins and chamber pots.

Prisoners of different nationality communicated in the camp slang. This was a vocabulary of about a hundred German, Russian, Polish, Yiddish and French words. Some words or terms were replaced with gestures as the need arose. It took only a few days to adopt the slang, and it served its purpose well.

I saw the camp documentation after the war and saw that I had arrived in Auschwitz on May 30, 1944, and was transported, together with my father and uncle, to Buchenwald on June 6 of the same year.

Buchenwald became our base camp. Here they recorded our personal information, photographed us and gave us our numbers which we sewed on our jackets and trousers. They vaccinated the new arrivals, all with the same needle.

It was the established practice for groups of prisoners from the base camp to be sent to wherever a labour force was needed.

In the middle of June, they transported me, as part of a large group of prisoners, to a ruined factory near Jena. We worked twelve hours a day, plus the roll calls, seven days a week, with the food and accommodation as described already. We were not experienced at

physical work so they "motivated" us with copious beatings and spectacular executions "as an example".

My father and uncle were taken to Magdeburg for similar work and under similar conditions. After a few days of this I fell ill. In a first-aid station the French doctor, also a prisoner, diagnosed pneumonia. Thanks to a combination of circumstances I wasn't killed, but was returned to the camp hospital in Buchenwald. The doctors there were also French prisoners. They had no medicines, but I was given good care. Incredible as it sounds I was fit again in ten days. I had taken French lessons from my earliest childhood because my parents had wanted me to study in Paris. This dream failed to come true, but I believe my knowledge of the language saved my life.

After my successful hospital treatment I was sent to one of the convalescent barracks. This was the place for invalids, often without arms or legs, who were unable to work. From time to time we were visited by Red Cross commissions. These barracks served as demonstrations of "humane German treatment" and an apparent contradiction of the "enemy propaganda" about the killing of camp inmates who were unfit to work. Here my father and I met again. I learned that he had been seriously wounded in Magdeburg, during a raid by the Allied air force. He was returned to Buchenwald as an invalid. He was very feeble, but meeting me helped to restore some of his vitality. I fed him the illusion that perhaps my mother had survived the selection and the family would be together again after the war. I also found a way to improve our food a little by voluntary night work in the camp kitchen, trading tobacco, selling shoes and clothing of questionable origin and so on.

I struck up a friendship with three fellow-Jews my own age, two of them from Transylvania and one from Budapest. One of them was missing a leg and the other two had lost arms. They suffered both because of their handicaps and because of mistreatment by other camp inmates. There weren't many Jews in Buchenwald, but they ranked at the very bottom of the national hierarchy, as they did in the other concentration camps. Verbal and physical abuse of the Jews was a kind of entertainment for the others, mostly Polish, Ukrainian and Russian prisoners. Invalids were easy prey.

The four of us often met for discussions with intellectual pretensions, reading, singing popular hits and sharing our memories and

plans. We made our own simulation of life and were able to spend part of our time as normal people.

It was difficult to get any news from the front, but there were many indirect signs that Germany's power was almost spent. There were Allied planes flying overhead every day. Camp inmates with German blood were invited to volunteer for the army in return for a pardon for their earlier transgressions. Non-Jewish camp inmates were asked to volunteer to give blood. The reward was a whole big sausage. Towards the end they began checking even the inmates of the invalid barracks and all who had four limbs were declared fit for work.

In the middle of December, 1944, I said farewell to my father and my friends. Along with hundreds of other camp inmates I was sent to a small place called Berga am Elster. This was an idyllic spot in North-Eastern Germany, untouched by the war.

We were accommodated in a mill which no longer operated. We slept in the same four-tiered beds. Lying close together we tried to keep ourselves warm. Work, work and work, twelve-hour shifts, night and day. We were using pneumatic drills to dig holes in a hill, presumably for the building of an underground factory. The German workers would do the blasting and we would take out the rock, or load it into small wagons. The work was hard, the pace unendurable and there were beatings all the time. It was unbearably cold and our clothes were thin, our food weak and inadequate. As soon as anybody died the nearest prisoners would immediately take his clothes and put them on. The foreman would wet the dead man's chest and write his prisoner number in large figures with an indelible pencil. This was the usual procedure in all the camps because the corpses were also counted during the *Appell*, the roll call. Roll calls were held after work and would sometimes last for hours as we stood at attention in the snow, ice or rain. The death rate was high and every two weeks they would bring new prisoners in as replacements.

After the work and the roll calls were over, the dilemma would be whether to sleep on the upper or lower tiers of the bunks. On the upper tiers it was warmer, but the prisoners on the top levels rarely woke up in the case of need and would urinate on those below them, after which they would be harshly beaten. Sleeping on the lower tiers it was colder and the prisoner would often wake up wet.

More than two months passed. Few of the prisoners with whom I had originally come to Berga had survived. They had died at work, died

when being beaten, died in their sleep. I could hardly move and I would work in a semi-conscious state. I was becoming a living skeleton. We were so exhausted that we could even fall asleep as we walked. We would go to work and come back in ranks of five, holding each other arm in arm. The first, third and fifth would walk awake while the second and fourth would walk and sleep.

At the end of February, 1945, during the usual selection, I was put into the category of *musulman*[4].

I was returned to Buchenwald and found myself again in the invalid barracks. The same day I had a visit from a prisoner, a Serb from Srbobran. He gave me a piece of bread and half an onion. He was silent, silent... then: "Your father died two weeks ago." He patted me on the back and left.

I was now quite alone. I collected another ten Jews together and kept repeating after somebody: *"Yisgadal v'yiskadash sh'may rabo..."*

I tried to discover the circumstances of my father's death, but all I knew for certain was that after my departure he had become apathetic. He lost the hope that my mother might have survived and nor did he believe that I would return. Perhaps he was suffering under the burden of a bad decision: when we left Hungary, in Wenerneustadt, the Germans had opened the doors of the wagon and given us ten minutes to think. Anyone willing to volunteer for farm work could get out, along with their family members. My father was against any kind of volunteering. Nor did he have any luck with his choice of friends. In Magdeburg, up to the time that he was wounded, he was working beside his best friend from Srbobran. This friend was appointed as a foreman (Vorarbeiter) by the Germans. From that moment on my father became his main victim for beatings. I think he probably lost his will to live.

I was moved to a new barracks. There I discovered that the food was distributed by a Dalmatian. I spoke to him in Serbian and he just looked at me and walked on. But from then on my rations became ampler, my soup thicker, my piece of bread a little bigger. I began to recover a little.

During March the mood in Buchenwald grew tense. We could hear the artillery fire in the distance. As the days passed the roar of the canons became louder. We could even hear machine guns. We didn't

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[4] See footnote, 2, p. 134

know whether the Germans would hand us over to the Allies alive. The end was near, but what it would be was uncertain.

One morning, late in March or early in April, 1945, the inmates from that part of the camp called Kleinlager were led to the gates of Buchenwald. They formed a column which must have numbered thousands of prisoners and, surrounded by guards, were quick-marched along the road to Weimar. Many were exhausted or invalids and they fell behind. All of these were shot dead. The road behind us was lined on both sides with corpses in striped clothes. We arrived at the railway station in Weimar. A hundred people were pushed into each wagon and we set off.

Here my memory begins to fail me. My consciousness was oscillating between clear images and complete darkness. What remains now are fragments with no clear sequence of events and that is how I shall present them.

The journey took between ten and twenty days.

- The Germans would occasionally open the wagon. We would press ourselves into one end of the wagon and, one by one, cross to the other end. Those who couldn't walk were shot on the spot. The corpses of those who had died and those who had just been shot would be taken in a blanket to the last wagon, the wagon "for the dead". This gave us an opportunity to pluck some grass to eat or to wet our mouths when it was raining.
- The Allied air force bombed our locomotive. We stood and waited. The Allies were strafing us. There were many dead prisoners. The "wagons for the dead" were filling up and were uncoupled at the next station.
- The Germans no longer rode in their special wagon behind the locomotive. They were now deployed in pairs among the prisoners' wagons, sitting by the open doors. We had air to breathe.
- Every now and then there would be a problem with the railway line. We would wait for a long time, then move, then wait again.
- We were crawling with lice. The prisoners picked at the lice, picked at them and ate them.
- The hunger and thirst were terrible. Some people wet their lips with their own urine.

- We got water from somewhere and rushed for it. I managed to get two or three sips.
- There was no bucket. We were surrounded on all sides by our own and other people's excrement.
- People were dying in large numbers. We dared not take the corpses out of the wagon. If anyone should trip and fall they were shot dead. The corpses stayed with us, decomposing.
- One prisoner arranged a deal with a guard. For a cup of water he offered his gold-crowned tooth. The German pulled his tooth out with a bayonet and brought him water.
- The train was standing at a station in Czechoslovakia. An elegant blonde woman, wearing a hat, was negotiating with a German officer. Then villagers arrived bringing food for the soldiers and barrels full of boiled potatoes for us. The Germans distributed them to us. The whole village was at the station watching us. We also got some water.
- I was talking to a young Pole. A captured Partisan. He was talking loudly. The German guard at the wagon doors raised his rifle and shot. The Pole's brains splattered across the floor. A number of hungry hands reached out.
- The train stopped, the command rang out "*Alles raus!*" We crawled to the wagon door and fell out onto the ground. It was raining. Everyone pushed their dry lips and tongues into the puddles. We saw more prisoners around us; even they were astonished to see how we looked. They whispered to us that we were in Dachau. We crawled to a barracks and were given soup and water. We heard heavy artillery fire. I completely lost orientation in time and space. All I remember is the door closing and the ban on leaving the barracks.
- The barracks doors were open and we were crawling towards the exit. There were American soldiers standing there. Horror in their eyes. One of them stood there and vomited. They were stupefied.
- I was standing completely naked while they showered me from a hose. Then they sprayed us with white powder from a pump. DDT, they said. Haircutting and shaving.

- They were driving us in ambulances. I was on a stretcher. The soldiers were very careful. They put everyone into their own individual beds with white sheets. American military hospital, they said.
- We slept or lay half conscious. Our days were filled with doctors, injections, infusions, visits, carefully chosen food. We were all suffering from dysentery. There was a very high death rate.

Within a few days my consciousness gradually returned. I could tell day from night. I talked with my neighbours. There was an Austrian lying on my left, on my right a Pole. I could also communicate with the doctor. After an X-ray examination he told me I had tuberculosis of the lungs. They removed the tubercular scrofulae from under my arms. The scurvy was rapidly going and my teeth were no longer loose. A dentist removed dead tissue from my mouth.

I walked around the hospital ward where there were now fifty or sixty former camp inmates and found two Jews from Budapest and Novi Sad. We struck up a friendship. Sometimes we would sit in front of the hospital barracks. One of them had a mirror so we looked at ourselves to see what our bodies looked like. We saw that we were skeletons covered with skin. The widest part of our legs were our knees. We had no muscle mass and had to use cushions when we wanted to sit.

The national committees which had been organised took a census of the inmates. Someone from the Yugoslav committee came and noted my personal details. From then on I regularly received *Dahavski poročevalac*, the newspaper for Yugoslav prisoners, in Slovenian. Most of the Yugoslav internees in Dachau were Slovenes.

One day passed after another. The Americans came up with the idea that the German prisoners of war should clean our facilities and maintain hygiene. Bad idea! The former camp inmates didn't respect the Geneva Convention on the treatment of prisoners of war.

A month passed. I learnt from the Yugoslav Committee that the next day, June 4, 1945, we were to depart for Yugoslavia.

At six in the morning I was at the assembly point. There were American troop transports waiting for us. The former camp inmates were now wearing German uniform. A uniform from Rommel's Africa Corps was hanging on my body. We set off. Our journey took us through Austria and we entered Italy via the Brenner Pass. We were plagued by dysentery. Locals in the villages through which we passed

stared in amazement at the "German soldiers" on American trucks with their bare behinds hanging outside.

I don't remember arriving in Yugoslavia. Perhaps I had dozed off. However we were greeted in Ljubljana with festivities: a military brass band, people showering us with gifts. Speeches, music, merriment. Night time. I was tortured by dysentery.

The next day I was admitted to hospital. But this is no longer a story about the war.

EPILOGUE

The concentration camps have been described by many authors. Historians, writers, politicians, former inmates, sociologists and many others have made valuable contributions to the understanding of this twentieth century phenomenon. In most of the descriptions, both of the camps and of the camp inmates, the story ends with the end of the war. The reality, I believe, is rather more complex.

Jews were taken to the camps to be exterminated. Depending on their physical condition, the extermination was carried out immediately on their arrival, or delayed for some time in order to exploit whatever physical strength they still had.

After the initial selection, if he survived it, a Jew would end up in a camp where the usual norms of civilisation as he knew them didn't apply. The battle being fought here was one to stay alive as long as possible, and there was no choice in the way it was done. In this struggle for biological survival, ethical principles and moral norms were of no significance. The new value system favoured prisoners who were adaptable, able to adjust rapidly to the changing conditions of the concentration camp. A regression in civilisation would take place.

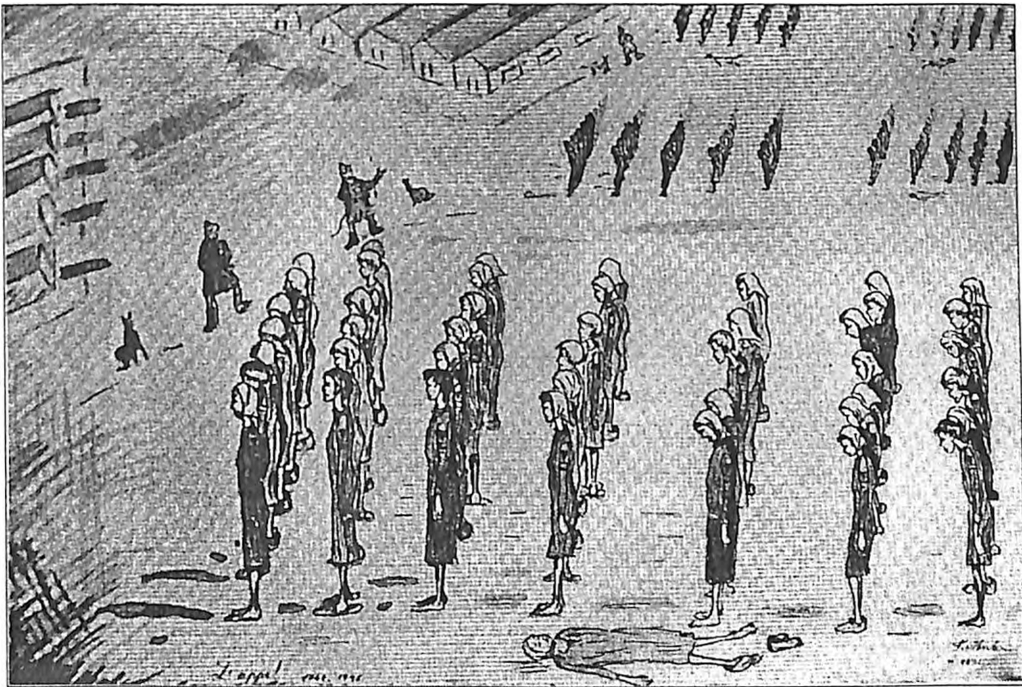
After the liberation the inmate would leave the camp as a partly changed person. Resocialisation was essential, mostly spontaneous and, more or less successfull, it touched on every area of life. After the complete change of personality in the camp, the former inmate had to learn everything from everyday behaviour to the traditional values of a civilised society. This is a long and painful road, regardless of any professional or personal affirmation either planned or achieved.

But one question remains unanswered. Do the camp traumas disappear, or are they only successfully repressed? Perhaps that's an individual matter. For my own part, sometimes, in my thoughts, I recognise

the spirit of Buchenwald. These aren't memories of the camp but thinking in line with the camp model. The camp marching song perhaps expresses it best.

> *"Buchenwald ich kann dich nicht vergessen,*
> *weil du mein Schicksal bist..."*
>
> (Buchenwald, I can't forget you,
> because you are my destiny...)

Subotica, March 2002



Roll Call (Appellstehen)
From a collection of drawings by Belgian painter Felicie Mertens, inmate No. 10465 in the Ravensbrück camp

Raul TEITELBAUM

THE PRIZREN ELEGY

Raul Teitelbaum was born in Prizren in 1931 to Dr Yosef Teitelbaum and Paula, née Weisselberger. In May 1944, together with his mother and father, he was taken first to the camp at the Belgrade Sajmište, then to Bergen-Belsen. They were in one of the last convoys of Jews from Yugoslavia to be transported to German concentration and death camps. They were liberated on April 24, 1945. His father did not survive the hardships of the camp and died a few days after the liberation. He was buried in Germany. Raul returned with his mother to his hometown of Prizren and lived there for three years. He finished his final year of secondary school at the First Boys' Secondary School in Belgrade. In June, 1949, he boarded the ship Radnik and left for Israel where he still lives as a retired journalist. His mother died in Jerusalem and was buried there.

Raul Teitelbaum completed his military service in the Israeli Army as an officer. He studied history and economy at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. For more than forty years he worked in Israeli media as a journalist and publicist. For a number of years he was a correspondent, economic analyst and parliamentary reporter on the most popular Israeli daily, Yediot Ahronot. *He finished his career as a journalist working as the paper's German correspondent. He also worked as an Israeli correspondent for* Borba, Politika *and* NIN. *He*

now devotes his time to historical research of various aspects of the Holocaust. He has published, together with Mirko Klarin, a book entitled Israel at the Crossroads *(1986). In 2000 he published, in both Hebrew and English, the historical study* Holocaust Gold.

For many years he was very active in Israel's political left. He was a member of the Israeli Communist Party's Politburo and, later, the president of the Party's Central Committee. He was one of the founders of the leftist movement Moked and member of the leftist Mapam Socialist party. Soon after this was disbanded he joined the Merec movement. He is also active in the Israeli Peace Now movement.

His wife Aliza, née Eisen, is a microbiologist. They have two daughters, Anat and Iris, and four grandchildren.

The army truck drove slowly away from the gate of the house, whose windows faced the street. The driver had to manoeuvre through the narrow cobblestone alley. This alley was rarely a witness to motor vehicles in this part of the town, close to the centre.

It was a late spring that year. The sky was grey and leaden. It was rather cold in the morning hours. I was shivering from excitement, still drowsy. In the open vehicle my mother tried to warm me with a hug. The small white and coloured flecks carried on the breeze were getting smaller and smaller. They looked like the last snowflakes or the first spring butterflies. They were the stamps from my collection. I had begun collecting them just before the war, very diligently and passionately. Ten minutes earlier my stamp album had been flung out of the window along with some of my father's Austrian medals from World War One. Father's medals landed in the courtyard, while my album flew apart and the stamps were scattered on the breeze.

May 16, 1944. Very early in the morning. Mother, father and I were still asleep in our temporary one-room apartment into which we had moved a few weeks earlier on our return from Albania. Someone was banging furiously on the door, then broke it down with the kick of a boot. I opened my eyes. Three or four SS men burst into our room. "*Los! Los!*" This was a nightmare awakening. "*Schnell! Schnell!*" We stood up in our pyjamas. Only the SS officer spoke. The others just threatened with their rifles and *Schmeissers* pointed at us. "Get dressed fast and get downstairs!" he barked.

My father tried to calm him down in his excellent German (he had a doctorate in medicine from Vienna). He walked to the cupboard, took out a box and showed it to the one in charge. They were medals, the high decorations he had received in the first world war. "I was your ally in the last war!" It was futile. Instead of calming him down, this attempt of my father's only made him more furious.

"Get out, you Jewish pig!" He tore the medals from my father's hand and flung them through the window. Then he crossed to the cupboard and threw everything from it through the window. My stamps as well. They wouldn't let us take anything except the clothes we stood up in. As we were leaving my father managed to grab the doctor's bag he used to take when his patients called him.

And so they loaded us onto the army truck downstairs. From our alley the truck headed to the street along the Bistrica river which ran through my home town of Prizren. Then, across the bridge it joined the main road leading north. The streets were empty. The people of Prizren were still sleeping. Kaljaja, the mediaeval Ottoman fortress above the town became smaller and smaller in the distance.

Everything was done in almost the blink of an eye. It had been a complete surprise. In fact what had happened was expected. In those few weeks we had been in this temporary apartment there was talk about needing shelter. There was even talk of people from the National Liberation Struggle preparing an illegal bunker for us in the Podkaljaja region, on a hill below the walls of the old fortress where mainly poorer Serbs lived. Over there my father was to treat the wounded and ill from the underground and Partisans from Mount Šara. But the Nazis were faster. We arrived in Priština in the afternoon to find about three hundred Priština Jews already assembled in military barracks. This was the last transport of Jews from Yugoslavia.

All this happened just months before the liberation of Kosovo and Belgrade. But the Nazis were stubbornly and systematically "cleansing" the remaining Yugoslav territories of Jews. It didn't matter that Germany was losing the war. They were doing all this according to their plan, providing the necessary means and transport to take us thousands of kilometres away to northern Germany. They were collecting us one by one, in the painstaking way the Germans are famous for.

Why Raul?

We were the only Jewish family in Prizren. None of my friends from school or from the neighbourhood, not even my teachers knew how to pronounce my surname, one which was quite unusual in this region. Even my first name was completely odd in this colourful ethnic mosaic of Prizren in which I was born and grew up. My father, Dr Yosef Teitelbaum, was a municipal physician at the time and a passionate chess player. In 1931, the year I was born, the world chess champion was a Cuban, Raul Jose Capablanca. So my father named me in his honour. And I certainly have played chess since my childhood, but I remained a long way below the level of my Cuban namesake.

Last photograph: Raul with his father, Dr Yosef Teitelbaum, in the Preza camp in Albania, in the summer of 1943

According to the census of January 31, 1921, there was 1 (one) "Israelite" living in Prizren, probably my father (there were 313

"Israelites" in Priština). This was the year that my father arrived in Prizren from Vienna.

He was unable to practice medicine on the territory of Austria, and had seen an advertisement saying that the newly formed Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was looking for army doctors. So, in 1921, he arrived in Prizren to work as a doctor in the army garrison town. He worked in the army until 1930 and was then appointed as Prizren municipal doctor. In 1925, on a visit to Vienna, he married my mother Paula, née Weisselberger. My mother was born in 1905 in a place called Kosmerzyn in Poland.

According to the stories I head later from the Prizren natives, both Serbs and Albanians, my father as a physician almost had the status of an omnipotent tribal magician. He brought the dead back to life. My father also wrote, although I don't ever remember seeing him write. When we returned from the camp one of the few possessions which had been left behind which we found with our neighbours was a manuscript of my father's. It was a comprehensive historical study of Jewish uprisings against the Roman Empire during the period from 64 BC to 137 AD. Drawing on old Roman sources and those of Flavius Josephus, he described the Roman intervention in Judea, the Maccabaeus family, the development of ancient Jerusalem and life there, the raids of Pompeius and Mark Anthony, the defeat of the Hasmoneans, the rule of Herod, the influence of Tiberius and Nero on the Near East, the battle for Jewish independence at the time of Vespasianus and Titus, Queen Berenika's love affairs, the rolė of Elazar ben Simon and other Jewish leaders, life in Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple on the Moria Hill, later on the teachings of Rabbi Akiba and his followers and, finally, Bar Kokhba's uprising and the end of the national state of the Jews.

From all the manuscripts left by my father I can conclude that, before the first world war and immediately after it, he was of Zionist orientation. A copy was somehow preserved of a letter addressed by my father to a "Dear Kurt", a person unknown to me. The letter was probably written in the 1920s and in it my father argues that, some fifty or sixty years in the future anywhere between five and eight million people could be living in a Jewish state in Palestine. However my father never reached Palestine but, instead, found himself in Prizren, by the Albanian border.

Prizren at the time was a provincial town with a population of about twenty thousand. It was a colourful town, what we would now call a multicultural environment. However all of this was probably not as idyllic as my childhood memories of it seen from this distant point in time.

In my early childhood my nanny was a Gypsy. We used to buy ice-cream in a patisserie owned by a Goranac, one of the Pelivan family. Our baker was a Turk, we bought vegetables from an Albanian green-grocer, my mother bought filigree jewellery from Catholic Albanians. All our neighbours and friends were Serbs or Montenegrins. My parents' friends were the small circle of Prizren intelligentsia: lawyers, judges, secondary school teachers. Our best friends were the family of Dragutin Jakić, a local lawyer from a respectable old Prizren family.

As a child I could already feel the signs of the approaching storm. When, in 1940, I began my last year of primary school, I would overhear snippets of my parents' conversations, and their concern as to whether I would be able to enrol in secondary school when the time came. This was because of the various decrees passed by the Yugoslav government of the day which limited the enrolment of Jewish pupils and students, the *Numerus Clausus*. After the *Anschluss* in Austria, there was great concern for our family in Vienna. Some of them managed to move to Palestine, while others somehow reached New York. The exception was my grandmother on my mother's side, Ethel Weisselberger, despite a great many unsuccessful attempts by my mother to get her out of Vienna and even bring her to Prizren. Many years later, in Israel, I found among my late mother's papers a postcard from my grandmother Ethel (Devora) from Vienna. It had, by some miracle, been saved. The date was October 17, 1940, and the postmark bore a swastika. I had probably removed the stamp back then for my collection. This was a terrible cry from an old and lonely woman, begging to be saved. "I am desperate because I have not received any news from you. I still haven't got the shoes and I have no money to buy them. Perhaps you could get permission for me to leave and I could then join you. I am so desperate in my old age and so terribly lonely. Dear God, help me be reunited with my children. Every night I pray to God to grant me this happiness. My dear daughter, I beg you to make some effort." My mother did try. She even travelled to Vienna in the summer of 1940, but she didn't manage to get the documents necessary to bring her mother to Prizren. My grandmother, who I had got to know to

some extent during our visits to Vienna before the war. was killed in Theresienstadt. I found her name in Yad Vashem in Israel, in the *Theresienstadt Book of Death*, together with the exact date of her death: March 2, 1943. She was 73 years of age when she died.

"AVETE FRANCOBOLLI?"

The Germans occupied Prizren and the surrounding area twice. The first time was a few days after the declaration of war. I think it was April 9, 1941. It was a very dramatic picture. A German convoy entered the town, tanks, armoured vehicles and army motorcycles. There had never been so many vehicles in Prizren. The German soldiers, with their helmets and grey raincoats were truly terrifying. There was some gunfire heard in the first minutes. Later it emerged that a few soldiers from the Prizren garrison tried to resist this convoy with their outmoded World War One rifles, hiding behind tombstones in the Prizren cemetery. They were all killed of course. Then everything calmed down, apart from the fear and uncertainty. My father, who had been mobilised as a medical officer, managed to escape imprisonment. He somehow managed to return to Prizren from Prokletije by a roundabout route. A few days later the Germans withdrew and handed the region over to the Italian military authorities. In July the entire region of Kosovo, apart from Trepča and Kosovska Mitrovica, was annexed and handed over to the Albanian civil administration. And so we found ourselves in "Greater Albania". Formally we all became Albanian citizens, "second class" citizens of course. Schools for Albanian children opened in the autumn while we, the non-Albanian kids remained on the streets. Not long afterwards, during holidays, the Albanian children were also marching through the streets of Prizren wearing the black shirts and black caps with pompoms of the Young Fascists and carrying rifles – children's toys, Italian style. They marched proudly through the streets of the city centre, trying to sing *Primavera*, the Italian Fascist anthem.

Everything was black, especially the future. Even as a child everything was clear to me: the Nazis and Fascists were here and victory was over there. This victory was very close, every year, from the very beginning. Time passed, but victory was always here, close at hand. I remember one discussion I had with my father. Sometime around the end of 1941, before the "Italian chicken thieves" as we disparagingly referred

to our occupiers, arrested him. We had a radio, a rarity in Prizren at the time. My father was trying to listen to the BBC from London, with the volume turned down low. This was how I heard about the great naval battle in the North Sea in which the English sank the Bismarck, I think. My father was enthusiastic: "Well, it's completely clear. Great Britain has the strongest naval fleet in the world." I tried, unsuccessfully, to convince him that the Russian fleet was the most powerful. My father waved his hand, as though to say "You don't understand anything." But I stuck to my opinion.

Everything was black and white during this period. The Black Shirts and the like were black. The Reds were white. Not the red of the Albanian flag with its double black eagle which hung on all the public buildings in my town, but the red of the five-pointed red star.

Everything was clear, but life wasn't easy. However, during those three critical years we were spared the horrors facing Jews in other parts of Yugoslavia. At the time a number of Jewish families who had managed to flee Belgrade and other parts of Serbia also found refuge in Prizren and lived there illegally with false documents. I remember that my mother helped some of them to find apartments.

Sometime around the end of 1941 my father was arrested. It wasn't exactly because of his Jewish origins. At the time, probably as a preventive measure, the Italian military authorities arrested several hundred of the most highly educated Serbs and Montenegrins. My father was one of them. This group included teachers and lawyers, professors and respectable people from throughout Kosovo and Metohija. Anyone who was seen as a potential leader of any kind of resistance against the occupying authorities. They were all taken to an Italian camp in Albania, near Preza. Together with them were part of the illegal communist leadership from Kosovo and Metohija. My father remained in that camp for about two years, until Italy capitulated in September 1943.

After my father's arrest our apartment was confiscated and given to Italian officers. We were given a week to pack all our furniture and belongins. Our friends, the Jakić family, took me and my mother in. Dragutin Jakić, a lawyer, spent the entire war in German captivity. As for us, apart from our short sojourn in Albania, we spent all this time with Nela-Ana Jakić and her daughters, Biserka and Ivanka. Aunt Nela spoke perfect Italian and somehow helped us to survive until the Germans caught us at the beginning of 1944. My mother knitted woollen socks and sweaters and I sold them to Italian soldiers. With the money

from this and from our savings, we were able to buy the necessities. At the beginning of 2002, when she was aged 95, Ana-Nela Jakić, who now lives in Zagreb, was proclaimed by Yad Vashem in Jerusalem as "Righteous Among the Nations" for the unselfish help she gave in these difficult times.

My friends and I were somehow free during this occupation. There were no schools and no teachers. In fact we lived on the streets getting up to all kinds of mischief and craziness. Poking around the taverns where the Italian soldiers and officers used to sit, I tried to fill up my stamp collection. The first Italian sentence I learnt was "*Avete francobolli?*" (Do you have any stamps?) In very little time I learnt to speak Italian so well that some Albanians thought I was of Italian origin. The Italian soldiers we came across were mostly good natured. And we kids often managed to get the better of them.

ICA FROM PODKALJAJA

One week during that period was to determine the course of my whole life. It was the week in the winter of 1941 when we had to pack all our furniture from the apartment which the Italians had confiscated. We called a carpenter to help us with this. He was twenty-year-old Ica Naumović from Podkaljaja. I would pass him nails and small ladders, which was an opportunity for us to talk and "analyse" the situation. We divided the things we packed among our neighbours. After the liberation, when my mother and I returned to Prizren from Bergen-Belsen, we found one of those trunks full of things which were priceless for us: family photos, my father's documents, several of his manuscripts and some books from our bookshelves, as well as a Persian rug from our guest room. They were all that were left of my idyllic childhood.

Ica was a member of SKOJ, one of the few members of the illegal Party youth organisation in Prizren. He was killed at the end of 1944 as a member of the Šarplaninski Partisan detachment. During the week we packed our furniture, Ica "organised" me. I was eleven when I joined an illegal group of children my age and a little older. Meetings were held in an area called Podkaljaja, where poor Prizren Serbs lived. It lay below the mediaeval Ottoman fortress on a hill above the town on which the Italian occupying force had written in large letters the Fascist slogan "REX – DUX". At our first illegal

meeting, our senior guide, the elder brother of a member of our illegal children's group, explained to us what the word "conspiracy" meant: not a word to anyone, not even to our parents. So I entered a world of secret adventures whose aims were not at all childish. "Death to Fascism, freedom to the people!" My first practical contribution to the "Movement" was my father's medicaments which I carefully packed in a box and handed over to the illegal organisation. For almost a year and a half, from the beginning of 1942 until the summer of 1943, I was completely absorbed in this illegal conspiracy. Not even my mother, busy ensuring our survival, knew where I used to wander off to for hours. I made new friends and cut all my ties with old friends from primary school. They continued to play with their marbles while I found a completely new use for mine.

At these illegal meetings we very quietly sang a song that had been previously unknown to us. *Red are the East and West, Red are the North and South*. Once an older friend brought us parts of a book primitively mimeographed for us to study. The words were barely legible and the sentences, which took a great deal of difficulty and effort to decipher, were even less comprehensible. These were excerpts from an illegal edition of *Short Course...* We understood well who the Albanian Balists were, and Draža's men, but we certainly didn't understand what the *Bund* was. This attempt to give the illegal children of Prizren an ideological education was futile. What was far more interesting for us was distributing leaflets, pushing them under the doors of houses without being seen. It was something like a new version of "Cops and Robbers". Of course we were overjoyed when May 1 dawned, I don't remember whether it was 1942 or 1943, with huge pictures of Mussolini and King Victor Emmanuel III, all torn. The occupying force had put them up on a wall of a house on Šardavan in the centre of the town. And the big REX-DUX slogan on the wall of the Kaljaja was whitewashed over. For days the gendarmes and police snooped around town trying to find out who had done it.

We also had other tasks. Minor sabotage of the occupying forces. We were to steal weapons, or weapons parts from the Italian soldiers in taverns, which we sometimes managed to do. We'd put boards with nails in them under the occupiers' vehicles. When the vehicles moved off they'd have to change tyres after just a few metres. A very popular form of sabotage was pouring sugar or sand into the fuel tanks of army trucks. And our marbles became a really brutal weapon. Prizren lies in

hill country so the occupying forces usually used mules to transport heavy weapons, ammunition and equipment from one place to another. We'd put marbles in the ears of the mules and they'd lose their balance. It was an awful sight to see the mules fall under their load and squirm helplessly on the ground.

We also had intelligence and guard duties. We would carefully monitor the movements of military units in the town and report to our older friends. They would assign us to various streets and corners when important illegal meetings were being held and so, using signals and signs agreed on in advance, we would inform our older friends of potential danger and unexpected passers-by. I would single out one event which happened one day at the end of summer in 1943 as a highlight of this activity. They had deployed us around Podkaljaja. Our orders were to keep our eyes peeled. If we spotted any suspicious movement of unfamiliar people we were to immediately give a signal. None of us knew what was going on. Many years later I learned that a very important provincial conference was held that day, attended by Svetozar Vukmanović-Tempo who was on his way to Albania as an emissary of the Supreme Headquarters. This conference played a special role in the annals of the National Liberation Movement.

Because of the local conditions, the anti-Fascist movement in Prizren, as in all of Kosovo, was rather weak, especially among the Albanian population who were seduced by the idea of Greater Albania. It was only in the second half of 1943 and the beginning of 1944 that Albanian activists began to emerge in greater numbers. Still, it doesn't hurt to mention the National Liberation Movement was the only movement during the occupation which included members of all ethnic groups in its ranks. The others were all completely ethnically pure.

After the liberation I received a lapel pin given to members of the Fighters Association and a booklet with the signature of Aleksandar Ranković. I sometimes wear this little five-pointed red star on my lapel along with other Israeli medals when, on Holocaust Day, I speak to young Israeli students about my wartime activities.

CAMP DOCTOR

This illegal activity was interrupted by our departure to Albania just before the end of summer in 1943. We were told that we could visit

my father in the camp and so my mother decided that we should go there to be closer to my father.

There was one thing in my childhood which prevented me from being a real underground activist. I had frequent attacks of acute tonsillitis, especially in the winter months. I would get very high temperatures and cough enormous amounts of pus into a bowl. We were ten days on the road to Tirana. My mother decided that this was a good time for me to get rid of my tonsils. She found a doctor, a surgeon. She paid him, probably with a gold coin, and we arrived at the clinic on the day arranged. The Albanian doctor spoke to me in Italian and then sat me in a kind of dentist's chair. He tried to inject my tonsils to ease the pain of the operation. I have an intense dislike of anyone poking in my throat, so I suddenly clamped my mouth closed before the needle touched my tonsils and got up from the chair. The doctor was astonished, as was my mother. As I ran towards the door I heard the Albanian doctor's words. "Well, everyone knows that Jews are cowards." I felt deeply insulted. The next day I took my mother's hand and bravely returned to the Albanian doctor, prepared now to get rid of my miserable tonsils. This time round the doctor just knocked me out a little with some chloroform and, with a small sharpened spoon, scooped out my tonsils in what I felt as a painful procedure. He patted me on the shoulder and said "For the next week you should only eat ice-cream." And so, now that I was healthier, we headed for the Albanian Partisans.

On our way to my father's camp we found accommodation in the small town of Kruja, headquarters of the legendary Skenderberg, the mediaeval leader of Albanian insurgents against the Turks. We were near the village of Preza, where my father's camp was, in a valley surrounded by hills.

I was able to visit my father in the Italian camp in Preza a number of times. I would take him parcels with food that my mother prepared. She was not allowed to visit my father. He worked there as the camp doctor and had a small barracks with his doctor's office in it. The Italian military administration of the camp kept everything under strict control. However this simply can't be compared with the regime in the German concentration camps. There are two photographs from that period hanging on the wall above my desk in my apartment in Jerusalem. One is a photograph of my mother in a Turkish national costume from Prizren, in Muslim women's trousers, taken sometime in

the 1930s. In the other, my father and I are standing with our arms around each other next to the barracks in the Preza camp. Me in short pants and sandals, my father in a dark vest and a long-sleeved shirt. Someone took this photograph of us in the summer of 1943 and this photograph, which is precious to me, was preserved together with some other photos of the Preza camp inmates. My father was short with a large, bald head, a small trimmed moustache. He had a high forehead and wore glasses for his short-sightedness. He looked entirely different from the robust Montenegrins and Serbs who were in this Italian camp.

Because of the war and my young age, I didn't have a chance to really get to know him. Forty years later I had the opportunity to hear some touching stories about my father from that period. This was in Belgrade when I met Arso Milatović, a pre-war Montenegrin communist who had been a senior official in the Foreign Affairs Secretariat after the war (ambassador in Albania, Romania and Poland, head of the Secretariat's political department). He and my father had been together during his two months in the Preza camp. "He was a perfect intellectual, with great erudition, and he was an excellent doctor," Milatović said. "He was a good-natured man, very communicative, honest and humane. Very lively. He was very popular with the inmates. We all listened avidly to his learned lectures on the French Revolution and the Roman Empire. During the long hours in the camp we played chess with him or watched him play. He was the best chess player among us. It was then, for the first time in my life, I saw how a simultaneous exhibition is played when the doctor played with a number of them and beat them all." In a letter which the late Arso Milatović had sent me earlier, in October 1981, he wrote: "Your father's kindness, cultivation and humanity left a great impression on us, so we have a wonderful memory of him. As a true friend he shared all the hardships of the collective with us. It was then that he used to tell us about his son. It was back then that I heard and remembered your name. After the war, the men from our group who returned to Kosmet to work told me that our dear Doctor Teitelbaum, our chess and culture teacher, had not survived the war."

WITH THE ALBANIAN PARTISANS

It was by coincidence that I visited my father at the camp on September 8, 1943, the day of Italy's capitulation. And so it was, in the

Preza camp, that I lived to see the day of liberation. Word of the capitulation spread fast among the inmates. There was a feeling of unrest and uncertainty among the Italian soldiers. By the afternoon, inmate representatives began negotiating their release with the Italian commander. He categorically refused on the orders of his superiors, who had already fled. After the unsuccessful negotiations the inmates, overjoyed by the capitulation of Italy, began preparing to break through the wire fence of the camp. They dismantled their wooden beds and armed themselves with pieces of wood. But then, in the afternoon, they spotted a convoy coming down a nearby hill. These were Albanian Partisans who, in no time, surrounded the camp. Finally the Italian commander caved in. The meeting of the inmates and the Partisans was joyful. Everyone hugged and celebrated. After this, most of the camp inmates joined the Albanian Partisans. So did the three of us. My mother had joined us and now she, my father and I set off with the Partisans through the mountains nearby, which were almost impassable. Along the way we collected weapons from the disarmed Italian units. Each of us, even I, carried several rifles each to the Partisans' mountain bases. We stayed with the Albanian Partisans until the end of the year. We lived in remote mountain villages where my father treated the wounded Partisans and sick villagers. But there were difficult days close at hand. The Germans, who soon occupied Albania, launched an offensive against the Partisans in the hills east of Tirana. The Italian units which had joined the Partisans quickly fell apart and a terrible retreat into the mountains began.

Because of an acute ulcer, my father could no longer endure the strain. We began lagging behind and hiding in remote villages. I remember my father, exhausted, saying one evening "I can't take any more." We didn't know what to do. Father decided that we should somehow get to Tirana and try to survive there until the end of the war. I was against this and wanted us to continue on with the Partisans. Father cut me off. "If the Germans catch us there there's no doubt that they'll shoot us. But over there we have some chance of survival and of somehow getting through this."

I think that at that time, the beginning of 1944, in the Albanian gorges, not even my father was fully aware of the existence of Auschwitz and the gas chambers. Of course he knew that the Germans were hounding the Jews into camps. But he had no idea that most European Jews had already been brutally killed. The news that reached

us in these remote parts of Albania was very incomplete. We knew nothing about what was happening in occupied Europe, or about events in other parts of Yugoslavia. There was patchy news about the situation at the front lines, but news seldom came through the Allies' radio stations, especially the BBC. And even then there was little talk about the fate of the Jews.

So, with the help of some Albanian villagers, by a circuitous route we crossed to Tirana which at that time was crawling with German troops and Albanian collaborators. We rented a room in a suburb and so managed to survive a couple of weeks, completely cut off and living in an atmosphere of extreme uncertainty. One day my father ran into some Albanian acquaintances from Prizren and told them of his problems. "Doctor, what are you doing in this foreign environment? Go back to Prizren and we'll look after you there. We've been left without a doctor in any case," they advised him. And so, at the beginning of 1944, we returned to Prizren. I very quickly re-established contact with the illegal youth group. My father treated the sick of Prizren and the nearby villages. Among them were a number of wounded Partisans who had been illegally transferred to the town. The situation in Prizren was unbearable. Germans and Albanian collaborators strolled around town, spreading fear. This was something completely different from the Italian occupation. The people from the underground began preparing a bunker for us so we could hide. But the Germans were too fast.

SPANISH ROMANCE IN SAJMIŠTE

By the spring of 1944 it was clear that Hitler was losing the war. We were getting patches of information about Stalingrad and the Allied invasion in Southern Italy. But the atmosphere in our region was very grim and full of uncertainty. After Italy capitulated, the German units very quickly strengthened their positions in Albania and Kosovo. The Albanian collaborators, the Balists, were rampaging through the area. Not even the approaching denouement of the Third Reich was enough for them to forget the handful of Jews in this part of Yugoslavia who had somehow managed to survive thus far. The operation was carried out by the 21st SS Division, the Skenderbergs, led by the German commander August Schmidthuber. This was actually the first operation by this unit of Albanian volunteers from Kosovo, Metohija and

Sandžak. The officers were German. The German representative for Albania and the supreme commander for Serbia mounted a coordinated operation to round up the Jews from all of Kosovo and Metohija one by one, together with Jewish refugees in Montenegro – all those who had found refuge in territories under the Italian military administration until its capitulation in September 1943.

We were all loaded into freight wagons at the Priština railway station. With no food or water. This train, escorted by SS guards, began its journey through the Ibar valley. The thirst was terrible. I remember the train stopping on the open line beside the Ibar and that they finally allowed us to drink the muddy water from the river. And that was how our suffering began. The first stop was at Sajmište, across the Sava River from Belgrade. There were no longer any Jews there. Sajmište was formally part of the Independent State of Croatia and the camp was run by Ustasha guards under German control. No one knew what would happen to us. We kept hearing stories about the tragic fate of Jewish women and children from Belgrade a year or two earlier. Some of the Ustasha guards in the camp told us that we had no chance of surviving because up to then no Jews had lived through Sajmište. It was here perhaps, for the first time, that we really realised that we had embarked on a struggle for our very survival.

We stayed in Sajmište for three weeks. There we were joined by a few dozen Jewish refugees from Bosnia and Croatia who had taken refuge in Montenegro. There we also survived the Allied bombing of the bridge on the Sava River. As I remember, one of the bombs fell within the Sajmište compound. One inmate, a woman, was either wounded or killed.

One sad evening remains stamped on my memory of Sajmište. We were all in a huge hall where they had built multi-tiered wooden bunks on which we slept. The windows in the hall were all broken, which made it very cold at night. The atmosphere was heavy and sad. Suddenly, from a corner of this huge hall, we heard a soft melody. From some other place, some other time. One of our women from Priština was singing a lyrical Sephardic lament. In the silence it sounded like a prayer. This was the first time I had heard this Separhdic music. I no longer remember the song itself, but many years later, in totally different circumstances, I again heard this melody from the Sajmište.

Our fate in the Sajmište was to be different from that of our predecessors who had been killed in this death camp. In mid-June we were

loaded onto wagons. A week later this convoy of 437 Jews arrived at the Bergen-Belsen camp in northern Germany. In all the lists and German documentation we were all described as "Albanian Jews". This was the last Jewish transport from the territory of Yugoslavia and it included my father, my mother and I. It was in this camp that I "celebrated" my thirteenth birthday, my Bar Mitzvah. Along with us "Albanians" there were a large number of Dutch Jews, Anne Frank among them, and several dozen highly-respected Jews from Greece. Others also came later. Women, Auschwitz inmates who had survived. Even several hundred Jews from Libya.

"WHITE DEATH" IN BERGEN-BELSEN

I saw Hebrew letters for the first time in my life, written in the sand of Bergen-Belsen. It was also here that I heard for the first time ever the melody of a Hebrew song about Trumpeldor, the one-armed hero who was killed in Tel Hai, a pioneer settlement in northern Galilee. During the first months in the camp, when it was still tolerable, the children were gathered together by a young rabbi from Priština, Josip Levi, and a teacher, Hana Levi (later Has) from Sarajevo. They taught us the Hebrew alphabet in the sand in the camp. But all of this didn't last long.

There were many rumours and various theories about why they didn't kill us all. One of them was that as "Albanians" we were citizens of a country which was Germany's ally. Another was that the Germans kept us in order to exchange us for their own people taken prisoner by the Allies. The truth was that Himmler had planned Bergen-Belsen as a collection camp for various purposes, including the possibility of exchanges.

Bergen-Belsen was divided into several camps by barbed wire fences. The high outer fence which surrounded the whole camp was studded with high watchtowers with heavy machine-guns and spotlights. Small black boards with a skull and crossbones in white hung on the fence. "Anyone approaching will be killed without warning" read the boards in German.

We were all put together in what they called the *Sternlager* (Star Camp). Women and children were in one barracks, men in another, but in the same camp. They put us in barracks number 8. In the very first days they gave us six-pointed Stars of David, made from yellow cloth.

In the middle of them was the word *Jude* (Jew). The Dutch Jews who were already in the camp when we arrived had the same yellow star, but theirs read *Jood*, in Dutch. Mother somehow sewed these yellow symbols onto our clothes as they ordered. We were not allowed to move around the camp without them.

At the barracks entrance there was a space with a table and several wooden chairs. The remaining space was occupied by wooden bunk beds. Several months later, when more convoys arrived, surviving inmates evacuated from camps in the east, the space was even more crowded. A third tier was added to the wooden beds. The space was really cramped. In the end, more than four hundred people were living in barracks meant for a hundred. Everyone had a space about half a metre wide in which to lie. We slept pressed up against one another, with no chance of turning over. At the beginning, things somehow were all right. However, after a few months, when the bad dysentery began and a serious typhus epidemic, the situation was terrible. Because the people were so weak they couldn't go outside to relieve themselves so it was pouring from the upper bunks onto those below. There were also some horrifying moments when someone's neighbour in the bed would die without anyone noticing. Sometimes this would even be a brother or sister, a father or mother.

At the beginning my father tried to function as a doctor in the camp. But within just a few weeks he was so weak because of his ulcer that he spent most of his time lying down and rarely left the barracks, and then only with the help of my mother.

We stood on the *Appellplatz*, the parade ground, for hours. The heads of the barracks would line us up. One of the SS men, on a bicycle, tried to put the ranks into straight lines. God help anyone who got out of this line! Blows would rain down on them. After that they would count us. And of course they'd never get the right number of inmates. There were always people missing, either because they were exhausted and unable to leave the barracks, or because they were already dead in some corner. It was always a long time before they got things cleared up. And so we would stand there, endlessly, in the rain, snow and cold until the numbers somehow added up. These *Appells* were a typical combination of Nazi sadism and German pedantry.

Up until September or October, everything somehow proceeded "normally". We received our daily meals. In the morning this was some muddy coffee substitute, at noon a clear soup with a piece of potato or

mangel-wurzel floating here and there. Late in the afternoon they would give us something which was supposed to be tea. Along with this was our daily meal of a two-centimetre thick slice of bread and a piece of margarine. From the end of autumn until the liberation, the situation in the camp became more and more difficult and unbearable. Especially after the arrival of the new commandant, Josip Kremer, a former Auschwitz commandant. Everything broke down and became general chaos and a nightmare. The camp command was out of control, supplies no longer arrived. The daily bread ration was cut suddenly to the size of a box of matches. Instead of a two-centimetre slice of bread we got one centimetre a day; instead of two watered-down soups with mangel-wurzel we now got just one. And then not even that. There were also some days and weeks when we would get nothing.

At the beginning, while it was still possible, the adult men were taken to work in a nearby forest outside the camp. Virtually barehanded they had to uproot tree stumps to be used as firewood by the German population in the surrounding settlements. Women and children were put to work picking apart old, worn-out shoes which were brought to the camp in large heaps. The parts of these shoes which could still be used were made into some kind of primitive footwear with wooden soles for the inmates to wear. Some of us were given those typically Dutch wooden peasant clogs. They were heavy and it wasn't easy to walk in them. People dragged their feet. However they had the advantage that on cold days they could be lined with rags to somehow keep the feet warm.

Hunger was our greatest, and probably our only obsession. We would sneak around the camp for hours looking for scraps of food. Sometimes we looked at our Dutch neighbours and our peers in that part of the camp with envy. At least at the beginning they tried to keep to their daily routine and ate their poor meals all together within the family. On small wooden boards they would very neatly share their daily ration of bread for breakfast, lunch and dinner. A small piece of bread for every meal. For us Balkan types there was always the dilemma of whether to eat this daily ration all at once as soon as we received it. In this way we would feel that our mouths were full, even if just for a moment. Or should we leave part of the meal for the evening as the Dutch did? While they were still giving us mangel-wurzel soup, we children tried to hit the jackpot: after this watery soup was doled out we'd lie in wait for the empty vats which we would return to the camp

kitchen across from the entrance to our section of the camp and outside the barbed wire. This was an opportunity for us to lick the remains of the soup from inside the vat. And, even more important, to steal a piece or two of the mangel-wurzels piled in great heaps in front of the camp kitchen.

During the first months we also used to be given pickled forest snails. These were given to us from wooden barrels. At first no one could eat them because of the strong smell of this unusual food. Later they became the camp delicacy. A rare portion of protein. We used to use pickled snails and mangel-wurzel cut into pieces to make a kind of pate. But this soon came to an end. I have never come across these pickled snails again anywhere else.

The most important ritual for the inmates was when they would bring to the barracks several square loaves of bread, which contained more sawdust than flour and the head of the barracks would cut them using an improvised knife, a sharpened fork handle in fact. All the inmates who could still stand on their feet would gather around the table at the barracks entrance and watch carefully while the *Blockalteste*, the block supervisor, would measure the slices with a primitive ruler to make sure he didn't give anyone a millimetre less. Measuring the ends of these square loaves was always a problem. This piece of bread was the measure for everything. It was a kind of camp currency for the most primitive kind of barter. For a daily ration of bread, devoted smokers could get four of the cigarettes which the resourceful managed to obtain from the Nazi guards or the support staff at the camp. Even a shabby coat and other similar items could be had for bread.

While I was still somehow able to move around I spent most of my time in the camp collecting cigarette butts from the German guards. This was for my father who was a passionate smoker. At the beginning I managed to get him some Machorka tobacco from the Russian prisoners who worked in the camp kitchen. For hours I would walk through the camp compound looking down at the ground and collecting butts. This became almost an instinctive habit. For a long time after the liberation I would instinctively bend down whenever I would see a butt on the ground. It took me quite a while to break this habit.

I don't remember whether I ever looked the SS men in the face while I was in the camp. If I had been called on to identify any of these

criminals after the war I would probably not have been able to. I don't remember even one of their faces.

Near our camp there was a women's camp for those who had survived the Auschwitz Death March. They arrived at the beginning of 1945. Their hair was shorn, they were wrapped in rags and scraps of striped dresses. This camp was run by SS women who were extremely cruel. One scene which I saw across the barbed wire remains etched in my memory. The SS supervisor was furiously beating a woman, an inmate, with a plaited whip. The blows were dreadful and the poor woman fell on the ground squirming. And still the SS woman continued kicking her with her black boots, aiming for the most vulnerable parts of the body. As I watched this terrible scene I wondered how one woman could beat another so badly.

For me, hunger remains the overriding phenomenon of the days in the camp. Exhausting, chronic hunger which went on for months. The stomach is empty and the head thinks only of food. Everything else is eliminated from the mind. And on it goes, one day after another. Nobody who hasn't actually experienced it could understand this feeling.

Everyone moved around the camp like ghosts. People with swollen stomachs, hollow cheeks and wide-open rheumy eyes. Feeble, completely apathetic to the surroundings and to the people closest to them. The "hunger syndrome" consisted of putrid, purulent boils. Human dignity began to vanish. *Musulmani*, living skeletons. We were almost naked because the clothes we had brought with us very quickly wore out. The dirt and the dysentery left their unbearable traces. The stench was everywhere, the dreadful faecal stink. The primitive toilets were flooded, pouring from the barracks down the camp paths. Everywhere. Everything was mixed together. The dead and the living. It was impossible to walk without stepping on a corpse or a puddle of faeces and urine. There was total apathy. Some lay exhausted, unable to move. Others crept around the camp like ghosts, with no kind of connection to other people. Lice everywhere. These grey vermin multiplied at incredible speed. They nested in every seam of our ragged clothing and on every hair on our bodies. We were skin and bones, but the lice kept growing fat on our blood. In the beginning we tried to pick them off as an important part of our daily routine in the camp. We would look for them in the seams of our clothes and crush them with our nails. It was a Sisyphean labour. But our strength gave out and the

lice won. Everyone was too exhausted to get rid of them. The worst came after death. When someone died the lice, accustomed to the warmth of the human body, would crawl out to the surface of the corpse, covering it with a grey, vibrating layer. This was the surest sign that someone had finally died. Because quite often people who were alive looked as though they were dead. This was a kind of "white death" from lice.

The winter of 1944–45 was a season from hell. The typhus raged. Dozens, hundreds of people died every day. In the last three months before the liberation about 45,000 people died in the camp. The camp crematorium worked day and night and was still unable to cremate all the victims. There were bodies piled up beside the barracks. They were stacked like logs at a stake, petrol was poured over them and they were burned. These piles of human bodies would burn for days. The awful stench of death, of burning human bodies, flooded the camp.

During these last months, the German order was falling apart. The camp administration no longer took care of anything. The SS men rarely appeared in the camp. Germany was falling apart. The camp was falling apart. While there was order they were killing systematically. Now, in disorder, people were dying on a massive scale. The result was the same.

In the most difficult days, when everything was falling apart around us, my family tried somehow to stay together. Mainly thanks to my mother. In these circumstances this was no easy task. Staying together was perhaps the most uplifting sign that we still maintained our human dignity.

Sometimes hope came to us from the skies. In the distance we would hear the buzzing of the Allied bombers' heavy engines and then the dull explosions of the bombs on Hanover and other industrial regions of northern Germany. When the wind was kind to us the narrow ribbons of silver paper dropped by the Allied aircraft to confuse the German radar would drift into the camp. These were signs that the end of the war was growing closer.

When English units liberated Bergen-Belsen on April 15, 1944, they immediately realised that it was impossible to clean and disinfect the camp. Those inmates who had survived were moved to a nearby German Army camp. Bulldozers were used to bury thousands of unidentified bodies in mass graves and the Bergen-Belsen camp itself was razed to the ground using military flamethrowers.

We were not there at the time. One day in April we were told that all who could still move should prepare for transport. The reason for this German decision, just days before the liberation, remains unclear. Himmler or someone else had plans for us in those last days of the Third Reich. And so, at the beginning of April 1945, three convoys were evacuated from our *Steinlager*. Mainly towards the south-east. The first convoy reached Theresienstadt, the second was liberated by the Americans at Magedeburg. We were in the third convoy.

On April 10, five days before the liberation of the camp, we were ordered to go to a railway crossing gate, about ten kilometres from the camp. At the end of March, my mother had contracted typhus! She could walk only with great difficulty. I carried her to the train on my back so that we would not have to part. My father, who was 54 at the time, looked as if he was a hundred years old, but he somehow dragged himself along beside us.

The fact that father and I survived (although by just a few days), the horrors of the camp is something which, above all, we owe to our mother. She was our anchor. She took care of us and of others, trying to find extra food. She made us trousers and shirts from worn-out blankets. And, most important of all, by dint of great effort she preserved our dignity and the unity of our family under horrifying conditions when everything in the camp was falling apart.

They loaded about 2,400 of us, internees from Bergen-Belsen, Jews from Holland and Yugoslavia, some from Greece and France, into sixty wagons and, under SS escort, the transport set off on the night of April 10. And thus we began our journey of death through a ruined Germany which was already in flames. This train was later known as the "lost train". First we travelled via Lunburg, to the north, towards Hamburg. Then this train, some six hundred metres long, turned south-east towards Berlin. Then again to the south, to the cities of Kotbus and Luben, then west, not far from the river Elba and the place where the Soviet and American troops met. This meandering through Germany in closed wagons, with no food or water, went on for about two weeks. Through the barbed wire over the wagon windows we saw smoke and heard explosions in the distance. Berlin was in flames under the attack of the Red Army. On the rare occasions when they allowed us out to search for water, we would throw the dead out beside the railway lines and try to bury them in shallow graves. During this

nightmare journey I caught typhus and lived through all this in the delirium of high fever. My memories of it are all somewhat hazy.

Work by Raul Teitelbaum, done in the camp

During the night of April 23, our train stopped on the railway line out in the open. When the spring morning dawned, there were no longer any German guards around the train. There was a strange silence outside. And in the wagons the heavy smell of faeces, urine and death. Someone managed to get our wagons open. We crawled out. Because of my illness I could no longer walk and was crawling on my stomach. A few hours later someone shouted “Russians! Russians!” In the distance, as though in a dream or in the touching pathos of a Russian film, we saw a group of cavalry approaching. This was the advance contingent of the Red Army. We were free! Those who were able were shouting at the top of their voices and kissing the cavalry men and their horses.

A few months later, before they were repatriated to their countries, the Bergen-Belsen inmates who had survived sent Stalin a letter of thanks, typical of those enthusiastic days. "Each of us will tell our children and grandchildren, from generation to generation with deep gratitude, about these happy days of liberation by the victorious Red Army. After unprecedented suffering we are returning to life as free people."

We were liberated near a place called Trebic, in the eastern part of Germany. Because the fighting was still going on, the Soviet soldiers had no time to concern themselves with us. They took our whole train to Trebic, expelled the German locals from their houses and moved us in to await the Soviet medical teams. Our liberators then continued their advance.

Because we were so exhausted we weren't even able to rejoice at our freedom. But many of us, in our hunger, threw ourselves at the food we found in the houses. For some, this proved fatal. Some of these liberated camp internees died immediately after their liberation. The medical teams arrived a day or two later. For fear that a typhus epidemic would break out, all typhus sufferers were moved to field hospitals in the area, to some kind of quarantine. And thus my father, my mother and myself found ourselves near the village of Milberg in an army prison camp which had been converted into a field hospital. Our beds were right next to one another. On the morning of April 29, six days after we were liberated, I woke up. My father was lying next to me, he wasn't moving. He had died in his sleep. I reacted almost hysterically, shouting "There is no God!"

We buried my father that same day in a nearby prisoner-of-war cemetery in part of a forest. Two German prisoners, escorted by a mounted Soviet guard, dug the grave. We lowered the coffin with my father's body into it. The two German prisoners were muttering something to each other. I thought they said something like "*Der Verfluchte Jude*". To this day I'm not certain whether I really hear, this or whether I just imagined it. I went to the guard on his horse and complained that the Germans were swearing about my dead father. The guard handed me the horsewhip he had in his hands.

"Beat them," he said to me. I tried, but didn't have the strength. Then he took the whip back and started driving the Germans down the path, whipping them. With a pencil I wrote my father's name on a board and put it down on the fresh grave. Many years later, sometime

in the second half of the 1980s, I was in East Berlin as an Israeli representative, attending an international congress of fighters against Fascism. I asked the organisers to help me look for my father's grave in the part of East Germany where we were liberated. My search for the grave took several days. And so we also arrived in the village of Milberg. One of the older people remembered that there was a camp for prisoners of war in the area and that sick concentration camp internees had been accommodated there immediately after the war. He even remembered that there was a cemetery for prisoners of war. We went to find the spot where the camp stood. All that remained were the concrete foundations of the barracks, now overgrown with tall plants. We also found the place where the prisoners' cemetery was supposed to have been, the place where I had buried my father. But there was no longer a cemetery there, nor my father's grave. They explained to me that there had been a flood in the area sometime in 1947, that the shallow graves were unearthed and that the bones of the dead had been scattered by the water. The remains were collected and buried in a common grave in the village cemetery with a small gravestone reading "Three thousand soldiers and officers of various nations who fought against Fascism and died for peace and freedom." Not a word about Jewish victims! My father and the other victims from the "lost train" who were buried here were neither soldiers nor officers. They were just ordinary Jews. In that post-war chaos perhaps they didn't even know that they existed. And so I failed to find my father's grave in Germany. There were no graves in the Holocaust.

Many years later, going through lists at the Yad Vashem commemorative centre in Jerusalem, I learnt that my serial number in Bergen-Belsen was 4657 and that my parents' numbers were ahead of mine, my mother's was 4656 and my father's 4655. On the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation, in April 1995, a group of about two hundred people who had survived the "lost train" gathered in Bergen-Belsen, from Israel, Holland, the US and a few dozen Yugoslav survivors. After the moving meetings and commemoration we again travelled the route of the "lost train", but this time in buses. And so, fifty years later, we once again arrived in Trebic. At the local cemetery in which some of the inmates were buried after the liberation, in a touching ceremony, we erected a memorial plaque in German and Hebrew with the names of the 320 "lost train" victims. Among them was the name of my father, Dr Yosef Teitelbaum.

A few weeks after my father's death, my mother and I decided not to wait for repatriation to be organised but to return to Prizren on our own. We were joined by Bela Abramović of Priština. And so we set off on a journey through Europe which lasted about a month. Instead of the yellow Star of David, my mother now sewed on our coats the Yugoslav tricolour flag with the five-pointed star in the middle. This was the custom among the many prisoners and camp internees liberated in Germany, everyone wearing their own flag. At that time Yugoslavia and Tito opened all doors, better than any valid visa. On Russian heavy artillery, on trucks, in overloaded wagons travelling down ruined railway lines, on foot. We passed through devastated Dresden, then Prague, Budapest and Belgrade. We arrived in Prizren in the second half of June in a truck carrying flour from Uroševac. When we got off near Bistrica we were completely white with flour. Like ghosts from another world. No one recognised us. Everyone was surprised that the family of the town doctor had survived the war, but they welcomed us warmly and helped us out. We again were given a room by the Jakić family. We returned to life.

We remained in Prizren for three years. There, in what they called the Partisan Secondary School, I tried to bridge my lost war years. Three years of secondary school in a year. At the beginning of 1948, my mother and I moved to Belgrade.

LEAVING WITH MY BOOTS ON

"Comrade Teitelbaum said 'I am one of you but I must go and help build a new country, Israel.' We all cried. I played my own composition: *We are Tito's Young Heroes!*" That's what Bora Ćosić, my school friend from the First Boys' Secondary School, wrote twenty years later in his well-known novel *My Family's Role in the World Revolution*.

The locomotive blew its whistle. In all literary conventions this whistle is sad. But perhaps, in some way, there was something jaunty about it. Who could remember now? After more than fifty years. Belgrade railway station, which has hardly changed since then, began to slowly recede into the distance. We all rushed to the windows to wave once more to the crowd of people who stayed behind on the platform. A few tears welled up. I felt a tug in my chest. But those were the days

when the young didn't weep. It was shameful to give vent to feelings. At least it was for me, a SKOJ member travelling into the unknown.

Raul today, with his wife in Israel

A year earlier some friends had tapped me on the shoulder. "Let's celebrate, you've got a state." At first I didn't understand what they were talking about. Then I remembered the news I had read in the papers. A Jewish state – Israel – had been proclaimed in Palestine. And now here I was travelling to the land of my ancestors. The people on the platform grew smaller and smaller. A little off to one side stood a strapping young man saying goodbye to his girlfriend. I no longer even remember his name. But their figures and their faces are deeply etched in my memory.

Epilogue

From the perspective of a known ending, this story from my life is at once both lyrical and sad in tone. For as long as I remember, from the beginning of the war, the big war, because there have been others

in the meantime, I have tried to somehow have some influence on reality. And reality has most certainly changed. But these personal efforts of mine have mostly been in vain.

Nevertheless, I have now been living in Israel for 54 years. My mother's grave faces the Judaic mountains. The only family I have is here. For 44 years I have maintained a "socialist friendship" with my wife Aliza. By all criteria, an Israeli. A warrior in all the Israeli wars from 1949 on. Now a retired Israeli journalist with forty years of work behind me. A hard core opponent to the entire Israeli political establishment. With many scars and disappointments I belong to a species which is becoming extinct, former Yugoslavs. But with a Homeland in which I wasn't born. With two *tzabar* daughters, Anat and Iris, and four grandchildren, second-generation *tzabars* (Elija, Imbar, Zohar and Joav). As I grow older the memories of the "Prizren Elegy" keep returning to me. But I have no other country. Just one. This one in which my children and grandchildren were born. That is my personal and historic lesson from Bergen-Belsen.

Ivona FRAJD

A GERMAN SAVED MY LIFE BY CHANCE

Ivona Frajd was born in 1923. Her father was from Novi Sad and her mother from Budapest. The war caught them in Novi Sad where her father was working as a building contractor and Ivona and her brother were attending school. All the members of her immediate family perished at the beginning of the war.

Following the liberation she studied pharmacy and worked for pharmaceutical companies. She lived in Belgrade after her retirement. She died on October 7, 1992 and was buried in the Jewish cemetery. She is survived by a daughter and two grandsons.

This interview with Ivona Frajd was conducted by Jaša Almuli for the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University, USA.

I was ten when Hitler came to power in Germany and the image etched in my memory of those early childhood years is of my father sitting by the radio, frantically listening to the news, and of all the voices. Hitler's voice coming closer like some ominous thunder. A few years after these first forebodings, refugees began arriving from Germany and Austria. They passed through Novi Sad in smaller or larger groups. Horrifying rumours of what was happening began to spread.

The adults around us were rather disturbed. They were thinking about what could be done to save the children, to avoid something that they knew was terrible although they couldn't really imagine what could actually happen. My uncle, my father's brother, who was a physician, went to America in 1940, but my father said "I'm an old man, I can't make a new life for myself. Maybe things will be difficult, but to leave now, to start from scratch... I can't do it!" My father was 52 at the time. This was more or less the way many people thought. My father was a building contractor, he built roads and had a good reputation, status, and apartment. He had a settled life.

We had lived in Yugoslavia without any anti-Semitic incidents. But then came March 27, 1941. I was in the eighth grade of secondary school. All the students from our school joined the demonstrations in the streets of Novi Sad. We passed the German *Kulturbund*. These were peaceful demonstrations. The next morning I was sitting in the dining room getting ready for school. The radio was on and we heard an official announcement in which King Petar proclaimed that he had seized power. There was a delighted outburst, especially in Serbia, in Vojvodina. We thought that this meant that the pact had been broken. People were shouting slogans: "Better the grave than a slave! Better war than the Pact!"

March 27 was a sunny spring day but, as the war approached, the weather also seemed to change. We weren't going from spring into summer, but into winter: it began to snow and, on April 6, bombs also began to fall on us. Germany attacked Yugoslavia without declaring war.

Thee weren't any air raids in Novi Sad, but the sirens sounded again and again; we heard what was happening in Belgrade and about the ongoing conflicts. The Germans didn't arrive: we were occupied by the Hungarians on April 13, 1941. As they entered Novi Sad, people were also killed in the very centre of the city, respectable people were killed, hostages were taken, Serbs and Jews. My father was also taken as a hostage. The Hungarians asked for ransom for the Jewish hostages. The Community collected a considerable sum of money, I don't know how much, and the hostages were released. Life went on under the terror of the occupier. In the morning no one had any idea what would happen during the day. Refugees also came to us, to our house, my aunt and uncle and their children from Belgrade. However, on May 15, there was an official announcement that all newcomers to

Novi Sad must leave the city. They prepared to return to Belgrade. On the morning they were supposed to leave, my cousin, who was a physician, tried to commit suicide by poisoning himself. By doing so he actually saved himself and his parents because they got out of the deportation to take him to hospital, where he eventually survived. He managed to stay both alive and in Novi Sad.

Ivona Frajd's mother and father, killed in January 1942 in the Great Raid in Novi Sad

That year, 1941, I completed high school. I found it rather strange that we were given a course in Hungarian history and geography in which we had to take an exam for our graduation. My brother was four years younger than me. We didn't speak Hungarian at the time and he went to the only Serbian high school in Novi Sad. The summer after I finished school was very difficult: my father was taken to forced labour

and was badly harassed. Mother tried to get in touch with her relatives in Budapest. They spoke sometime in November, although my brother was enrolled in the fifth grade of high school in Novi Sad. Mother agreed with the headmaster that he would not go to school in December but would return on January 12, after the holidays, to finish the semester. And so, in November, we arrived in Budapest, my mother, father, brother and I.

We had relatives in Budapest. Life there was relatively normal. I think that Jews were banned from working in the public service, but doctors were allowed to work. Jews ran shops, there were no limitations on enrolment in high schools. However they began to force young people to join labour battalions. My brother was too young for this so, as agreed, he returned with my mother to Novi Sad on January 12, 1942. My father and I stayed in Budapest. Father became very restless and so he also left soon afterwards.

It was the coldest winter I remember. I was then enrolled in a French school, just for the sake of studying something. I had been left alone and tried to get in touch with my parents and my brother. I tried to phone Novi Sad from the post office on the evening of January 21. They told me that the lines had been cut because of the cold. The lines were cut on January 22, the lines were cut on January 23 and, on January 24, refugees from Novi Sad suddenly began showing up in Budapest! My relatives discovered that something had happened, but didn't have the heart to tell me. "If you want to find out you can go to this address, they have relatives who are with your parents." I didn't suspect the truth, I thought they had been arrested, that father had been taken hostage again.

When I arrived and saw my neighbours' relatives wearing black I still didn't understand immediately. "They were together," they said.

"Not the children, too?"

"Everyone!"

"What happened?"

"In front of the house, on the morning of January 23, at 9.30, in a temperature of 20 ° C below zero, drunken Hungarian gendarmes... "

I know the very spot at which my father, my mother, my brother and all my neighbours were killed, where there were Serbs and Jews who were later loaded into trucks and thrown into the Danube River. And the Danube was frozen. Later they said that there were bodies floating down the Danube to Belgrade all through the spring. They

have no grave. I have been to Yad Vashem and stood before the Jerusalem monuments and saw that the Great Raid went down in history. It is called the Novi Sad Raid and is recorded as a tragedy of the Jewish people. But it is also my personal tragedy, for life, for each and every day. At my age now, no one has parents, but this happens to people in the normal course of life. I can never escape this.

I later discovered that the Novi Sad Raid in which my parents perished was the continuation of a murderous operation which had begun a few days earlier in Žabalj, a small place north of Novi Sad, and then spread to the city. Posters were put up in the city on January 21 proclaiming a ban on residents going out into the streets. The Hungarian gendarmes combed through the city street by street. They went into houses, Jewish and Serb, and took people out. On the first and second day they took people to the Strand, the beach on the Danube in Novi Sad. There they waited in long lines and could see what was happening. The official pretext for this massacre was that it was a reprisal for some alleged rebellion against the Hungarian occupation in Bačka, and they showed some soldiers who had allegedly been wounded. The gendarmes were given large quantities of alcohol and, in terribly cold weather, were forced to massacre people. By January 23, the last day of the Raid, they no longer took people to the Danube but killed them in front of their houses. In Miletićeva Street, where my parents lived, in the centre of Novi Sad, there were at least a few people killed from each house. My parents were taken out at 9.30 in the morning and at 1.30 the order came from Budapest to abort the operation. In the meantime a large group of people, Serbs and Jews, were taken to the Cultural Centre in Novi Sad to await their turn. However the identity documents of these people were checked and, sometime during the evening, between six and seven, they were released and allowed to return to their homes. My aunt's family was among them. Later, when I returned to Novi Sad, I went into the apartment and saw breakfast things still on the table. No one had been there. I heard that there were cases where they looted everything after the massacre, but at our place everything was in place as if my family had walked out into the street right in the middle of breakfast.

I who had never been alone and who, until the age of eighteen had been surrounded by love and attention, suddenly found myself all alone in the world, a dangerous and malicious world. I stayed in Budapest where life was very strange. I was staying in the apartment

that my parents had come to in November. I was able to support myself. My parents had been well-off and my mother had also had a house so we also had income. I didn't have any financial problems.

The situation in Hungary was strange. As time went by the Hungarian authorities, sometime in 1943, felt that they hadn't taken the right side in the war and were doing things which didn't exactly give the impression of a close alliance with Germany. At the time Hungary was full of Polish refugees. There were Jews with false papers, there were Poles, there was even a large camp for Poles. The Poles received assistance from the Hungarian government. Gradually, whenever an opportunity arose, the Hungarians began taking the other side. However, on March 19, 1944, the Germans arrived and occupied Hungary. They had seen through the Hungarians' game. We panicked, especially I , who knew what this meant and what could happen to us. I had Polish friends and I moved from the apartment where everyone knew me and found accommodation in another part of Budapest where nobody knew me. However, on April 20, 1944, a man from our group was arrested by the Gestapo. He was not a Jew and, on April 28, I was also arrested. In fact almost everyone from our group was arrested. This was a student group. I had obtained false papers which described me as Christian. There were both Jews and non-Jews among the Poles although, on paper, they were all Aryans. The Germans knew exactly who I was, what my name was and everything else. The man who had been arrested had betrayed us.

I was taken to the Gestapo for interrogation. They asked me for my identification document and asked me where I had got it. I told them that I had bought it but that I didn't remember from whom. I told them my name. I was then registered under my real first name and surname.

From April 28 to May 15, 1944, I was in prison in Budapest. After that they moved me to a nearby camp called Kistarcsa, where I remained for about a month. This was a camp-sanatorium where we all wore our own clothes, the food was like that in the prison and we were allowed to receive parcels. I even received one with some clothes. After about a month in Kistarcsa they sent a paddy wagon, a small truck, just for me and I was returned to prison. I spent just one night in the prison in Fo Street. The next day we were transferred by train to a prison near Vienna. There I was again among a group of Poles and with another two or three people whom I had not met before. We were in a labour

camp for foreigners, although we were not working, but in confinement. We were waiting for them to take us somewhere else.

From carefree days to family tragedy: Ivona and her brother Ivan, who was killed together with their parents in the Novi Sad Raid

I think it was about a week later that they moved us to a prison in Vienna where we spent the night. There was a woman there who had been brought back from Auschwitz to be tried and she told us what was happening there. By this time they were already releasing information through Radio London on what was happening in the German camps, but what we heard was far too horrifying for people to believe. This woman told us that there were fake showers in Auschwitz which were actually gas chambers, that they had crematoriums where the corpses were immediately burned and that entire trains full of people were being sent there. We listened to her but could not believe it. The next day we set off. By some miracle I wasn't on a transport from the ghetto but on a normal train, with police guards. We were a mixed group. There were Jews, there were people from Vienna, there was also a woman from a mixed marriage who had lived in Vienna until July, 1944. She had also been picked up. We arrived in Auschwitz on the evening of July 6. Because we weren't a ghetto transport this wasn't such a big train and so we didn't arrive at the Birkenau station, right in

front of the gas chambers, but at the main Auschwitz station about three kilometres from Birkenau. We left the train and were taken to the camp. We walked the three-kilometre road, getting closer and closer to hell. I had the feeling, a feeling which did not leave me as long as I remained in the camp, that I was on some other planet, that this was something which had nothing to do with anything I had seen before or anywhere I had been up to that point. The nightmare loomed as we came closer. The crematoriums could be seen from the distance: there were three of them, three that I saw, and they were all operating, flames shooting high out of them. First a big flame, then smoke over the flame. Heavy smoke and heavy flames.

We entered the camp and saw living people walking around it, strange-looking creatures with shaved heads. We couldn't tell men from women. They walked around in rags. We approached the admission section where a group of women inmates admitted us and told us "Now sit there, you'll go to the showers." We immediately thought that we would be sent to the gas chamber. However we were really sent to the showers. After that our heads were shaved, then they tattooed us, took our things, gave us some rags and some odd shoes. Some were even given two left shoes, some got one wooden clog and one sandal.

Suddenly we were in hell! It was now for the first time that I thought "Thank God my parents didn't live to go through this!" We were actually in Birkenau. In the summer of 1944, Birkenau was the biggest death factory that had ever existed. I learnt later that 14,000 people were killed there every day.

Our transport didn't go through the selection, so we all entered the camp. With us was an elderly lady who, luckily, remained with us. We all entered the camp and were given our numbers. I have the number 82479.

We were accommodated in barracks in *kojen*. These were wooden bunks in tiers with room for two people on each bunk. But here eight people slept on each bunk, on both the lower and upper tiers. There were about thirty women on each set of bunks and they could hardly move. It was summer and the stench spread everywhere. When night fell, the bedbugs would begin their invasion.

The day began at dawn when we had to leave the barracks for the roll call. We would line up in ranks of five and stand there until the entire camp, all the people in the camp, were counted. If the numbers didn't add up, the whole procedure was repeated and prolonged

another two or three hours, in any kind of weather, be it sun, snow or rain. We came out in the clothes in which we had slept. Those who hadn't already had their fingers burnt and didn't know what would happen if you didn't sleep with your footwear under your head would wake up in the morning without shoes. In conditions like this, human solidarity breaks down. There is no solidarity. No one ever dared make a joke of not immediately eating the bread that was handed out for breakfast. And if anyone wanted to save it until the next meal, it would certainly have disappeared by then. The living conditions, if this could be called living, were such that it was impossible to imagine anyone surviving here for even a few days. In the first days no one could even touch the food. Later the hunger became so bad that we no longer thought of anything except another portion of this same food. We would be given what they called *Jager* soup, made of leaves, flour and bread. At the end of the roll-call they would hand out some liquid and call it coffee. Of course people soon began losing weight and various diseases spread. First was a really bad form of dysentery. Dysentery like this meant dreadful suffering. We used shared toilets. These were really just holes fenced off with bricks where people sat next to each other, it didn't really matter who sat next to whom. As for the water we used to wash our faces, if someone managed to win the struggle to wash once a week then this person would feel like a czar for the next two or three days.

Skin diseases emerged, from vitamin deficiencies to mange. Then vitamin deficiencies affected people's mouths. People died. Selection was carried out in the camp. In a crowd like this you were always close to one or two people because, among such a large number of people, there is always someone you grow close to. And that's how it was with me and a friend of mine who was taken away in the selection. Her name was Felicita Slandal and she was from Warsaw. Her entire family had already been killed, as had mine, and we spoke about this all the time. That was what brought us close together. During the selection, Dr Mengele and another two men came into our barracks. All of us women had to strip naked and walk past him for review. He would stop some and ask for their number to be written down. Her number was written down. She know at that moment, I also knew, and we all knew what this meant. Two days later they came and called out the numbers they had written down. At first she was silent and then she left. She was twenty years old and she went to join her parents.

I didn't go. I survived this and, sometime at the end of December, I ended up in hospital. I was sick from exhaustion.

On January 12, 1945, the Germans were preparing to close the camp down. The Russians were approaching. Those of us in the hospital didn't even have the kind of clothes they wore in the camp.

The Germans were taking the prisoners away, but what would they do with us? And again there was someone with whom I was close. We began to talk about what we should do. It occurred to us to report with the others. We wrapped ourselves in blankets and went out into the cold. The German organising the transport asked us "Where are you going?"

"To report," I said.

"Get back!"

I have this man to thank for my life, because the people who left then were decimated. They suffered for a while, travelled by train and then they made them continue on foot. Further and further, from one camp to another, across Germany. Some of them were not liberated until May 1945.

We were liberated on January 27, 1945. I returned to the hospital. That was on January 18, 1945. The Germans left the camp. The Russians had not yet arrived and the Germans had left. They came back once again. They returned on Thursday, killed a group and then left again. On Saturday afternoon, at the time of day when it gets dark in January, the first Russian soldier appeared in the camp. We were liberated.

Marta STANIČKOV

TO HELL AND BACK

Marta Staničkov, née Gal, was born on January 16, 1923, to Jelena, née Rozental, and Žigmond Gal. Her father was a private clerk, an expert in timber and a court expert, while her mother was a housewife. She had a sister, Vera, six years older, who moved with her family to Israel, where she died. Of her immediate family, her father perished in the war. Of her extended family, only her cousin, the writer Laslo Gal, survived. He died in 1975.

Before the war she completed commercial academy and worked after the war as the chief cashier in the head office of the Agricultural Cooperative in Sombor. However, on the recommendation of her doctors, because of her health problems, the whole family moved to Opatija in 1951. After fourteen years they returned to Vojvodina, to Novi Sad. There she worked at the Novi Sad Commercial Bank until her retirement. Her husband, Momir Staničkov, whom she married in 1946, died in 1996. She has two children, Dušanka, a foreign language correspondent, and Jovan, who works at the Novi Sad Public Enterprise for City Construction and Development. She has one grandson.

They came and took my father away at the end of April, 1944. At first they were arresting only men. Because we lived across the street, on the second day we saw trucks and an off-road vehicle carrying four

high-ranking officers in German uniforms. That's when they began rounding people up out of the buildings and loading them onto trucks. They were then taken to a camp in Bačka Topola and from there to Auschwitz.

The deportation of the remaining Jewish population, from infants to the elderly, began on April 26. On the last day, April 29, a civilian and two gendarmes came to get us, my grandmother, aged 76, my mother (50) and me. I was 21 years old at the time. They were very rough: we had to strip naked and jump up and down for them to check whether we had hidden something. They wouldn't let us take the suitcase we had packed, but just a few things wrapped in a cloth, saying "Where you're going, you won't need anything."

We were taken to a silk factory and then, at night, put into cattle wagons at the train station. That night they picked up all the patients from the hospital and the residents of the old people's home. We were taken to Baja, where they put us in a mill and then they placed us in Jewish homes. We were there for just a few days. They came again at night to pick us up and take us back to the mill. The next day, I remember it was May 27, several senior German officers arrived and took us from the Hungarians and loaded us, the same day, into cattle wagons with a lot of violence and beatings. There were eighty or ninety people in each wagon.

Our journey had begun. For most of us it was a journey of no return.

We travelled until June 2. In seven days we left the wagon only once, at Gensendorf in Austria where a selection was carried out. One group stayed in Austria, luckily for them because they all survived. Because we didn't want to leave our grandmother they put us back in the wagon. And then...

With no food or water, in dreadful heat and, above all, in uncertainty. A few people went insane, they trampled over us. People died. When we crossed the Czechoslovakian border and entered Poland the men began praying and singing *Kadish*. Perhaps they sensed what awaited us.

SELECTION

Late in the afternoon of June 2 (we still hadn't lost track of time), the train slowly drew to a halt. The locomotive kept releasing steam

until everything finally fell quiet. We had reached the Birkenau gate. The door of the wagon opened immediately and with shouts of "*Los, los, raus!*" and blows raining down on us, we were rushed outside. Through our cries and tears we tried to find our family and friends. We were soon lined up in ranks of five – men, women and children all separately. Little did we suspect that this was the last stop and, for most, the end of life. A group of people in uniforms stood in front of us, people with satanic smiles and eyes as cold as ice. The selection began. It was carried out by Dr Mengele, as we later found out, a handsome and elegant man. Families faced their most difficult moments as the separation began. Many young mothers had to turn their children over to women they had never met with the explanation that they would be reunited later on, because the children and adults would be transported in separate trucks. Of course they never saw their children again because the children were killed that same night.

My grandmother was immediately sent to the right-hand column, which meant death, while I was sent to the left. When my mother's turn came, Mengele first sent her to follow my grandmother and then suddenly changed his mind, tapped her on the shoulder with his whip and said "*No geh auch du links*" (No, go on, you go left too).

Fate!

When I turned back I saw that my mother was following me. We walked on and stopped in front of a building. They left us there to wait for hours until it was our turn to go in. We had to strip naked, then they shaved our heads and bodies, while all the time they shouted and beat us. Then we were washed under a cold shower and were given rags for clothing, with no underwear, then sent out into the night to stand again for hours. After that we were taken to Camp C, to a barracks, where we stumbled over other people in the dark as we looked for a little space. We remained awake all night, standing. The stench was suffocating and we felt nauseated. At that point we still didn't know that they were burning people in the crematorium.

LIFE IN HELL BEGINS

Camp C was not a labour camp. We weren't tattooed, but almost every day they came to make selections for the crematorium, for staying in the camp or for transport to some other camp. These selections were attended by a supervisor (*Aufseherin*), Irma Grese with her whip

and a dog, *Aufseherin* Mandel and Borman. Of the men, I remember the names Schultze, Tauber and Fritz (who was always laughing). I also remember a doctor, a Slovakian woman named Erna. From Weisswasser I remember *Aufseherin* Ilsa and Greta. I have forgotten the name of the woman who was the camp commandant (*Lagerkommandant*), but I think that the camp supervisor, was called Martha.

Next to us was a Czech family camp with both elderly people and young, children of both sexes. They wore their own clothes and their hair hadn't been cut. Then, one night at the end of July, 1944, if I remember rightly, came the *Blocksperre*, the block liquidation. We suddenly heard the roar of truck engines, screaming and shouting, crying and the words "*Los, los, die Schuhe ausziehen!*" (Let's go, let's go, take your shoes off). After a while the trucks left and there was silence. We were frozen in horror. In the morning the Czech family camp was empty. One inmate asked where they had taken them. The *kapo* just pointed to the sky.

While I was in Block 11, a woman from my block was in labour. She had passed the selection without anyone noticing she was pregnant. I remember it was deadly quiet in the block, but this woman giving birth didn't utter a sound. The block supervisor and another woman in white, probably a doctor, were by her side. We heard the child cry, then silence. We wept. Devastated mothers who had been separated from their children took this even harder. We saw the block supervisor pass by carrying something wrapped in a blanket. Of course the child had been suffocated at birth! One evening after the roll call, when we came into the block, the supervisor came and with her a forewoman, together with a woman in a white coat, perhaps a doctor. We had to stand beside our beds and the doctor picked out a couple of us younger ones, I don't remember how many. We had to get undressed. They were looking for those who had a clean body with no sores, boils or mange. There were very few such women among us. Of course we were frightened to death. They ordered us to open our mouths and then put some liquid in our throats which burnt terribly. Then they injected something into the vein on the left hand. That night I was taken ill. I vomited a number of times, and the next day I was burning with fever. Because we hadn't been tattooed, they noted down our names, but even today I am amazed and puzzled as to why they didn't move us out of the barracks.

Within days another selection followed, in front of the block after the roll call. They were looking for people with small hands and thin fingers. We had to hold our hands out in front of us. They chose me, but not my mother. Those chosen were immediately locked up in a barracks. I looked out through a hole in the door, trying to see my mother who was walking in circles around the barracks, looking completely lost. The *kapo* pulled at me, frantically slapping my face and beating me so that I fell on my back on the tiled stove which ran the length of the block. In the barracks in which we were separated for transport there was also a Hungarian girl called Magda, who had an aunt in the camp. Her aunt worked in the kitchen so she made an arrangement with the block supervisor (bribing her well, of course) to let her out of the block and to arrange for my mother to take her place. The exchange was made at roll coll. There were no beds in this block, only straw on the floors. We waited for the transport. The days went by and we began believing we would stay. Then one evening, a new move! We were moved to Camp B, but only for one night and a day: that evening they moved us again to a large building with unglazed windows and concrete floors. It was draughty and cold. This was October and we were in thin, summer dresses with no underwear. A small group from Camp C also came here. They told us that Camp C had been closed down and that the others had been taken away in trucks. No one knew where.

The next morning Mengele arrived with his entourage, ordered us to take our clothes off and to walk around him in a circle with our arms in the air. Now many more were selected and immediately taken away. That same day we were given new clothes and bread for the journey. In the evening, shouting "*Los, los, dreck Jude!*" (Let's go, let's go, dirty Jew!) and beating us, they loaded us into wagons. We travelled for about three days, in freezing cold.

Then, early one morning, the train slowed down and stopped. The doors opened and the shouting started: "*Los, los, schnell, raus raus!*" (Let's go, let's go, fast, get out, get out!). We were so frozen we could barely move. People at the station stared at us as if we were ghosts. We had arrived at the station of Maehrisch-Weisswasser. We walked to the camp, high up in the hills. We saw a pair of two-story brick buildings with a wire fence around them. Escorted by new guards, we entered the building. After Auschwitz, this was heaven!

Bunk beds, a warm room, each of us had a straw mattress and a blanket, hot showers, a plate and mug. What luxury! When they took our personal details they assigned us to jobs. The day after the roll call we went down to the Friesserwerk factory. There was a man from the factory called Hasse, I don't know what he did there, but he made a speech saying that we had to work and that we must not sabotage anything because then we would go to the same place our parents were. He pointed to the sky. I was assigned to work on the lathes, on night shift, while my mother remained in the camp kitchen.

After a few days I fell ill with a high temperature. I was then assigned to work in the main fitting workshop. Although the conditions were better we had a very difficult time because we had to go twice a day from the camp to the factory and back, in the snow and that dreadful cold with no socks or coats.

About a month later I again fell ill, with suppurating sores in my mouth and throat. I couldn't swallow and had a high fever. I was lucky because the camp commandant put me into a small room away from the others. She thought I had diphtheria and my faeces were sent for analysis. The results were negative so they returned me to the hospital ward. Because the Gross Rosen camp was nearby and it had a crematorium she could have sent me there never to return. Soon after this, I don't remember when exactly, I again had suppurating sores in my throat and my mouth and gums became inflamed, and this time worse than the first. Because there was no medicine I was given some liquid as a mouthwash, but they didn't actually know what was wrong with me. I lost weight because I couldn't eat anything. And even if I'd been able too, there was less and less food, in the end only beets boiled in water with no salt. I had this illness once again, but this time also had tiny sores on my body.

The situation was becoming more and more difficult. We had hardly any food and many people were fainting from hunger. There was a strong feeling of uncertainty about what would happen to us, because the French workers kept us up to date with the situation. They were in touch with the Czech Partisans. The Germans were looking for wagons so they could transport us further on, but they were already in chaos. Because the munitions dump was nearby, we were afraid they would blow up our building.

RETURN

One of us was always on guard and, on May 4, 1945, we learnt that the Germans had left and the French had taken over the camp. They guarded us until we were liberated by the Russians on May 6. We remained there for some time after this and then, after seventeen days of travel and a few more in quarantine in Subotica, my mother and I arrived home in Sombor at the beginning of June, 1945. Home.

Weak as I was, with sores on my face and body, I began work. I immediately went to a skin specialist and to a specialist physician. They treated me from April 1945 to April 1947. In the meantime I was married and became pregnant, but the sores would disappear on one part of my body and reappear elsewhere. Because the doctors were unable to cure me, we agreed that I should go to a clinic in Belgrade as soon as the baby was born and both of us were strong enough.

In the end I was cured by accident! A man who visited us saw the sores and went to the pharmacist Antić, with whom he had been in the medical corps in World War One. They made some kind of cream which I applied and, after about three weeks, the sores disappeared.

I mentioned at the beginning that, when they deported my father from Sombor, four officers had arrived in an off-road vehicle. One day in 1952, when we were walking down a street in Opatija, I saw a man walking towards me – tall, with a stiff left leg. I followed him! I recognised him! He was one of those same four officers. His name was Furlan, he lived in Opatija, in Volosko. My husband went to the Internal Affairs Department and reported this. He was told that they would look into it and that they knew he had been in the German Army in Bačka and that he was married to a German woman from Bačka. We thought something would be done about this, but apparently someone tipped him off. He fled to Italy with his family.

Alisa FRANCUSKI

"DADDY, WILL IT HURT WHEN THEY SHOOT US?"

Alisa Francuski, née Najhaus, was born in Subotica on April 13, 1928, to Judita Holender and Josef Najhaus.

She survived the Holocaust together with her parents. She has a daughter, Sonja, married to Mirko Levi, and two grandchildren, Aleksandra and Ivan.

I attended the Queen Marija school, a Jewish school financially supported by the Jewish Community. Great emphasis was laid on religious education in this school so they took us to services in the big synagogue. At that time in Subotica there was also what they called the small synagogue, where services for school children were held in order for them to learn the whole ceremony. These were held only on Saturdays and the teaching was conducted by a rabbi and a deputy cantor.

I was thirteen when the Hungarians entered Subotica. They immediately began arresting people. Until 1943 and even up to the beginning of 1944, they left our family alone.

In 1942 I went to visit my aunt in Novi Sad. The winter break holiday had been extended because there was no fuel for heating, so we could not go to school. Because of this my aunt invited me to stay. I was caught there by the Great Raid. Together with my aunt I was among the Jews on the bank of the Danube. They say that the temperature was 27° C. below zero. We stood in line waiting to be shot, ten or twelve people, the last ones. One Novi Sad physician and his wife asked us to let them go before us because they could no longer stand. We thought that we were all going to be killed and that no one would be saved. These poor people were executed and, right after them, the orders came to stop the shooting. I was in shock and it's as though I saw nothing, as if I didn't go through any of this. But I remember... There was a family in front of us, Jews. The girl, about eight years old, asked her father. "Daddy, will it hurt when they shoot us?"

The father explained to his daughter that all it takes is just a second and "after that we won't feel anything any more".

After that they took us to the SOKOL building and later let us go home. Two days later, in the morning, we arrived in Subotica. In those two days my mother turned grey.

In Subotica we wore no symbols until 1944. However once the Germans arrived we had to wear yellow stars. Later we had to go to a ghetto which had been set up in Subotica, near the railway station, and we stayed there until we were taken to the camp. While we were in the ghetto, some Hungarian neighbours of ours took care of us. They brought us food because we were not allowed to go to the market before noon.

When the occupation began my father had to stop working. We raised money mainly by selling our belongings, jewellery and gold coins and other things which could be sold. The first thing we sold, very cheaply, was a villa and a vineyard at Palić.

The Germans arrived in 1944. We were immediately forced to wear yellow stars. I didn't find this humiliating. I remember one day, in front of the school, I was approached by a Catholic priest who taught religion at the girls' secondary school. Quite by chance he caught up with me and took me by the arm. "I'm wearing a yellow star," I told him.

"That's shameful only for those who put it on you!" he replied.

There was a Hungarian officer living in our apartment. He took all our valuable paintings and things and drove off with everything.

One day they moved us out of the ghetto into wagons. I don't know how many of us there were. First we went to Bacsalmas, a place in Hungary. There we were accommodated in and around the synagogue. After a few days in Bacsalmas they again loaded us into wagons and took us to Austria. After the war I learnt that an agreement had been reached, in June 1944, between Eichmann and Dr Kastner, the representative of the Jewish organisations, to set up labour camps in Austria, in return for the payment of millions of Swiss francs to the German Reich. About 18,000 Hungarian Jews were on those transports. Among them were some Jews from Bačka, mostly from Subotica. This transport was spared the horrors of the concentration camps. Most of these people survived the Holocaust. The first camp was Strasshof. We were there for about a week. All who were fit were sent to work. I spent the longest time in Durnholz. We were building up the banks of the river Taja. I was loading and unloading stones that we then built into the bank. I did this from morning to evening with another girl, a friend of mine. They gave us some food from the estate of the Lichtenstein family. They really helped us a great deal. Now and then the locals would give us some food, usually beets and there would be some cooking done. There was no wire fence around the camp. There were just 41 of us there. When they took away all the ones they thought were unable to work, nineteen of us remained, mostly women and a few men. There were a number of Hungarians from Szegedin. My father, my mother and I were together, we managed not to be separated.

The camp was an empty abandoned house. We slept on wooden beds, bunk beds. We had brought our blankets, which they didn't take from us, so we covered ourselves with them. We would get up at 4.30 or 5.00 in the morning. Then we made and drank warm water, something like tea, and then went to work. We would return in the evening. What they called food waited for us again in the camp. The guards were all individuals, quite different from one another. One SS man was horrible, while the others weren't like that. We were forbidden to talk to them and only spoke among ourselves. We would recount our memories, wonder about whether we would ever return home, talk about what we would do when we got back. Most of the time we invented menus. With all our hunger we thought about what we would eat if we survived.

After this camp we were again moved further on. This was 1944 and the Russians were getting closer. We moved from place to place every day for more than a month. As the Russians advanced the Germans drove us further and further. On May 8, we arrived in Grosau and stayed there. They put us into some stables in a castle. We were not alone there.

The SS men made us dig trenches. At one point we told them we could no longer do this. "We can't do anything any more. If you want to shoot us, shoot us, but we won't dig any more trenches!" Then, suddenly, they disappeared. The SS men, the guards, they all vanished. We were quite alone. We went up to the loft for hay. Someone saw that there was hay there and that there was no reason for us to lie on the bare ground. Just as one of the girls and I began throwing down the hay we were frightened by a man appearing out of the dark. He asked if any of us spoke French. I told him I did.

"Miss, the war is over," he said, in French.

I immediately rushed down thinking that perhaps he was an agent provocateur. There were a number of French prisoners downstairs throwing chocolates to the children from packages. The English prisoners were also good to us. They had been interned in the same place in Austria as we were, but they had been in military captivity. They had been treated completely differently from us. They were allowed to walk around the village, they received parcels and had food.

The next day the Russians came, liberated us and slaughtered an ox. Fortunately my mother would not allow me or my father to eat any of this. We got some potatoes and somebody cooked them. A number of the inmates who ate this rich food died because of their starving stomachs.

On our return we first arrived in Zmanevo in Czechoslovakia. This was a provisional collection centre where we spent a few weeks. Because we wanted to get food for our parents, a girlfriend of mine from Szegedin and I went to a restaurant and asked if we could wash dishes. They didn't pay us, but we were given food which we would take to our parents. This lasted for about two weeks, then we again got transport and, by a roundabout route, reached Budapest. There was a Jewish collection camp there where my father received assistance for the whole family. We spent a week in Budapest and then moved on, towards Subotica.

When we arrived in Subotica our house was full of people. There was a whole family living in each room, it was dreadful. For three years we were not able to enter our own house. We lived in some apartment, in fact an apartment belonging to my aunt's parents who had not returned from the war.

When we returned home, none of our things were there. The only things we got back were two old silver candlesticks which were returned by an old Gypsy woman, a beggar our mother used to give food to. "Here," she said, "I stole these from your house and now I'm returning them."

One day they announced that they were distributing coupons for shoes. Because I had no shoes I went to this place in Subotica and stood in line for a coupon. What should I see but a girl working there who used to be a member of the Hitler Youth. She had worn the Hitler Youth uniform during the occupation. I told her that I had come for a coupon and she replied: "You're not entitled to a coupon: they're only for fighters." I knew that everyone was getting this assistance so I went to the regional secretary to complain. When I walked into his office I thought he was sitting in our living room. All the furniture, the carpet, everything was from our living room. When I recovered myself he asked me what was wrong. I told him that everything was ours.

"What do you mean, yours?" he asked.

"Everything in here, it's ours," I repeated.

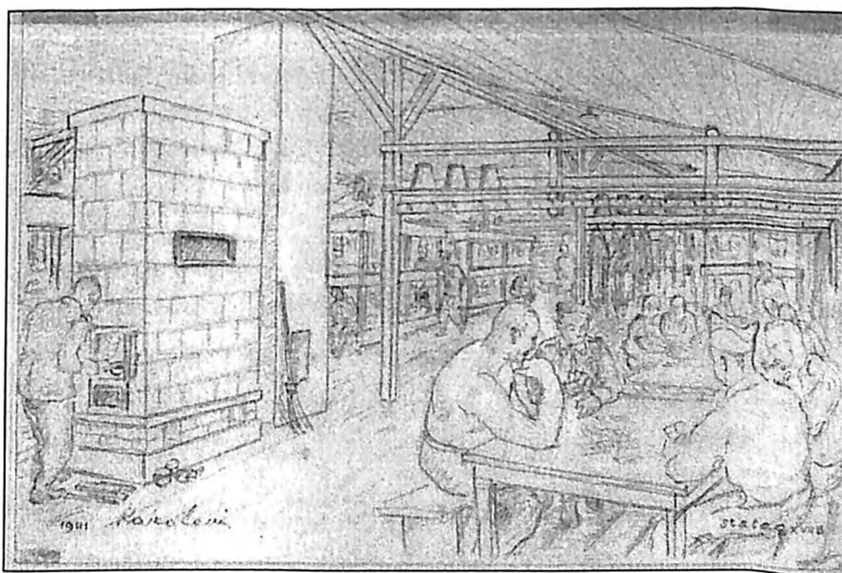
He asked me where I had lived before I went to the camp and I told him. He then agreed that the things were ours and told us we could come and take it all back whenever we wanted. The woman didn't stay in her job. I mentioned what I knew about her. Later on I heard that she was also a member of the Communist Party.

Very soon my father began working again, he was in charge of mills, working for a Swiss company with which he had also worked before the war.

I was transferred from Subotica to Novi Sad where I worked in a polyclinic. I had to attend classes and take the state exam. My future husband was a lecturer there. That's how we met. We were married for 46 years until his death in 1997. He was not a Jew but was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Belgrade. He was a great friend of the Jews and did a lot of work for the Community.

My mother had nine brothers and sisters. One brother died during the occupation and another before the war. Those who returned

home were my mother, her two sisters and the children. Their husbands did not return. One aunt lost her son, who was my age, but her other son and daughter returned, as did my other aunt's six sons. Today they all live in Israel and America. Of my father's family, the only one who was saved was his sister, who had hidden with her daughter in Budapest. Her son was killed. There is no one else on that side, but we are in constant contact with our relatives on my mother's side.



Painter Rajko Levi, German prisoner of war from 1941 to 1945. Drawing from his prison camp days, 1941

Mirko NAJMAN

DESTRUCTION OF THE OSIJEK JEWS

Mirko Najman was born in the Donji Grad quarter of Osijek on May 11, 1921, to Mavro Najman (Max Neumann) and Gizela Najman, née Kraus. He had two sisters, Nada and Vera. His father, mother and sister Vera died in Auschwitz. He also lost members of his extended family in the Jasenovac camp. His sister Nada, married as Fisher, lives in the USA.

He completed his primary school and the first grade of secondary school in Vienna, where the family had moved and where his father had a grocery store. In 1932 the family returned to Osijek.

From 1950 until his retirement in 1974, he worked for companies in the military industry.

He married Margita Lovrenčić with whom he has a son, Vladimir, and grandchildren Vera and Branko.

In June 1945, after years of active service in NOVJ, the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia, I was given leave to visit my hometown of Osijek. I had hoped to discover something about the fate of my parents: my father Mavro Najman (Max Neumann), my mother Gizela, née Kraus, and my sister Vera. Since I had escaped from the Tenje camp and from Osijek in June, 1942, I had heard nothing about the fate of my family. People I knew had told me that the Jews from Osijek were taken to Jasenovac in August 1942 and had perished there. In

1946 I received official death certificates for both my parents and for my sister, according to which they had been killed in Jasenovac on August 31, 1942.

The book *Yugoslavs in the Auschwitz Concentration Camp*[5] lists Yugoslav nationals who were inmates of Auschwitz, including the names of my parents and sister Vera and a great many Jews from Osijek and the surrounding area. Since reading this book I have begun collecting material on the destruction of Osijek Jews in order to present my feelings and the feelings of others about the suffering of our Jewish compatriots.

This is something I owe to my parents, my relatives and my friends who died in the Holocaust of Croatian Jews.

From 1935 to 1940 I was a member of the Zionist Hashomer Hatzair and Akiba Agudat Hanoar Haivri. After I completed the State Commercial Academy in Osijek, I enrolled in the Economics Faculty of Belgrade University and made a connection with Akiba, the Zionist organisation in Belgrade.

In October 1940, the Government of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia passed regulations which, among other things, introduced discriminatory measures aimed at Jews. One of these regulations was the *Numerus Clausus* under which the proportion of Jews enrolled in secondary and technical schools could not be more than the proportion of Jews in the population. Because this regulation applied to me, I instead found employment with the Osijek company Štajn i Drug and later in the Silk-Teks factory. After the March 27, 1941, demonstration in Belgrade, when the people protested at the signing of the Tripartite Pact, I returned to Osijek on April 4, at the urging of my parents. I had a premonition that the Germans would soon attack Yugoslavia. On April 12, 1941, the German Army entered the city.

OCCUPATION

In fear and shock we Jews and Serbs watched the feverish delight and applause of our Croatian neighbours when the German troops arrived in the town. They made no attempt to conceal their delight because, in the arrival of the Germans, they saw their centuries-old

[5] *Jugosloveni u koncentracionom logoru Aušvic, 1941–1945*, Tomislav Žugić and Miodrag Milić, Institut za savreminu istoriju, 1989.

dream of the Independent State of Croatia coming true. Together with the Ustasha, the *Kulturbund*, the members of the German minority association, armed with the weapons of the former Yugoslav Army, immediately began enforcing the regime of "order, work and purity of the race".

The former Yugoslav Army weapons and other military equipment were collected in the former officers' residence in the Tvrđava area of Osijek. As soon as the occupation began, about twenty or thirty of us, Jews and Serbs, were sent for forced labour. Jews were also sent to other kinds of forced labour and various forms of plunder were introduced. One special method of looting the Osijek Jews, and Jews rights across the Independent State of Croatia, was the "contribution". This was described by my uncle, Dr Lavoslav Kraus, in his book *Encounters and Destinies*[6]:

"In April 1941, I was taken by night at the point of *Kulturbund* bayonets to a Jewish school, to an empty apartment in which my wife's parents (Chief Rabbi Dr Simon Ungar) had lived for 53 years and in which my wife had spent her childhood. About forty or fifty of the 'fancier and richer' Jews were rounded up here and kept under guard. One evening a rumour spread that we would all be executed by firing squad at two in the morning.

"These first detentions ended a few weeks later in extortion, which they called "contributing". From some they received 500,000 dinars[7]. From me they got just 25,000. I heard that the *Kulturbund* split these "contributions" with the Ustasha organisation."

As I recall, there were a few more contributions. The "authorities" would prescribe an amount of money which the Jews had to collect, and the Jewish Community would have to divide this debt among individuals, taking into account the material resources of its members.

The desecration of the Jewish cemeteries in Gornji Grad and Donji Grad began in the first days of the occupation. I also remember the Gornji Grad synagogue being burnt down, along with a building which housed Jewish social organisations. *Kulturbund* members Franjo Kolar and Anton Piler were behind this arson. While the crowd

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[6] *Susreti i sudbine: sjećanja iz jednog aktivnog života*. Osijek, Glas Slavonije, 1973.

[7] Author's note: A secondary school teacher's starting salary at the time was about 900 dinars a month.

around the synagogue screamed at the top of their lungs at the Jews watching the synagogue go up in flames, a number of fire engines stood by. The firemen were making sure the fire didn't spread to other, non-Jewish buildings.

Eight days after the occupation began, anti-Jewish demonstrations were organised in Osijek by the *Kulturbund* people. The demonstrators carried placards with anti-Jewish slogans. According to the recollections of Vladimir Kon, the former deputy head of the Jewish Community in Osijek, and those of Dr Vinski, about 250 young Jewish people were taken from Osijek towards Zagreb in the first weeks of August 1941. They were taken to Gospić and killed above the yawning Jadovno Gorge.

In his book *The Jews of Yugoslavia, 1941-1945*[8], page 92, Dr Jaša Romano lists various ways in which the plunder of Jewish assets was legally justified. In Osijek, also, local regulations against Jews were passed for the district. Thus, among other things, Jews were in principle forbidden to take trams, to bathe in public places in the city or travel by boat (so they would be unable to cross the Drava River to Hungary). Jews were not allowed to move anywhere outside their own homes without the yellow armband. They were forbidden to shop at the market before 10.00 a.m. (very little could be found after 9.00 a.m. during the war years), and they were permitted to enter shops only between three and five in the afternoon. Jews were also forbidden to go to the theatre, the cinema, taverns, cafes or bars and were not permitted to sit on public benches or enter parks. They were also forbidden from meeting in private apartments and moving around the streets of central Osijek, unless they lived there. They were permitted in the streets outside the city centre but were only allowed to walk in twos, not in larger groups.

It's very difficult to list everything from which Jews were barred. They included going to barber shops except between 10.30 a.m. and noon, meeting or getting together with "Aryan women" and owning radios or cameras, which instead had to be handed over. When Ustasha or German events were being held, Jews were not even allowed to leave their homes. All these bans were accompanied by fines or prison sentences for breaking them.

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[8] *Jevrei Jugoslavije, 1941-1945: Žrtve genocida i učesnici narodnoslobodilačkog rata*, Jaša Romano, Federation of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia, 1980.

During the housing crisis, one of the worst measures was the eviction of Jews from apartments in the city centre to the suburbs. This was accompanied by various ways of robbing from the Jews – by paying "redemption costs", the costs of moving both their own belongings and the belongings of those who "relinquished" small apartments in exchange for a larger, Jewish apartment, and other methods.

A "commissioner" was appointed to every Jewish-owned shop. In practical terms this meant that the Jewish owner could not dispose of his assets and, if he continued working in the company or shop, he would work as an employee.

The anti-Jewish propaganda in the daily newspaper *Hravtski List*, in which all the anti-Jewish regulations were proclaimed, also included publication of an anti-Semitic article every two or three days. Under pressure from the authorities, particularly Ustasha and *Kulturbund* people, shops began putting up signs reading "Jews not welcome" and restaurants displayed "No Jews admitted" signs.

I first heard about the Jasenovac camp in the summer of 1941. Until the proclamation of the Independent State of Croatia, a man called Đuro had worked for my father as a shop assistant. He was a *mačekovac*, a follower of Vlatko Maček[9], and later an active Ustasha. One day in August, Đura turned up in my father's shop wearing his Ustasha uniform and asked me to go with him to the warehouse next to the store. There he told me about the horrors happening in Jasenovac and advised "if they ever want to take you to Jasenovac, run! It would be better to get killed on the run than to reach there alive."

Some time later orders came for us to move out of our apartment to a smaller one next to the store, so we had to get rid of some of our furniture. After another two or three months, while I was at work in Tenje, the Ustasha authorities ordered my parents to move once again, this time to a one-room apartment somewhere in the suburbs. Again my father had to give some of our things to people he knew. I learnt about the move a few days after it happened and managed to get permission to visit my parents. This was the last time I saw my grandmother, my mother's mother, who lived with us. She died suddenly, a few days after they moved. I was unable to attend the funeral

[9] Vlatko Maček, leader of the Croatian Peasant Party, the strongest elected party in Croatia at the time of the establishment of the Independent State of Croatia.

because they wouldn't give me time off from work. During this last visit I found my mother in bed; she had had a stroke. She was unable to speak to me but squeezed my hand in hers, her right hand which she was still able to move. This was the last time I saw my grandmother, my mother, my father and my sister Vera.

THE WORK OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN OSIJEK DURING THE OCCUPATION

During the period of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the Jewish Community in Osijek had mainly devoted itself to religious matters and charity work. With the Independent State of Croatia, everything changed. Religious services were no longer held and there was chaos among the Osijek Jews. The *Kulturbund* seized all the Community's documents and the records of Jews and members of the B'nai B'rith Lodge. The also, naturally, took all the Jewish Community's money. The existence of the Jewish Community suited the *Kulturbund* people because it gave them control over the Jews as they carried out their plunder and the subsequent destruction of the Jews.

The *Kulturbund* members bypassed the Jewish Community to collect their first round of "contributions". When the Ustashas saw how much money the *Kulturbund* people had taken from the Jews they clashed over who would get control of the Jewish Community. So the Ustasha political authorities appointed Ivo Hočevar as commissioner to seize control of the Jewish Community from the *Kulturbund*. They appointed a new management for the Community, headed by Bela Fridman, with Slavko Klajn as secretary. The Ustashas then demanded a new contribution of twenty million *kunas*. Commissioner Hočevar allowed the Jews to deal with this new obligation imposed on them as they saw fit, on the condition that they would do what was being asked. Under a decision of the Independent State of Croatia authorities, a Jewish religious tax was levied and funds were raised this way to support the Community, operate the Jewish school and provide aid for Jews in camps. Because Jewish children had been expelled from the normal schools, a Jewish primary school was set up in Osijek, together with a six-year secondary school. Classes were conducted by Jewish teachers who had been dismissed.

Various committees were set up within the Community to deal with contributions, social life, schools, tax, finance, forced labour and assistance for camps.

When Jews were evicted from the better apartments, a number of families found themselves practically in the street. For this reason the Community also set up a committee to solve housing problems by allocating other apartments to these people or by moving several families into one apartment.

Meanwhile a battle was raging in the Ustasha ranks for the position of Jewish Community commissioner. The status of the committee members in the community, and that of Jews in general, depended on the commissioner and on the prevailing anti-Jewish policy in Osijek. Nevertheless, the *Kulturbund* members still managed, de facto, to have the last word.

Despite the constant changes in policy on Jews, two Community institutions survived all these changes right up to "the final solution of the Jewish issue in Osijek". These were the camp assistance project, also known as the flying squad, and the "people's kitchen".

According to the recollections of Vlado Salzberger[10], the flying squad was active from October or November 1941 to May 1942, when Vlado left Osijek, but he believes that some other team members remained active until they were deported to camps. The team moved in when people lost touch with deported family members after they had been taken from Gospić to Jasenovac. It was no longer possible to send parcels of food or clothing to these deportees. When people found out that parcels could be sent through the Red Cross, the camp assistance project was set up as a special institution. But, according to the reports, the inmates often didn't receive these parcels, or they were stolen. Still, through Commissioner Hočevar, contact between the Jewish Community committee and Maks Luburić, the notorious head of Jasenovac, was made possible. Jews offered their help in providing supplies for the Jasenovac camp and then the Jewish Community of Osijek (and its Zagreb counterpart) established connections with the Jasenovac "supply office". At the invitation of the Ustashas, committee members Andrija Rip and Vlado Grinbaum went to Jasen-

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[10] *The Osijek Flying Squad*, Nada and Vlado Salzberger, in *We Survived...*, The Jewish Historical Museum, Federation of Jewish Communities in Yugoslavia, Belgrade, 2004.

ovac for negotiations. Thanks to the agreement on supplies for Jasenovac, many human lives were saved by these supplies to the camp in these worst times in the winter of 1941–42.

This operation suited the Ustashas nicely, because it meant the job of supplying food staples was largely taken over by this organisation, thus saving money for the Ustashas.

This care for camps project was headed by Andrija Rip, a young man who was tireless and absolutely devoted. In August 1942, he and the other young people involved, who never stinted with their time, were taken to Auschwitz where they were killed. The other permanent members of this small flying squad who should be mentioned are high school students Ivo Šoten, Rik Frem, Herman Haberfeld and Franko Vajs, the locksmith Zvonko (Levi) Smit and Zvonko Drajzinger.

In mid-December, 1941, this team began hurriedly preparing for the accommodation of Jews in the Đakovo camp and for Jewish refugees from Bosnia in the Cerealija mill. The team arranged the mill so that the ground floor could be used as shared space, while the upper three floors were used as living space. By agreement with the Ustasha authorities, the Jewish Community in Osijek took over the job of supporting this camp financially. There were about 1,900 people accommodated there, including bedridden elderly people who had to be carried. Thanks to the activities of the Osijek Municipality, a large number of children were placed with Osijek families and with families in nearby towns, including Našice, Vinkovci and Donji Miholjac. My aunt, Julija Kraus was very involved with this work. Members of the flying squad took these children to their new homes. Because there was so much work to be done in a short time, the team, often known as the Đakovo team, was expanded to include the following young people: Dragutin (Haim) Kon, Švarc Rojbek, Zdenko Volf, Janoš Kon and Nada (Rahela) Grinvald (married as Salzberger). Those who worked on washing and mending clothes were Ljerka Adler, Mina Fišer (married Montag), Melanka Inselt, Lola Atijas, Zlatko Vamošer, Vlado Raus, Branko Polak and Branko Mautner. The Jewish administration of the camp was managed by Vlado Grinbaum and working with him were Ladislava-Lili Grinbaum, Ladislav Lederer and Dragutin Glaner. Until February 1942, living conditions in the Đakovo camp were tolerable, but on February 24, 1942, the evacuation of the Stara Gradiška camp began and this was followed by a typhoid epidemic and an epidemic of the

dysentery which had ravaged Stara Gardiška. This needed the energetic and persistent work of the medical group, which was led by Dr Laci Lederer and included Dr Miškolci, Dr Nada Jurković and Dr Atijas. The whole flying squad worked on the disinfection of the camp with the help of several older people and medical professionals from Đakovo.

On March 29, 1942, the Ustasha authorities took charge of the camp. The Ustashas immediately banned the flying squad from working there and so, from April 17, none of the team members were allowed to visit the camp.

The Đakovo camp was closed down at the beginning of June 1942 and the women and children inmates were transferred to Jasenovac in three trains. The first transport was sent on June 15, and the last on July 5, 1942. There were a total of about 2,800 women and children on these trains and they were all killed immediately on arrival at Jasenovac. There are 569 victims of Ustasha bloodlust and madness buried in the Đakovo cemetery.

ROUTES TO SALVATION FOR OSIJEK JEWS

After the introduction of anti-Jewish laws in the Independent State of Croatia in May and June, 1941, Jews from Croatia mainly emigrated to Italy. The next most common destination was Hungary, while some managed to reach Switzerland and beyond. Others fled to those regions of the former Kingdom of Yugoslavia occupied by the Italian Army: the Dalmatian coast, south of Sušak and the greater part of the Dalmatian hinterland, all the way to Ogulin in Croatia and Mostar in Bosnia, as well as the Adriatic islands scattered along the Dalmatian coast. The exact number of refugees has never been established, but it is estimated that there were about ten thousand.

After the deportation of Jews from Osijek, it was clear to everyone that the Jews could save themselves only by fleeing the Independent State of Croatia. It was not safe to hide in the houses of Croatian friends and, at the beginning, very few Jews opted to join the Partisans.

As well as fleeing towards the Italian-occupied zone of the Dalmatian coast, the other direction particularly favoured by the Osijek Jews was towards Hungary. Though anti-Jewish laws had also been

passed there, a large number of Jews managed to survive in Budapest under false names.

The River Drava separates Osijek from Baranja which, at that time, was part of Hungary. Many emigrated by renting a boat and crossing to the other bank of the Drava at night. Having reached the other side they would somehow get to the nearest train station, from where they usually travelled to Budapest. Hungarian rail workers helped some people cross into Hungary by train. Control on the Hungarian side of the border was not rigorous.

Najman next to a monument on the place where the Tenje camp stood

According to a poll conducted at the end of 1945 by the Jewish Community in Osijek, about three hundred people emigrated from the Municipality of Osijek to Italy, to the occupation zone where power was held by the Italian Army (Independent State of Croatia territory) and to Hungary. The same poll indicated that a total of about 450 Jews from the surrounding area had managed to escape the horrors of genocide in various ways: illegally, by emigrating, by joining the Partisans and by other means.

The Croatian authorities constantly insisted that the Italian authorities treat Jews living in the Italian occupied zone of the Independent State of Croatia in the same way they were treated by that state itself. In the end a compromise was reached in which the Italians committed themselves to putting all Jews from the occupied zone into concentration camps. In this way the camps near Dubrovnik, in Makarska, on the islands of Brač and Hvar and in

Kraljevica were established. Later a Jewish section was set up in the Rab camp. Jews in these camps, however, were treated humanely.

BUILDING THE TENJE CAMP

Sometime in early March 1942 I was sent to forced labour in Tenje, as was Kalman Vajs with whom I spent most of my time. The construction site was on the Osijek-Novi Grad road towards the village of Tenje. We had to walk seven or eight kilometres from our homes to the construction site and the same back again. The authorities had given orders for a settlement to be built on this site for the Jews to move into. Jews were given a choice, either they could build this settlement and live there, more or less in a ghetto, or be sent to Jasenovac. Obviously the Jews chose the first alternative. They were required to move into the settlement by June 1942. Representatives of the authorities had allegedly promised that construction of this settlement would the "final solution of the Jewish question in Osijek" and that the Osijek Jews would not be deported to camps.

We later learnt that this eviction from the city was a result of pressure exerted by the *Kulturbund*. Signs had been appearing around the town in German, such as "Our patience is running out", "Jews must leave" and so on.

Believing in what the representatives of the local authorities had said, the Jewish Community worked out a plan for building the settlement. All members of the Community were even asked to apply if they wanted a separate room built for their family (everyone else would be accommodated in shared rooms for a larger number of people). Those who took up this option had to provide funds needed to purchase building materials and pay the workers. The Community members really believed that by building this settlement the Osijek Jews would avoid the fate of Jews in the Independent State of Croatia. This was an illusion!

Until mid-June, 1942, everything went more or less according to plan. But then *Hrvatski List* published an article on "the insolent behaviour of two Jewish women towards a disabled German". The Jews were to take collective responsibility for this lie. The Hitler Youth were organised: they waited for Jews passing through Novi Grad on their way to work in Tenje and whipped them.

At the end of June 1942, the foremen from Tenje, Volner and Mautner came to the settlement early in the morning, very agitated, with the news that the notorious Ivan Tolj had arrived in Osijek. Tolj had been the chief of police in Vinkovci and had been responsible for the fact that the majority of the Vinkovci Jews were among the first to be deported to Jasenovac and Stara Gradiška. It was obvious that Tolj had been brought here to get the Osijek Jews moved to the Tenje settlement as soon as possible.

I presume that my father knew, through Žiga Volner, what lay ahead and so asked my cousin Ernest, the son of an "Aryan" father and a Jewish mother, to prepare documents which I could use to flee to Split. Ernest came to me in Tenje so that the two of us could plan my escape. I insisted that he also obtain a pass for Kalman. At that time Ernest was a non-commissioned officer in the Home Guard and worked in the headquarters of the *IV Obskrbiski Zdrug* (an engineering unit). Accompanied by Ernest in his Home Guard uniform, Kalman and I walked through a gap in the unfinished fence and headed for Osijek. We hid for about two weeks with Ernest, who managed to obtain a Home Guard pass each for me and Kalman. With these passes, and a lot of difficulties, we reached Split.

REGIA QUESTURA

SPALATO

Prego per il rilascio della legittimazione personale

Mi chiamo ... di ...

e ... nato a ...

di professione ... residente a Spalato, dal

anno con stabile dimora a Spalato via

Altezza

Statura

Occhi

Capelli

Barba

Baffi

Naso

Segni particolari

Facsimile of an application to the questura and of the uncompleted identification form with which Najman was able to leave Split to join the Partisans

In 1942 I was arrested in the street in Split because I had no documents. I was taken to the notorious local Firule prison. One day, from inside the prison, I heard the Hashomer Hatzair whistle, *Hazaak veemac*, coming from the outside and it occurred to me that it

could be my roommate, Zvonko-Levi Šmit. A prisoner in my cell had a mirror and I used this to look out and see Levi in the street. I replied with the same whistle. A few days later I was taken to the port where Jews without documents were being loaded onto a boat. Levi was standing there: he had brought me some things. Hidden in a cap he gave me was a forged, blank personal identification document, *legitimatione personale*, which I was to use to escape and join the Partisans. I didn't even manage to use it because I couldn't establish a connection. Kalman Vajs and Teo Polak were put onto the boat along with me. We disembarked in Novi Vinodol where we were in "free confinement". From Novi Vinodol they transferred us to the Kraljevica camp and from there to the camp on the island of Rab. After Italy capitulated I joined the Rab Jewish Partisan battalion as a volunteer. When the battalion was disbanded I was assigned to the Seventh Banja Division where I stayed until demobilisation in November 1945.

MY PARENTS' FATE

With Tolj's arrival in Osijek, the process of moving Jews into the Tenje settlement began. About 1,600 Jews from Osijek and another nine hundred from the surrounding area were accommodated there. At the same time, four hundred Jews were moved to the Vukovar Road and a hundred people were put into the Jewish retirement home. Many people in the Tenje settlement had no roof over their heads because construction was not finished. There were Ustasha guards at every assembly point so that prisoners could only leave the settlement with passes. My mother, my sister Vera and the parents of my aunt, Julija Kraus, were accommodated in the retirement home, as were the former chief rabbi, Dr Simon Ungar and his wife, Fani. Dr Ungar had been appointed to his post in 1901 and, up to his retirement before the second world war, in addition to performing his normal activities he also studied the Talmud, the comparative philology of the Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmud, the Midrash and other Hebrew and Aramaic texts. Before he was taken away as part of the last group of Osijek Jews on August 22, 1942, all Dr Ungar's works were handed over, by agreement, to the Catholic parish priest, Bezecki, who kept them and saved them. After the war, Ungar's daughter Julija sent all his works to Israel where they

are now in the Jerusalem University Library. Dr Ungar's letter's from the camp have also been saved and are with his granddaughters, Judit and Eva Kraus. In a number of these letters, Dr Ungar had received offers of crossing into Hungary, but had refused because he wanted "to stay with his people", with the other Jews of Osijek.

The former chief rabbi celebrated his last religious service in the Tenje camp, on about August 10, 1942, at the wedding of Sonja and Herman Singer (who survived Auschwitz).

Journalist and writer Zora Dirnbah was the daughter of an Austrian "Aryan" mother and a Jewish father. She wrote about the day before the residents of the retirement home were taken on the journey from which they would not return, August 21, 1942.

"People walked, weeping, through the rooms, the yard and the hallway of the retirement home from the early morning hours, bidding farewell both to those they knew and those they did not know. How the information that the camp would be closed down and the deportations would begin spread among the people remains unclear."

Among those who managed to fight their way through into the retirement home and who brought their Jewish relatives and friends some things for their departure was Mitzi Friedmann, an Austrian "Aryan" married to a Jew. Zora helped her get into the retirement home.

"In front of Mitzi Friedmann," wrote Zora Dirnbah, "in that dark hallway, a woman appeared unexpectedly carrying a tiny, skinny little boy in her arms. Just a few steps separated us from the gate and the Ustasha guard. Luckily the guard had his back turned to us. Approaching Mrs Friedmann, the young woman desperately extended her arms with the little boy, whispering a few words, quite out of breath, stuttering from fear that she would not have time to say them, that the guard would turn around and take her last hope from her: 'Take him, please, save him. His name is Kardoš, he's not even two, he's sick, he has dysentery. At least save my child for me.' Mrs Friedmann took the little boy, Branko. One human life was saved."

The Jewish Community tried to ensure that life was as good as possible in all three places. But then came a new blow: Jews from the surrounding towns – Valpovo, Donji Miholjac, Podravska Slatina, Našice, Đakovo – were also brought to the Tenje camp, taking

the number of inmates up to three thousand. The situation became unbearable.

The Jews of Osijek and the surrounding towns were taken from Tenje to Jasenovac, Loborgrad and Auschwitz in August 1942. At that time I had already been in Split for two months. So the section which follows is based on the letters of my father, the Rausnic and Kon families, the recollections of the Auschwitz inmates who survived and other documents and papers to which I have had access.

THE FINAL SOLUTION OF THE "JEWISH QUESTION" IN OSIJEK AND THE INDEPENDENT STATE OF CROATIA

The decision on the solution for the "Jewish question" was taken at a conference in Wannsee on January 20, 1942. A photocopy of the minutes is held in Yad Vashem.

In a supplement to *Politika* published in 1996, Božidar Dikić, the newspaper's Bonn correspondent wrote: "The only state which, shoulder to shoulder with Germany's Third Reich, carried out its own pogrom, the eradication of the Jewish population, was Pavelić's puppet state." According to Dikić's research, the deportation of Jews to Auschwitz was carried out in direct collaboration between the Nazi Germans and the Independent State of Croatia. He backs this up with a number of documents such as "directives to the state railways management for the provision of strict security for these transports, their routes and timetable."

Inscription on the monument where the former Tenje camp stood

The Independent State of Croatia even paid the costs of transporting Jews to Auschwitz.

The first group began boarding the wagons on the afternoon of August 15. There were seven hundred children in this group. There has never been any reliable information on the fate of people from this group. They are believed to have been taken to Auschwitz and killed there. This is what Arnold Kon, an inmate who survived, claims.

The second transport, between a hundred and three hundred people, set of for Jasenovac on August 18, 1942. None of them returned, a conclusion which is also supported from the testimony of the only survivor, Miroslav Auferber.

The third train set off on August 22. On board were all the Jews from the retirement home, together with those from Vukovarska 77, the Jewish Community Board and all the remaining inmates from the Tenje camp. Even those who had to be carried on stretchers were sent off. From the statement made by the witness Kon, we can conclude that the elderly, the sick and the helpless who had no family members in the Tenje camp were taken off the train in Jasenovac and liquidated there.

A postcard from my father dated August 22, 1942, confirms that date of the last transport's departure.

> *Dear Son,* *Osijek, 22.08*
>
> *A few words before our departure. All of us, including Mother, are going to Germany. To Graz they say. We're in a good mood. We're not despairing at all and neither should you. Your aunt is sending you everything! Many kisses, Dad.*
>
> *The Ungars, too, the whole of the retirement home is going.*

Of about three thousand Jews sent from Osijek during August 1942, either to Auschwitz or to Jasenovac, only about a dozen returned (they include Arnold Kon, David Perlštajn, Jelena Grinbaum, Olga Heler, Herman Singer, Ljudevit Rosenberg and Miroslav Auferber). According to information obtained from Yad Vashem, 2,445 Jews from Osijek and the surrounding area were killed.

About 115 Jews from mixed marriages remained in Osijek as well as a few others who managed to hide or who the Fascists forgot about.

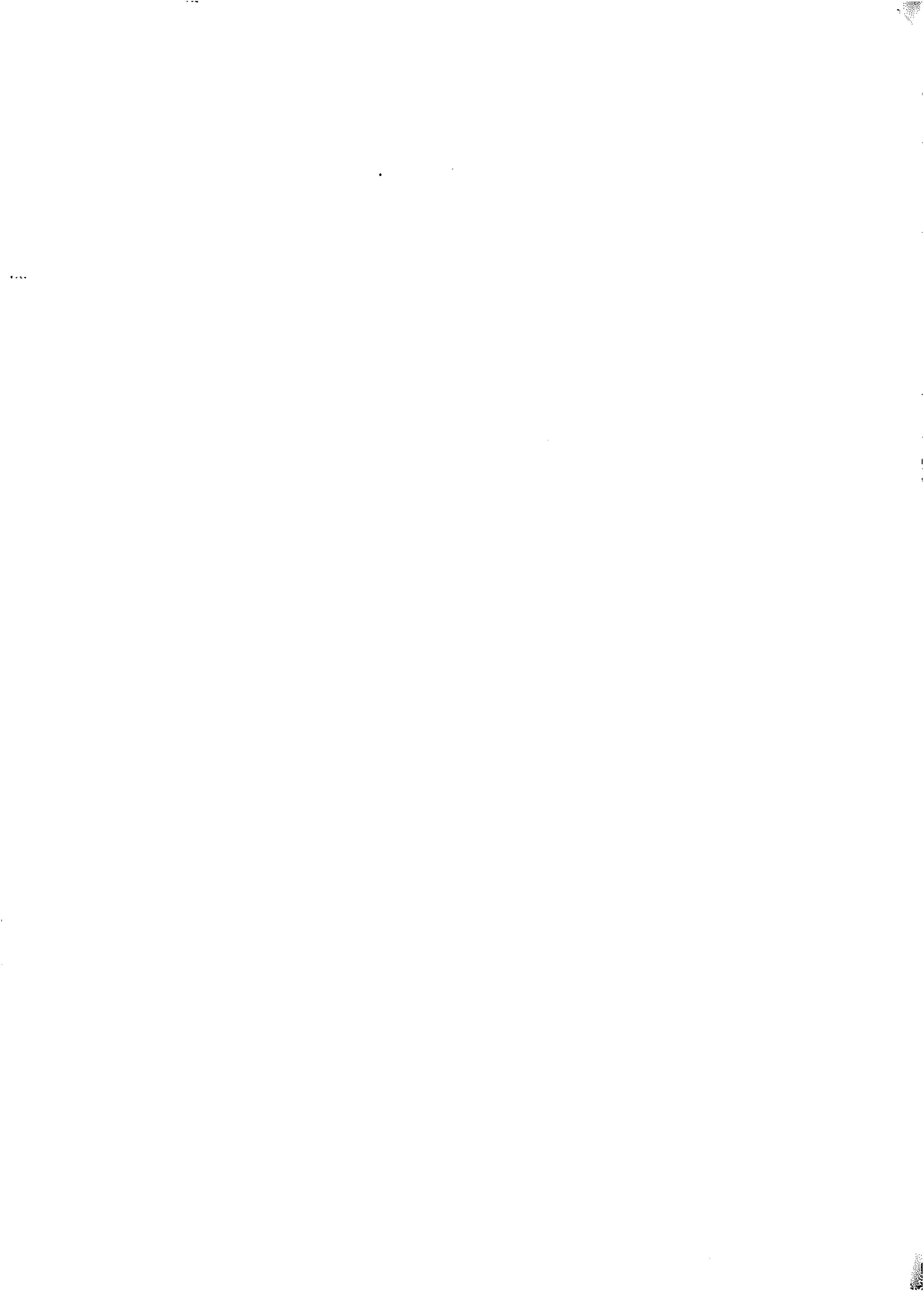
With the departure of the last train, the "Jewish question" in Osijek was largely solved, because 92.6 per cent of Jews from Osijek and

the surrounding area had been destroyed. A monument has been built on the Osijek-Tenje Road where the Jewish ghetto-camp Tenje stood in 1942. On it is written "On this spot stood a Fascist camp through which thousands of patriots from this area passed. The people of this area have raised this memorial stone as a token of gratitude and in memory of these fallen patriots."

I have never heard that in the Tenje camp there were inmates of any other nationality than Jewish.

IV

UNDER ITALIAN RULE AND IN SWITZERLAND



Frida MEL, Dr Miša MEL, Dr Eta NAJFELD

THE PATH THROUGH LIFE OF FRIDA AND DAVID MEL

Frida and David Mel are no longer alive to see the publication of this record of their strange fate and the account of their lives and survival. The authenticity and documentary value of this information draws on a recording of fragmentary memories of Frida Mel. Additional material comes from the memory of their close friend Dr Eta Najfeld, in whose memory their discussions are deeply etched, and from their son Dr Miša Mel's recorded memories of the stories told in his parents' home.

During the Nazi persecution of the Jews, the paths of these two people, one from Slovakia and one from Poland, crossed in a third country, Italy, from where they travelled on together to spend the rest of their lives in a fourth country, Yugoslavia.

Dr David Mel's considerable contribution to medical science, which goes far beyond the borders of the country in which he worked, obliges the editors of this book to publish the story of the miraculous fates of these two people and prevent it descending into oblivion.

Editorial Board

FRIDA MEL: I was born in January 1919, into the Grinfeld family in a place called Dunajska Streda in Slovakia, close to Bratislava. My father died very early and my mother did the worst kind of physical labour to support us children, four daughters and three sons. Because of the grave financial situation I was unable to stay at school. My mother decided that I should learn the tailoring trade so that I could begin earning as soon as possible to support myself and help the family.

Frida in 1939

I was very young when I became active in Trumpeldor, the Jewish youth organisation. By this time people already felt that war was coming so, at our meetings, we decided that we would go to Palestine. We didn't have any special documents. Five hundred and fifty of us, women, children, elderly and young people, rented a ship called the Penčo and, in 1939, sailed down the Danube. The Penčo was really a wreck used to transport cattle and was very uncomfortable. When we reached Kladovo we were unable to continue our journey. We remained in Kladovo for a month with no means of support. However the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities of Yugoslavia learnt of our plight and helped us out. Rural people in the area also helped us a great deal, bringing us as much supplies as they were able.

I don't remember exactly how or who it was that gave us approval to continue our journey via the Black Sea towards the Mediterranean. We were caught in a terrible storm near Rhodes and were shipwrecked on an uninhabited island. The waves kept pounding the ship and we saw that it would soon fall apart. We had just enough time to take a boat and a few wooden planks from the ship. Everything else sank. We spent seven days on this deserted island, sleeping under the open sky, with no food or water. Desperate, we began to light fires in the hope that someone would spot us and come

to our rescue. On the morning of the eighth day we saw a ship approaching. It was an Italian navy ship. When it came close a few sailors came ashore by boat. At first they didn't believe that we had been shipwrecked. However when they saw the children and the elderly they accepted us, collected us and took us to their barracks – a camp on the island of Rhodes. There we stayed for about a year. The Italian soldiers treated us really well. They gave us food, but we were allowed to move around only inside the camp.

Sometime at the beginning of 1942, the Italian administration informed us that they would have to move us. "You will have to leave here to save your lives." And so we arrived in Italy, in the Ferramonti camp."

TRACKING EVENTS

MINUTES of the 18th Session of the Executive Board of the Alliance of Jewish Religious Communities of Yugoslavia held on June 5, 1940, in the Alliance offices.

Present: Dr Fridrih Pops, deputy president of the Alliance; Bernard Robiček, Isak Mašiah; Supreme Rabbi Dr Isak Alkalaj; Secretary-General Šime Špicer, Chief Rabbi Ignjat Šlang. Dr Fran Hercog, David A. Alkalaj, Pavle Vinterštajn, Dr Isak Amar and Avram Izrael.

1. ...

2. According to reports received by the Alliance, the Penčo has arrived in Bezdan carrying about five hundred Jewish refugees. The Alliance has no further information on the make-up of this transport, nor does it know who organised it. Regardless of this, if the information that the passengers are in poverty is correct, it is necessary to provide them with urgent assistance.

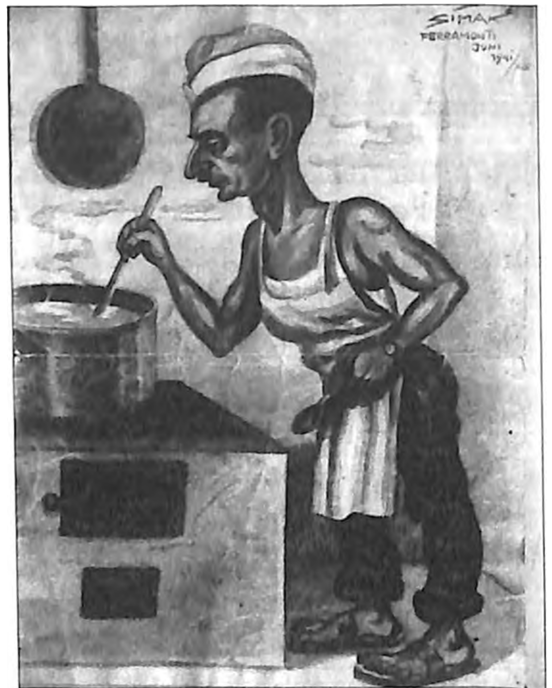
Resolution: if this ship is still in Bezdan, ask the JVO in Sombor to send a representative there and, in accordance with their findings, provide the passengers with urgent assistance to the amount of 20,000 dinars at the expense of the Allianse.

(From the archives of the Jewish History Museum in Belgrade)

The son of Frida and David Mel, DR MIŠA MEL, *now supplements his mother's testimony with family stories about how his parents met.*

Army colonel and teacher, Dr David Mel, was born in 1912 in the small Polish town of Sieradz, about sixty kilometres from Lod. He grew up in the Orthodox family of a wealthy grain merchant who owned a large number of grain silos and agricultural properties. Despite having completed his primary education in the *heder*, the father wanted his three sons to attend a classical Polish secondary school so that they could enrol at the university. He wanted all three of his sons to become doctors. Because the *Numerus Clausus* was in force in Poland, the three sons enrolled in the medical faculty in Brussels.

David remained in Belgium for only a very short time because his father encountered financial difficulties. Because schooling in Belgium was expensive, he moved to Italy, to Modena, where it was much less so. There he was caught by the second world war. As a foreigner, a student and above all as a Jew, he was interned in the Ferramonti camp. There he became a cook.



A 1941 caricature of David Mel by another inmate of the Ferramonti camp in which Mel worked as a cook for some time

Among the group of shipwreck victims from Rhodes, David spotted a skinny, starving girl named Frida and immediately offered her his food reserves. And so, from the impulse to help a starving girl, a love was born which culminated in a wedding in the Ferramonti camp, a wedding conducted according to proper Jewish ritual, under a *hupa*, in front of a

rabbi and with a signed *ketuba*. It does no harm to add that the couples' outfits were borrowed from various people. There is even a photo of the wedding.

Following the fall of Italy in September, 1943, the English entered Ferramonti and closed the camp down. Because there were people of many different nationalities in the camp, the English offered to send the former inmates anywhere they wanted, to America or Australia, or to repatriate them to their homes if they had been liberated from the Germans. David, as a Pole, said he wanted to fight Fascism in the Krajova Army (the Polish national army led by General Anders). However they refused him because he was a Jew.

The Mels made many Yugoslav friends in the Ferramonti camp and from them heard about the national liberation struggle. David decided that they should apply to travel to Yugoslavia. And so they went to Bari, because this is where the Yugoslav base was. There he was received by Dr Herbert Kraus, the deputy head of the Supreme Headquarters Medical Corps, who approved his departure to join the national liberation struggle. At first David worked in the English hospital in a place called Grumo, near Bari, where seriously wounded partisans were admitted for treatment and rehabilitation. Frida worked beside him as a nurse. Later he was transferred to the island of Vis. There he met Dr Kulušić, the head of the Dalmatian Units' medical corps.

Asked what he wanted to do, David replied that he would like to focus on epidemiology. Kulušić replied that he needed surgeons, not epidemiologists who didn't even speak the language. Kulušić was caught by surprise and didn't know what to do with him but, as he was there already, allowed him to stay. He found it strange, however, that a Pole had come, without coercion, to join the Partisans and wanted to stay among the Yugoslav Partisans.

Luckily the war was drawing to an end and Dr Mel was assigned to the naval base in Kumbor. Soon after this he arrived at the Military Medical Academy in Belgrade to begin his specialisation in epidemiology.

Family friend DR ETA NAJFELD *adds to the story told by Frida and David Mel's son Miša with her recollection's of David's career:*

The course of his specialisation took place under very difficult circumstances because he spent practically all of the time in Kosovo and Metohija fighting the infectious diseases that raged there constantly after the war. Dysentery was most common in the army. In the course of this very difficult and onerous work he also turned to scientific research. Thanks to his painstaking efforts, his specialisation abroad and his knowledge of a number of foreign languages, he managed to create a vaccine for dysentery. His vaccine has been recognised by the World Health Organisation as a very effective measure against this disease. The vaccine is known as Mel's vaccine. After gaining an international reputation for his scientific work, he was nominated on the broad list of candidates for the Nobel Prize.

Friendship and love in the Ferramonti camp culminated in a proper Jewish wedding, 1943

He was also recognised within the country: he was decorated a number of times by the army, promoted to the rank of colonel and finally appointed a professor at the Military Medical Academy. Professor Lea Rozencvajg, who was present at his nomination for this chair, told me the following:

Professor Vukšić, David's superior at the time, speaking for the proposal to promote David, said "Two Polish Jews have put the medical corps of this country in their debt. In the first world war, Dr Hiršfeld came as a volunteer, with his wife, to the Salonica front to help the Serbian Army. In collaboration with Professor Kosta Koča-Todorović they discovered the Paratyphus C bacterium. Now another volunteer, David Mel, has given us the dysentery vaccine."

This is how these two displaced Jews continued their life in this country, Jews who were treated with full equality and who received recognition for their work.

Professor David Mel died in 1993 and Frida in 1998.

Dr Sabetaj Robert-Puba ALBAHARI

FROM BAD TO WORSE

Dr Sabetaj Albahari was born on January 1, 1925, in Doboj, Bosnia-Hercegovina, to Leon (Jehuda) and Mirta (Mirjam), née Altarac. He is married to Mari-Lou, a psychiatric social worker. They have three children, Albert Scott, Susan Miriam and David (Davičo) Johanan, and nine grandchildren.

Dr Albahari is a psychiatrist, but his hobby is flying. He practised in the United States of America where he flew his own light aircraft for 36 years. The family lives in the city of Princeton in the state of New Jersey.

My grandfather, my father's father, was a jeweller and money-changer during the Turkish occupation, which is how he earned the nickname Saraf. He was from Tešanj. There he collected taxes for both the Turkish and the Austrian authorities. My father told me that, according to my grandfather, our ancestors came to Tešanj from Izmir, via Rušćuk (Ruse, Bulgaria). They fled Spain after the expulsion in 1492 and, in the opinion of Professor Cecil Roth[1], probably took as

[1] Sir Cecil Roth, former president of the Royal Academy of Science in London. In connection with the origin of the surname Albahari, Professor Roth also pointed out to the author of this testimony, with some reservations, the possibility that it could be of Arab origin. In Arabic the word *bahrija* means a sea or a lake, any large body of water, thus "Albahari" could mean either "sailor" or "fisherman".

their surname the name of the place in which they lived, Albuhera, five kilometres south of the city of Bajadoz, near the Portuguese border.

Grandfather Sabetaj married twice, so my father grew up in a large family. He had four brothers and five half brothers, three sisters and four half sisters. My father also comes from Tešanj.

WE JEWS SHOULDN'T LIVE

When I was one year old, the family moved to Dubrovnik because my father was appointed manager of Lav Odijela (Lav Suits), a shop owned by the Kabiljo brothers from Sarajevo. We could have lived quite comfortably and peacefully there had it not been for frequent anti-Semitic incidents. One example, when I was in the third grade of primary school, happened when Rabbi Daniti told me to leave the class while the others had religious instruction. My classroom was on the ground floor so, when I was outside, I could clearly hear the Catholic priest say that we Jews had "killed their Lord God on the cross" and because of this should not live! When I returned to the class, my classmates rushed at me, attacked me, beat me and spat on me. I managed to defend myself by pulling out a knife used for sharpening pencils and wounding one of the pupils, the leader of the bullies. This caused a scandal in the city. The incident drew a reaction from Belgrade which ruled that this priest could no longer teach. In an effort to calm the situation down to at least some degree, signs appeared in the school "He's my brother indeed, regardless of creed".

Before the war, in March 1941, we took refuge in Tešanj, in my grandfather's house. The greater part of the family was already there. However, when Yugoslavia fell, my father, my mother and my little brother Avram returned to Dubrovnik, and I followed them twenty days later with my sister and my Uncle Josif. As we were passing through Žepče we ran into Auntie Rena with her two small children at the station. We were unable to talk to her. We could see that tears were running down her face as though she wanted to say to us "We'll never see one another again!"

As soon as we returned to Dubrovnik, a commissioner called Brkan was appointed to father's store. He belonged to a notorious Ustasha group which also included Glavan and the high school teacher, Kaštelan. They were the most brutal murderers: during the

day they would go to Trebinje and the surrounding areas to "remove" Serbs and, in the evening when they returned, they would go to the Franciscan church for confession. They next day they would again go to slaughter Serbs in Trebinje, ruthlessly wiping them out, regardless of gender or age. Once I saw an Ustasha bragging in front of the Church of Saint Vlaho, talking about how he used a bayonet to cut children from the wombs of pregnant Serbian women, and he showed a pot full of Serbian eyes which had been gouged out. Atrocities like these can hardly be forgotten.

Father was arrested as soon as he returned to Dubrovnik, along with another 150 Serbs. This group was taken the next day by truck to a place near Gacko to be executed. However they were saved by luck because the truck broke down and they were kept in prison for a day or two. After the Italian commander of the Second Corps, General Guiseppe d'Amico, intervened, all those who had been arrested were released. As soon as he returned home, my father said that we should flee to Split. With the help of a Dubrovnik Italian, Lieutenant Sevilotti, an officer in the occupying Italian army, my father obtained a pass for all of us to travel to Split. He immediately sent me and my sister to my Uncle Aron, and they also came a month later.

KADISH FOR 45 MURDERED FAMILY MEMBERS

We didn't register with the authorities in Split, because my father kept insisting that we cross into Italy as soon as possible. In the meantime I was caught by the Black Shirts on the beach in Firule because I was swimming with my friends on a Fascist holiday when swimming was forbidden. They whipped us and beat us with rifle butts and made us shout "*Viva il Duce!*", "*Viva la Dalmatia italiana!*", "*Viva il fascismo!*" After all this, with the help of some acquaintances and some money, father managed to organise our travel from Split to Trieste by ship in November, 1941.

When we reached Trieste, my father insisted that we immediately go to the temple because he wanted to make contact with the local Jewish community. His plan was for us to get to Spain. However, when we left the temple there were two lines of Black Shirts, about a hundred metres long, waiting for us. Blows rained down on us as we passed between these lines. We stayed in Trieste for no more than

three or four days and were there in *confino libero*, free confinement, in Bologna until the fall of Italy.

We lived quite peacefully in Bologna. But after the fall of Italy, when the Germans arrived, we were forced to hide in stables and caves, always hungry. There was constant danger of Fascist raids, and of the Gestapo, because of whom we were unable to flee south to join the Allies. Once we happened to be spending the night in a farmer's stable when the Germans stopped there. This was two weeks before the liberation of Bologna, on April 25, 1945. An elite parachute unit was retreating northwards when the Allies broke through the rear line of defence before the breakthrough into the Po Valley. We were horrified and confused, not knowing what to do. We realised that there was nowhere to escape to, that we should stay where we were and wait for the end of the war which was drawing close. Because my mother spoke good German, we made contact with the Germans. They were surprised that we spoke German so well and asked for an explanation. As we all had false Italian names, we said that we came from Trieste, which was once under Austro-Hungarian rule.

About ten days before the liberation, an SS detachment came and wanted to take me to Germany to work. However the parachutists defended me and, when the SS men left, they gave me an armband with a swastika which read *Dolmetscher* (interpreter). This almost cost me my life after the liberation of Bologna, when a patrol of the Garibaldi Brigade was wiping out Fascists and their sympathisers. I was caught and even lined up against a wall to be shot as a collaborator. Fortunately I was saved when American troops arrived and began introducing the long-forgotten law and order.

The following day, as we walked through the city centre, my father and I saw a soldier in a British uniform. On his left shoulder he had a blue and white flag with the *Magen David*. We were overjoyed. The soldier was a member of the Jewish Brigade which was part of the British Eighth Army. Father and I kissed the *Magen David* and wept for joy because it was at this moment that we knew that we were really free. When we had fled Dubrovnik we had kissed the *mezuzah* on our way out of the house and now, in Bologna we kissed the *Magen David*.

The war had ended and, with it, the lives of 45 members of our family. What remains is the pain in our souls and a certain guilt: why

did these innocent people perish and not me as well? Only God, if He exists, can answer this question which has haunted me all my life.

Because they have no one but me to remember them, I say *Kadish* for all our murdered people, although I know neither the place nor the date of their execution.

Zihrono livraha!

I ke todos tengan buen ripozu i ke sejan in gan Eden, Amen. (And may they all rest in peace and may they be in Heaven, Amen.)

Nada NEUMANN

THIS IS WHAT I REMEMBER

Nada Neumann was born Nadežda Vinterštajn in Belgrade on March 23, 1923. Her parents, Pavle and Elza Vinterštajn (née Koen) both died in the USA and were buried in the Jewish cemetery for Yugoslav immigrants. In Belgrade, Pavle Vinterštajn, a lawyer, was a member of the Executive Committee of the Federation of Jewish Communities until 1941. In this capacity he toured private emigrant camps. He was also a leading member of B'nai B'rith, of the charitable society Potpora and other Jewish organisations. When the body of Dr Aleksandar Licht, a well-known Zionist, was transferred to Israel, Pavle Vinterštajn was sent to Israel to attend the funeral as a representative of Yugoslav Jews in the US. Elza Vinterštajn was an active member of the Jewish organisation Dobrotvor and of the Women's International Zionist Organisation (WIZO).

Nada's elder brother, Aleksandar, was born in Belgrade in 1921 and died in the US in 1997. As a research chemist he worked in university and scientific institutions and in industrial companies.

Nada lived in Belgrade from her birth until the bombing of the city on April 6, 1941. She was about to complete the eighth grade at the Second Girls' Secondary School but, immediately after the bombing, fled with her family to Geneva in Switzerland, via Sarajevo, Dubrovnik, Split and Milan. While in Split, she matriculated and sub-

sequently graduated from the School for Interpreters in the Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences of the University of Geneva.

She has lived in the US since 1948, working as head of a department at the Institute of International Education in New York from 1948 to 1960. In 1960, she moved to Montclair, New Jersey, with her husband, Oleg Orebić, who died in 1970. She taught French at the Montclair High School for 27 years. In 1974 she married Vienna-born Herman Neumann. She has two children from her first marriage. She now lives in California, close to her children and grandchildren.

In 1941 I was a student at the Second Girls Secondary School in Belgrade. I was in my senior year of high school. I studied, I practised the piano, I learned English and I danced to my heart's content. We lived in a one-family house at 23 Simina Street, near the National Theatre in Belgrade.

There was a lot of talk about the unsettled, horrendous political situation in Europe in the thirties. My father was a lawyer. My parents were well-read, well-informed and well-connected people. They sheltered Austrian and German refugees in Belgrade. My father helped some of these refugees get temporary residence permits through his connections. Professor Herbert Elias and his wife, Dr Ada Elias, who had escaped from Vienna, were hidden in our house until my father was able to get them temporary residence permits, which allowed them to stay in Belgrade until the arrival of their USA immigration visas. I distinctly remember Professor Elias' last words: "*Geben Sie mir die Kinder*" (Give me the children). He wanted to take my brother and me with him to the United States. My parents answered him, however, that whatever happened in Austria would never happen in Yugoslavia.

We were great nationalists, and we loved our country. My father was a leading member of B'nai B'rith and my mother was active in the Women's International Zionist Organisation (WIZO). We did not experience any anti-Semitism, especially not in Serbia. We had no intention of escaping. However, the Yugoslav government fell on March 27, 1941. Belgrade was heavily bombed by the Germans on April 6, 1941. Our cellar was reinforced and, all of a sudden, it became crowded with people who came to take refuge from the exploding bombs. The vice-president of the Yugoslav Governmnet, Professor Slobodan Jovanović, lived next

door to us. He took refuge in our cellar too, while the city was burning. The Red Cross was nearby and, perhaps, that saved us from a direct hit. My father saw my great fear. He made me sit very close to him and he held me so tight that I can still feel his arms around me. I was petrified.

Slobodan Jovanović was my father's professor of constitutional law at the University of Belgrade Law School and the relationship continued in good neighbourly fashion. During a lull, the government had sent a car to get Professor Jovanović out of the city. As the Nazis captured young men first, my mother implored him to take my brother with him and send a car back for us as soon as he was safe and out of danger. And he did! That's how my parents and I drove – literally through flames – across the burning city to Avala, the nearest railroad station. We got into a boxcar and stayed in it with dozens of other people, with no food or water for three days and three nights. We travelled south, away from the exploding bombs and the Nazis who were occupying the country.

Pavle and Elza Vinterštajn, the parents of Nada Vinterštajn-Neumann

We experienced heavy air raids in Sarajevo and all the way to Dubrovnik, which was also heavily bombed. We were starving and we survived miraculously. It was in Dubrovnik that we heard from a Belgrade refugee that my brother, unable to follow Vice-President Jovanović, who was evacuated with the government to London,

returned to Belgrade not knowing of my parents' and my whereabouts. In Belgrade he had to wear a yellow star marked "Jew" and work as a hard labourer on a road.

My mother was devastated. One day I went with her into a tearoom to warm up and get a hot cup of tea. As my mother was crying, Miss Job, a total stranger and a true Christian, joined us. After finding out the reason for my mother's despair, Miss Job offered to get my brother false papers, pretending that he was her son. It so happened that Miss Job's brother was going from Dubrovnik to Belgrade that evening and, at great risk, he took the papers with him and delivered them to my brother. When my father's secretary, Rudolf Dasović, also a true Christian, heard how my brother was going to flee, he offered to accompany him to Dubrovnik, so that if the Nazis were to catch him on the train, Dasović would try to vouch for him. The reunion was most exciting. How does one reciprocate favours like the ones given by Professor Jovanović, Dasović, Miss Job and her brother? Only God or a supernatural power could reward them.

Now that the immediate family was reunited I came down with malaria (45.5° C) and the pro-German Ustasha (the Croat Nazis) were going to occupy Dubrovnik the next day. Dr Popov, who diagnosed malaria, insisted that we leave Dubrovnik for Split, which was in the Italian zone, by the first ship. I had to be carried, but escape we did!

We rented two furnished rooms, with the use of the kitchen, in a one-family house on the outskirts of Split, near the beach. The landlords had just completed the construction of their house and needed the money. Mr Pavlović was a modest employee and Mrs Pavlović went to church at six in the morning every day. She kept a clean house and she sang opera tunes while she was dusting. Their young daughter, Mira, was refreshing. We stayed there for a few months. I took and passed the high school *matura* exam to qualify for admission to any university in Europe.

One day my father was taken to the police headquarters, he was interrogated for hours and we thought we would never see him again. When he was released, however, we decided that we had to get to Switzerland, a neutral country, because the Germans were winning the war. The closest Swiss consulate was in Milan, Italy. It was there, we thought, we could obtain visas for Switzerland. That is when my mother discovered a lump in her breast and had to have a mastectomy under very primitive conditions. Food was rationed. The black market

was rampant. Sometimes we did not know where the next meal would come from. We were friendly with Dr Joso Rismondo and, especially, with his wife, Anka. The peasants paid the doctor for his services with eggs, butter and fish. Sometimes we were able to get food through the Rismondos.

The Italian occupation was tolerable. The Italians were benevolent and certainly much more humane than the Germans. The Italian priests, in their black robes, played soccer with the local boys. We got reports from the front through people who were not afraid to listen to the BBC. The news was not good. We had to get to Switzerland, but how?

My mother, who did not speak a word of Italian, took with her our landlady who was able to communicate in Italian to the *Prefettura*, the highest office established by the Italian occupation forces. Without an appointment, the two women walked into the *Prefetto*'s office and asked for four *lasciopassare*, permits to get to Milan. My mother clearly described our fears, indicating that we were Jewish. The *Prefetto* was touched by my mother's tears or her frankness and he promised that he would see what he could do. A few weeks later, the permits arrived and the four of us were able to legally get on board ship to Trieste, which in those days was virtually impossible for Jews. We were constantly watched by the police, which was humiliating but unavoidable.

From Trieste we took the train to Milan where we rented two rooms in the Pensione Durini, across the street from Toscanini's home and behind the Duomo, the cathedral. The detectives watched us closely and we had to report to the police station regularly. In the Pensione, we befriended Alfredo Pizzoni, the director of the Banca Nazionale del Lavoro. He listened to the BBC and reported to us daily what was happening on the front. Little did we know at that time that he was also the secretary of the Treasury of the Italian Underground.

Through the Swiss Consulate, we applied several times for visas but we were turned down each time. The Nazis had asked the Italian Government to extradite *all* Jews. The Italians refused to turn over their own Jews, but they could not protect foreign Jews like us. My mother got sick again. We called a doctor who diagnosed the flu but suggested that we illegally cross the Swiss border. He knew two smugglers who would get us across the border for a sizeable amount of money. We lived on gold coins brought along from Belgrade and we

had some left over, so that was okay. However the Allies continued bombing Milan very heavily and we decided to escape to Fiumelatte on Lake Como. My brother said that he had to go back to Milan to see a friend. He came back from Milan very fast and told us that the doctor wanted us in a Como café the next afternoon. That is where we met one of our guides and paid the requested sum.

I was numb with fear. My parents, who had never taken any long hikes or enjoyed sports, did not realise the gravity of our undertaking. The guides drove us to a farm and hid us in a barn. They served us some food and at 9.00 p.m. took off our shoes, wrapped our feet in burlap, put our rucksacks on their backs and guided us out of the barn. It was a beautiful night. I can still see the full moon and the shining stars. The little path, with room for only two feet, was flat and my parents commented how easy it was going to be. It was March 4, 1942.

Aca and Nada Vinterštajn, brother and sister, from their childhood days in Belgrade

We walked and walked and walked. The path was very narrow, at times there was a ravine on the right or on the left. One guide was in front of us, the other was in back of us. As we proceeded, there was more and more snow on the ground. At each step the snow was deeper and deeper. It came up to our knees at times. There was also lots of ice, but we did not skid because of the burlap wrapped around our feet. The mountains looked like spectacular theatre sets. They were very silent, as if they were indicating to us that they were going to keep

our secret of illegality, because it was a matter of life or death. We could barely hear our footsteps. We stopped occasionally to catch our breath. We climbed gradually and the air became very rare. I had no more fear. The Nazis were far away, I thought, I knew that we were going to make it. The idea of getting caught never entered my mind. There were more ravines and dangerous paths. My father had trouble breathing and he was going to give up. He wanted us to go ahead and leave him there to die in the ravine. I do not remember exactly what I said to him, but I will never forget the look in his eyes. He looked straight into my eyes which were telling him lovingly that he must go on living for his own sake, for my sake and for the sake of a better future.

We stopped again and again. After about nine hours of walking, the guides showed us a marker made out of stone. On one side was engraved *Italia* and on the other side *Swizzera*. We believed we were safe. The guides told us that they could not go any further with us, we should take the burlap off our feet and walk towards the lights in the valley. A chauffeur-driven car would be waiting for us at the village bakery. We said goodbye to our saviours, who handed us our meagre belongings. Nothing was missing. They could have robbed us or even killed us, and no one would have known. My parents and my brother sat down. I cut the burlap off their frozen feet and rubbed them with the palms of my hands. They put on their shoes with difficulty and we walked slowly towards the lights. We were in a Swiss village near Lugano. The chauffeur-driven car took us to the railroad station and we purchased train tickets to Geneva where we had friends.

We were silent for hours until my mother spoke up. She complemented me on my ability to pull my father out of a depression and save his life. I loved my dad dearly.

In Geneva we stayed overnight at the house of Mika Pinto, who became wealthy importing poultry from Yugoslavia to Switzerland. I took a hot bath, but I was so stiff that I could barely walk. My father knew Mr Jurišić, the Yugoslav ambassador in Bern. When my father phoned him to tell him that we had crossed the Swiss border illegally, he said that we should come to Bern so that he could help us legalise our stay in Switzerland. Therefore we went to the Geneva railroad station to catch a train for Bern. Of course we did not look like ordinary Swiss citizens. A cop of the *Police Federale* stopped us and asked for our identification. We handed him our expired Yugoslav passports. It

was clear that we were illegal refugees. We were escorted into a police van with bars on the windows. I cried bitterly saying that we were honest people. We were taken to the school Les Charmilles, which was converted into a temporary refugee camp. We were cross-examined during the entire night. Many refugees were sent back over the border, which they had crossed illegally. That could have happened to us too. However, the police were able to ascertain after a few days that we had funds in a Swiss bank to live on in Switzerland, and that we had good connections, which my father had acquired while he was studying and working in Switzerland as a young man.

While at Les Charmilles we slept on sacks filled with straw, lined up like sardines in empty classrooms. There was a lot of crying and there was unbelievable stress and fear among the refugees from all over Europe. Otherwise we were treated well. One day, the man in charge of buying food for the camp asked me if I wanted to help him food shop for the refugees. I was overjoyed to get out of there for a few hours. He took me to a tearoom on our way back to camp. To my surprise, the owner, Ranđel, was a Serb whom the International Red Cross had brought to Switzerland during World War I. He was adopted by two lovely single women and never went back to Yugoslavia. Ranđel was most generous. He let me eat whatever I wanted and he gave me lots of cakes and all sorts of goodies to take back to camp for the other refugees.

As soon as my parents and I were cleared by the Federal Police, we were released. They kept my brother with all the other young males. We had to stay at one of the most expensive hotels, La Residence, because the tourist industry was very bad. My mother went into another one of her despairs. One morning, a very handsome Catholic priest joined my parents for breakfast at the hotel. He promised to get my brother out of the camp. And he did. My parents made a donation to his church and they were happy to have my brother free.

We started leading a more or less normal life. We were able to rent an affordable apartment in a nice residential area. The Allies continued to bomb northern Italy. The airplanes flew over Geneva and we would stand on our balcony and fearlessly watch them fly over our heads, knowing well that they would not bomb neutral Switzerland. We listened to the Swiss radio and to the BBC daily. Unfortunately, almost my entire family was killed by the Nazis near Belgrade. My parents' closest friends, Matilda and Majer Pinkas, whom I loved

dearly, were also killed by the Nazis. My parents were very strict and if I had a problem as a child, I would go to my Uncle Majer who gave the impression of being an old grouch, but who was gentle, encouraging and understanding when I needed him.

My brother and I were admitted to the University of Geneva where, of course, all classes and exams were given in French. We both graduated, my brother from the Ecole de Chimie, and I from the Ecole d'Interpretes and from the Faculte des Sciences Economiques et Sociales.

It was absolutely impossible for us to be gainfully employed, because the Swiss refused to give work permits to people like us. My father worked as a volunteer for the International Red Cross, providing Yugoslav prisoners of war in Germany with food packages and other necessities. I believe that I remember correctly that Stanislav Vinaver, one of the POWs wanted to have a piano and my father got it for him[2]. His superb piano playing was a boost to the prisoners' morale. My mother ran the household and helped many refugees who followed us. One of the first POWs to be released from Germany to Switzerland at the end of World War II was Vladimir Simić. He stayed with us in Geneva for a short while before returning to Yugoslavia.

We were overjoyed to obtain our USA immigration visas in 1948, after a four-year-long screening process. That is when a productive, stable life started for us.

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2 Pavle Vinterštajn probably managed to do this through his work at the International Red Cross where he organised assistance for prisoners of war. [Ed.]

Mirjam CAJNER

ONE GOOD TURN DESERVES ANOTHER

Mirjam (Mira) Cajner was born in Šid on May 1, 1925, to Majer and Sima Francoz. Her father had a jeweller business in Šid.

Together with her younger sister, Ela, she attended primary and junior secondary school.

After the war her entire family moved to Israel.

I was educated in Šid, in the primary and junior secondary schools. When I wanted to go to Novi Sad to matriculate and continue studying, I was rejected because of my Jewish religion. The *Numerus Clausus* had already been introduced. There were very few Jewish families in Šid, perhaps ten or so. They maintained good relations with their neighbours. I would say that half the Jewish families were well off.

The beginning of the war happened on the Passover. That evening we were sitting at the table, eating *matzah* and other holiday food. Suddenly we heard tanks coming. We were frightened, not knowing what would happen. The following day my father went to his shop. Immediately Germans arrived with the Ustashas. These weren't the local Germans. They asked where the Jews lived. The Ustashas brought them to our house. Unlike the Germans, these were local Ustashas. I don't remember everyone who came to the apartment then, but I do remember the Ustashas. There was an ironmonger's shop next to us, owned by a Croat. I think his name was Stokić. He was very anti-Jewish and anti-Serb. No one had known this before the war.

His daughter and I had been good friends. I was young and had no contact with her parents. I only knew the friends of my parents. I was popular in secondary school. It was common knowledge that I was Jewish, but no one ever called me a Jew or a *Čivutkinja*, no one.

When the Germans came they said the shop was no longer ours and that my father must take them to his house because they wanted to search it and find what we had hidden. We had no opportunity to hide anything because it all happened overnight. They came to our house and found us two daughters. They wouldn't allow our father to talk to us. They began searching for things in the cupboards. Mother became frightened and began shouting and they put a gun in her mouth so she was unable to speak. They turned the whole house upside down and took whatever they wanted. I don't remember what they found, but there wasn't any gold in the house.

Later they summoned us to the Municipal Council. We spoke good German in the family and my father and grandfather spoke perfect German because they had been in the Austro-Hungarian Army. They told us that we had to go to work under German supervision. My sister and I were assigned to translate books from Serbian to German in the taxation department (which was in the Municipal Council building). In addition to my sister and I, there were another two older Jews. I saw that they were issuing pass cards to Serbs so that they could go from one village to another and that people from the municipal authorities were stamping these documents. One day, early in the morning, I took some blank identification cards and stamped them. Why? My Serb school friend who had come from Šabac had said to me "Mira, if you and your family don't flee you won't be alive tomorrow." I asked her what she meant and she told me that in Šabac all the Jews had been killed and thrown into the Sava. Later she was married in Slovenia, where her husband died. I went to Slovenia to look for her, but couldn't find her. Her name was Anđelka. When I heard this I decided, that same evening in February 1942, to take two identification cards and come home.

During the occupation my father worked at the railway station. For nine months he had to clean officers' boots. He took a lot of beatings, his teeth were knocked out, I don't know how. Other Jews also had to work. There weren't many of them, ten families, perhaps eight or nine men. The attitude of other locals to us didn't change when the

Germans arrived, only the Croats stopped speaking to us. They immediately seized our shop and appointed a young commissioner who was not from Šid. We had a good relationship with him, but he never came to our house. My father didn't receive any earnings from the shop.

When I returned home that evening I told my father what my friend from Šabac had told me and showed him the two blank identification cards I had taken. Father said that my mother and I should remove the yellow armbands we had to wear, go to the station in the evening and wait for the first train to Zagreb and beyond, towards the Italian border. Father knew some man over there whom he had helped a number of times in the past. He gave us his address and said that he would get us across the border.

There was heavy snow in February, 1942. Mother and I removed our yellow armbands at the station and threw them into the toilet. Then, when night fell, we boarded the first train for Zagreb. Near the border they came to check documents. We didn't have any so we went into the toilet and closed the door. They banged and banged on the door, but we didn't open it.

We crossed the border and arrived in Ljubljana. People had told us that in Ljubljana there were many people who had fled from other parts of segregated Yugoslavia, that they were in a building called Cukarna. This was a sugar factory where a large number of Jews were accommodated. When we arrived there they told us we could have beds. We didn't report to the Italian authorities. There were representatives of an Italian Jewish organisation in Cukarna. They welcomed people and told them that they could save themselves. There we waited for my father who, according to our agreement, was to follow after us with my sister. We found a man who was going to Croatia, so we sent a letter with him describing where we had crossed the border and everything else.

Fourteen days later they came to Zagreb on the same train and then to Karlovac. There was a Jewish woman in Karlovac who worked with the Germans. They took her to my father and he told her that he needed to cross the border with his daughter. She told him that she would give him a German officer's or soldier's uniform. She told him to lie down in the train and, because he spoke good German, to keep saying that he was wounded, sick, so that they wouldn't check him when he crossed the border. He had no documents, he just sat next to

the soldiers in the train. My sister, who was fourteen, was with the other children crossing the border, in a wagon in which these children travelled and crossed the border every day to go to school. She was silent and afraid, but she sat with the children.

When the train stopped at the border they began checking the passengers. Through the window she saw that two Germans were taking my father somewhere and that he was pretending he was unable to walk. She didn't know what to do. She got off the train, not exactly where father had, but a little further away. In the meantime the train left and her coat and all her other things were still on it. They immediately turned father over to the Italian gendarmerie and said that they thought something was suspicious. They put him back on the train, now very frightened, and took him back to Karlovac where they locked him up. He was told that he would be taken to court.

My poor sister had no idea what to do. It was cold and she asked a Slovenian who worked on the railway for something to wear. He asked her where she was going and who she was. She told him that her mother was in Ljubljana, in Cukarna, that she wanted to join her mother and asked him to put her on a train. And that's what he did. She arrived in Ljubljana where we met her. However she had caught a cold on the way and now had pneumonia. I took her to hospital where she was treated. For them we were *spolatti*, refugees.

Father was kept in custody in Karlovac. My father was a good man and he had helped many people, both financially and in other ways. Some time before the war, someone had written to him telling him about a good, but poor man who father should help if he could. My father had sent this complete stranger a large parcel of food. On the return address of the parcel he wrote "Majer Francoz, Šid".

Now in prison, the guard asked my father what his name was. When father told him the man shouted "It's not possible! That man sent me a large parcel for Christmas. You sent me that parcel from Šid?" Father confirmed this and the man told him he would no longer be held there. He closed the door and said that he would come the next day. He had decided to find someone he could bribe to save my father. Father then sent a letter to Šid, to the Jewish woman who worked with the Germans and who had earlier given him a German uniform. In the letter he explained to her where he had buried our gold. He asked her to bring it and she did. Father gave her a third of

it, paid the man in the prison and also paid the man who took him across the border on foot, through the snow. However he was caught again by the Italians and detained in Ljubljana. When they asked where his family was he didn't know what to say. If he told them his family was in the same city, they would be detained as well, if he didn't, something even worse could happen. He decided to reveal that his family was in Cukarna. The Italians immediately came but, because my sister was in hospital, they didn't find us where they looked for us.

Father and mother spent about two months in prison, where my father fell ill. He was only 55, but he lay in bed all the time. When he recovered a little, they told us in the prison that our whole family would be sent to the Ferramonti concentration camp. They put us on a train to Naples. There we spent two days in prison before they put us on another train to Kozenca, the station from which people travelled to Ferramonti. In Kozenca there was a car waiting to take us to the camp. This was sometime in May or June, 1942. We stayed in the Ferramonti camp until the end of the year.

The camp was for Jews, of whom there were about 2,500 or 3,000. We lived in barracks, about thirty people to each and slept in bunk beds. The food was bad, there was no water for people to wash their faces, but at least they didn't punish us. There was no hospital in the camp, but my father was still ill. Because of this they decided to put us in *confino libero* in a place called Pizzoli, near Aquila in central Italy. In this free confinement we were obliged to report to the police three times a day. We lived in a rented room and were given eight liras a day for food.

Unfortunately for us, when the Allied invasion of Italy began in mid-1943 and the Ferramonti camp was liberated, we remained behind the front line. We then had to flee into the hills where we met Partisans from Yugoslavia who had escaped from Italian camps. They helped us a great deal, despite the fact that they themselves hadn't eaten for days. Whenever they got bread from the rural people they'd give us some. At night they would go down to the villages but, in that region, the rural people were so poor that they had nothing to eat themselves. We had some rings and some gold. For every gold item they would give us a piece of bread. My sister and I became very sick; I had pleurisy. It was cold, we had nothing to eat, we couldn't sleep. We were living in caves. It was a harsh winter that year, the winter of

1943–44. All day long we would listen to them bombing Monte Casino and other fortified German positions. The advance of the Allied forces was very slow.

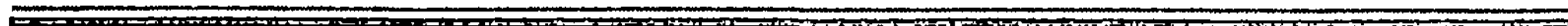
When the Germans came closer to us we went down from the mountain to a tiny, impoverished hamlet of about ten houses with the name of Carrufo. There we stayed with an elderly woman. We said that we were Catholics and went to services in the church so that the locals would think we were much the same as them. We were there for some time until the Americans liberated us n the summer of 1944, in June I think. From there they took us to Cinecitta near Rome where they were assembling refugees from various countries. They told us that anyone who wanted could go to Palestine, that they would take them to Bari, which was where the soldiers returning to Palestine were and we could travel with them. We agreed to this and went to Bari by train and stayed there for a few days in a camp until an English ship came to take non-Jewish soldiers to Egypt on holiday. In Egypt, we Jews went ashore and transferred to Palestine via the Suez Canal. There were about eight hundred people in our group. We arrived in Palestine on April 23, 1945.

I had two aunts, sisters of my father, who lived in Belgrade. One was called Judit Francoz. She was unmarried and lived in the Izvozna Banka building, on the third or fourth floor. My other aunt, Debora Francoz, was a widow and also lived in Belgrade. After the first or second day of the bombing of Belgrade they fled to Šid. I think they told us that they had reached our place on foot, which means that they walked about a hundred kilometres. My father was overjoyed when they arrived and told them to stay. They said they couldn't, because they couldn't leave their things behind. "What things? We are fighting for our lives here!" my father replied. But they refused to stay and returned to Belgrade by train. They were killed at Sajmište. I learnt about this after the war from Milan Emil Klajn. The rest of my father's family, four brothers, were all very religious and had a large number of children. One had nine, one had five and the third had eight, and they were unable to flee with so many children. They lived in Ilok, eighteen kilometres from Šid. One of my father's brothers returned from Ilok to live with us because my father was wealthy and was helping him out. He told my father that he could not escape. All of them were deported to Auschwitz. We heard another story from a man who

now lives in Israel about Estera Francoz, the eldest daughter of my father's brother, Jakov Francoz. She had been married before the war and had a child five or six months old. She was very pretty. At the camp entrance they told her to go to one side and that her child was to go to the other. A soldier took her child but she began shouting, ran after the child, took it in her arms and, together with the child, went into the gas chamber. I only once met the man who told this story. None of the 23 members of my father's family returned. Only some of the children of one of my uncles were saved and now live in New York.

V

IMPRISONED IN HUNGARY



Eva ČAVČIĆ

OUT OF OUR MINDS WITH HUNGER

Eva Čavčić was born on June 23, 1923, in Bačka Topola, to Franja and Jelena, née Herman. She matriculated from the Sombor secondary school in 1941. Her parents and close relatives perished in the Holocaust.

She spent the period from November 1942 until the end of the second world war in prisons in Vojvodina, in camps in Hungary and in the notorious Bergen-Belsen camp. After her return from the camps she graduated from the Faculty of Technology at Belgrade University in 1951. She was awarded a Ph.D. by the same university in 1965. She spent the greater part of her career at the Vinča Institute for Nuclear Sciences and in the Pančevo Chemical Industry. In 1959 she married Milan Čavčić, who died in 1994.

Eva Čavčić lives in retirement in Belgrade and is an active member of the Jewish community.

I was an only child and lived up to the age of five in Bačka Topola, where my father was a grain merchant. In that year he went bankrupt, so we moved in with my grandmother and grandfather who lived in Sombor, where my grandfather had a grocery store which my father took over after my grandfather died. However he was forced by Parkinon's disease to let the business go in 1937. I was much loved as a child, pampered by everyone in the family. I was obedient and

always a brilliant student. I matriculated from the Sombor secondary school in 1941.

I learnt about the persecution of Jews in National Socialist Germany at the age of ten, when the first refugees from Germany began to arrive. A shelter was set up for them at the Jewish Community in Sombor. My father's aunt lived in Berlin and we helped her by sending parcels.

At that time we lived a normal life, making plans for the future. Mine were mostly to do with what I would study. I was learning languages and dreaming about the life which lay ahead of me. In order to satisfy some of the desires which were beyond my parents' means, I began earning money by giving mathematics lessons while I was in the fifth grade of secondary school.

Hungarian troops entered Sombor on April 12, 1941. Yugoslavia disintegrated and the occupation of Bačka began. With the arrival of the Hungarian troops the position and social status of Jews changed fundamentally. The execution of Jews and Serbs began immediately. Jewish men were taken to forced labour. My father was spared because of his poor health. I passed my matriculation exam on June 23, 1941, a day after the Axis Powers attacked the Soviet Union. Following the occupation of Bačka, Hungarian laws came into force, including laws against Jews. There were many limitations imposed, but we still lived relatively normally in our homes. Children continued going to school, we weren't required to wear identification, we could still be involved in business, although with certain restrictions. I couldn't enrol at the university of course so, from 1941 until my arrest in November 1942, I supported myself mostly by giving lessons to children while I myself learnt English, German and, in secret, Russian. My two elder cousins, with whom I grew up and was very close, were already active members of the Communist movement and so, in 1942, I followed in their footsteps. Even before that, when I was fifteen or sixteen, I was a member of the progressive Zionist Youth organised by Tehelet Lavan. I wanted to be in some way part of the anti-Fascist struggle.

So I joined in the activities of the Communist Youth of Yugoslavia and was admitted to the organisation in August, 1942. My activities consisted mainly of collecting donations for Red Aid, translating pamphlets from German to Serbian and reading progressive literature. My main task was to be a courier between the secretary of the

district committee for Northern Bačka and the secretary of the county committee. Both of them operated underground.

IN HUNGARIAN PRISONS AND CAMPS

The Hungarian police had already been searching for both secretaries for more than a year, so every meeting with them carried great risk and required a great deal of caution. As is well known, after the Revolution was crushed in 1919, the police and the counterintelligence service had a long tradition and highly refined techniques for fighting Communism.

Eva Čavčić, nee Cuker, in August 1941, in Sombor

In November 1942, a new wave of arrests of Communists and their sympathisers began in Novi Sad. Once this was complete, the Hungarian counterintelligence service's flying squad turned its attention to Sombor and the arrests began there. And so I, too, was arrested on November 24, 1942, and charged with being a courier. Because the secretary of the district committee had killed himself while being arrested and they had been looking for the secretary of the county committee for more than a year, they wanted to get a confession from me so that they could catch him immediately. According to the tried and true schedule and technique, they began beating me severely immediately after my arrest. Without going into details of the torture which took place, I would note that within 24 hours of my arrest I could no longer stand up or move my fingers. My appearance can best be illustrated by the fact that I was given a tetanus shot in my chest, because it was the only part of my body which was still white. After a

two-day break because I had festering sores all over my body, they continued the interrogation, but with new methods this time. Today I am a disabled veteran with forty per cent disability and the scars are still visible on the soles of my feet. Of course these thugs put a little more passion into their investigation because I was a Jew. About twenty of us were arrested. We were all in one room, facing the wall; we took turns standing and sitting, hour by hour, in the constant presence of the gendarmes. All conversation among us was banned and the agents would come down to the room and take us away one by one for questioning. In December the whole group was taken to Novi Sad, to the Armija, where the investigation was completed and the records made.

Soon after this, on January 18, 1943, the Higher Military Court sentenced me to six years' imprisonment. I spent the period between sentencing and the day the ruling became final with all the others who had been convicted in these proceedings in the court prison in Novi Sad.

On April 30, 1943, they moved me and the other women from the Novi Sad prison to the Marija Nostra women's prison in north-west Hungary and the men to the Csillag prison in Szeged.

The women's prison in Maria Nostra was run by Catholic nuns and only the guards were men. The prison was mainly meant for criminals. When I arrived in Maria Nostra there was already a large group of political and military convicts there from Budapest. These women immediately welcomed us so we newcomers managed to fit into the organised life of the collective. The prison regime was very strict: there were three of us in each 4 metre by 2 metre cell, we slept on straw mattresses on the floor and wore prison uniforms. Of course Jewish women were put in cells together with other Jewish women. A special regime applied to Jews, they could receive only three 6-kilogram parcels per year and three visits. We were allowed to write letters once every three months. In the same period of time the other prisoners received six parcels and were allowed six visits. We had to go to church – Jews to the Reform Church, where we also had religious teaching.

LAST MEETING WITH PARENTS

After Italy's capitulation in September, 1943, the prison regime became somewhat more liberal. They allowed us to receive larger parcels and each Sunday afternoon, the deputy warden, who was in

charge of us, would assemble us in the courtyard or in a hall where we were allowed to mix under her supervision and perhaps even prepare some kind of short performance. In the summer we went to work in the fields, in the winter we made hand-made watches and knitted things for sale in the big hall. On March 2, 1944, my father, my mother, and Aunt Paula, my father's sister, came to visit me. There was a special room for visits, divided in half by a wall above which hung a small-gauge wire mesh through which only a finger tip could pass. I stood on the inner side of the wall with a nun sitting next to me. On the other side were my parents with a guard. On this occasion they made an exception and allowed me to go to the entrance hall to take the parcels and so I was able to kiss them quickly. This was my last meeting with my parents, but I saw my aunt once more in Bergen-Belsen.

History records that the Germans occupied Hungary on March 19, 1944, and that was when the "final solution" of the Jewish question in Hungary began. A month later even we women prisoners had to wear a yellow star and were then completely isolated from the other prisoners. At the end of June, a ghetto prison was set up in a wing of the Gyüjtöfogház assembly prison in the Budapest suburb of Köbanya. Here Jews were brought from all Hungarian prisons, regardless of what their conviction was for. Now we too were moved from Maria Nostra to the Budapest prison. The regime in the prison was adapted to the situation. The only belongings we were allowed to keep were our underwear and personal hygiene items. We wore uniforms at the height of summer, a skirt and jacket made of thick baize and shirt of hemp cloth. They didn't let us wear shoes so we were barefoot. I was the only one, because of the state the soles of my feet were in, allowed to wear specially made moccasins. Again in this prison we were in a collective and had our own illegal organisation.

In August 1944, Budapest was bombed heavily, day after day. At this time we learnt, from a leaflet thrown from an aircraft, about the Auschwitz gas chambers where 450,000 Hungarian Jews were killed. In fact it was then that I realised where my parents had been deported to at the end of May and I became aware of the fact that I would never see them again. Not my parents nor any of my other closest family, my grandmothers and aunts.

After Horthy's proclamation under which Hungary quit the Tripartite Pact on October 15, 1944, the extreme Right, the Nyilas Arrow Cross, came to power in Hungary. Our exodus began on October 20.

We were moved from the Budapest prison to Komaron, to military prisons, to the Csillag where, on November 7, they turned us over to the German SiPo (*Sicherheitspolizei*). It's worth noting that in Komaron they again put us together with political prisoners, non-Jews, who had been brought there from Hungarian prisons. At about eight in the evening on November 7, the door of our room, in which there were about ninety of us, suddenly opened. We were ordered to line up in the hallway without our luggage. We heard them say "Ten at a time, put them in front of the machines." We were convinced they were taking us to be shot by a firing squad, but luckily these machines turned out to be typewriters and they were used to register us. (My list and the lists of some of my friends are now in Yad Vashem). When we ran out into the hallway we were really sorry to see our friends who had remained in Maria Nostra because, naively, we had believed that they would not share our fate, but they too had been deported a few days after us.

DACHAU AND BERGEN-BELSEN

They loaded us into wagons on November 10. After travelling for four days, during which they opened our wagons only once, the train with its load of three hundred detainees arrived in Dachau. There was an artist with us in my wagon, a violinist, and she played the violin all night as we were crossing the Hungarian border, bidding farewell to her country.

When we saw the Dachau sign at the railway station I knew we had arrived in one of the most notorious concentration camps and that from that point on we could expect only evil. However at the time we still had no idea what suffering we would actually go through. It was a beautiful, sunny winter day, the snow-clad mountains shone all around us. It was there, at the Dachau station, that we first met camp inmates. They wore clean, striped suits, with caps on their heads, but their faces were like masks, completely expressionless and the shine had entirely disappeared from their eyes. We found this completely impossible to understand at the time. They lined us up in ranks of five and we walked in these to the sub-camp Allach, a men's camp where we were accommodated temporarily. We stayed there for about ten days. They didn't take any of our things from us. In Allach we were contacted by

French inmates who were active in the resistance movement. They gave us a box of medications and a lot of useful advice.

I would like to point out that in Komaron, and even during our transport, we were always a cohesive, organised group and this made all the suffering we went through a little easier. I was never a lonely individual, I was always with my friends and we helped one another. In the Allach camp, and even later, we were together, Jews and non-Jews, all the women political prisoners from Hungarian prisons. This once triggered an unpleasant incident. A few young girls, probably from fear of receiving worse treatment if they were together with the Jews, wanted to ask to be separated. However, after we talked to them everything was calmed down and we stayed together in the collective.

From there, after travelling another few days in wagons without enough food and water and walking for several kilometres, we arrived, on November 25, on a night as black as pitch, in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. At first we shared a barracks with Jewish mothers and their children from Slovakia. Of course it was very difficult for these women to see their children going hungry and they were concerned about their fate. I still remember one of them shouting angrily at her son, a pretty, dark-eyed child of six or seven, and the boy replying to her in a serious tone of voice "Why are you shouting at me? It's not my fault we're here!" Fifty years later, at a celebration for the fiftieth anniversary of the camp's liberation, in 1995, I learnt the happy epilogue to this. The woman survived the war with her daughter and her son, and this boy is now a dentist somewhere in Switzerland.

Life in the German concentration camps was very precisely organised. All internal authority was in the hands of the camp officials, who were chosen from among the inmates: head of the camp, heads of barracks, heads of various services, the *kapos* who, together with the Germans, had the power of life and death over the inmates.

At the beginning we managed to organise to have one of our friends as head of our barracks block. We distributed the food and looked after the hygiene ourselves. Because I'd completed a Red Cross first-aid course, I was assigned as nurse in our block. The role of nurse shouldn't be taken too literally, I wore a white scarf on my head and a white armband and all I had of the usual requirements were a thermometer, a few aspirins and two small tins of ointment, yellow for mange and black (Ichtiol) for boils and festering sores. It was my job, whenever necessary, to take the sickest patients to the quarantine area.

It should be mentioned that some of our friends worked in various workshops such as the SS tailoring shop, or in the warehouse where various confiscated goods were sorted out, or in the bread warehouse. Because we were in a collective this made it possible to help one another and so make our lives a little easier. This went on until the first half of January, 1945. A large convoy of exhausted Polish women and Hungarian Jews arrived in January, after having walked for a long time, and many of them died soon after their arrival. At this point a low-capacity crematorium began operating in Bergen-Belsen. I still remember the cloying smell of burning human flesh which came from it. We realised that conditions were deteriorating, that death was drawing closer. We came to the conclusion that, under these circumstances, it would be best, if we could, to leave the camp in Bergen-Belsen as soon as possible. The easiest way to do this would be for us to try to be included in a transport leaving for work. In January, a hundred women from our group were selected for work. They were lucky; they were taken to the Volkswagen factory in Falersleben. All of these women, the whole hundred, survived, while sixty per cent of those of who remained in Bergen-Belsen died.

At the beginning of December 1944, Kramer, the notorious Auschwitz commandant, became commandant of our camp. He was followed, later, by his whole team of camp officials. This is when our living conditions deteriorated rapidly.

At this point we were stripped of what little independence we had. They moved us to another part of the camp and appointed a barracks chief who brought in assistants for the distribution of food. They stole from our already minimal rations. Some of our friends worked in what they called the *Gemüsekommando*, the vegetable headquarters. There, sixteen or eighteen of them, instead of a horse, would draw a cart laden with mangel-wurzels, potatoes and cabbages into the kitchen. This was considered very hard work and so they would each get an extra two pieces of bread and margarine. They were also able to get hold of some extra beets, potatoes, carrots or a cabbage leaf. The constant hunger was tearing me apart, as it was all the others, but I was a little better when my friends managed to get me included in this work. I did this hard labour from dawn until late at night, but I was less hungry. There were also two French women, two Ukraine women

and others from our group pulling the carts. We were in the labour section of the camp, in tidy barracks. We slept in three-tier beds, two to each bed. Meanwhile, our friends who were not working were sinking lower and lower and now slept on the bare ground!

Eva Čavčić (front row, first on left), on July 1945, with a group of inmates liberated from Bergen-Belsen

As the spring came, the conditions in the camp became horrific. There was hardly any water, the lice were multiplying and typhus began raging through the camp. At the same time, Germany's territory was being squeezed tighter, so more and more new inmates were being brought in from camps which had been closed down. The camp

was overcrowded and there was less and less food until, in the last few days before the liberation, the camp was left with no food at all.

Typhus fever was raging in March, and for some time before that: hundreds of inmates died every day. People were dying of hunger, of typhus fever, of exhaustion. The capacity of the crematorium was small so bodies were burnt in piles. Transporting the bodies was a problem in itself. Because there were no trucks or cars, the bodies were carried "manually". This was done by tying a belt or rope around the hands and legs of a body and then four inmates, four living skeletons, would drag the corpse down the road through the dust. To this day I have a vivid picture in my memory of those endless lines. Sometimes someone would fall, they would have not strength to stand up, so in the next round they too would be dragged off.

The hunger was dreadful. After the liberation of the camp the SS men left and Hungarian soldiers took over the internal guard duty completely. This changed nothing, they were no better than the SS. I remember once when a Hungarian soldier who was walking behind us, beside the cart, killed three starving inmates at point blank range when they ran up to us to try to grab some raw potatoes.

I must emphasise that the collective remained in existence and functioned all the time. Those of us who worked and who were in a position to get some food did our best to pass some of it on to our friends. When we managed to do this, we traded potatoes for something which could more easily be smuggled back when we returned from work. Thanks to our joint efforts we even made a small stock of food so that, during the last days before liberation when the food supply was virtually cut off, each of us had a spoon of sugar and little cube of margarine each day.

The camp was liberated in the early afternoon of April 15, 1945. By that time we were already totally apathetic from hunger. When my friend from Budapest and I spotted the American armoured vehicles with a white star, we didn't realise they were the liberator's armoured vehicles but thought they were German tanks.

When the camp commandant, driving in a jeep, announced that the camp had been liberated, we pushed our cart, still escorted by guards, to the kitchen where we were supposed to go. Then we suddenly realised that we didn't have to work any more and refused to unload it. The SS woman in the kitchen began shouting at us for being

disobedient. She was also unaware that by the next day she would be removing corpses with the other SS people who had been caught.

At the time of the liberation there were about forty thousand living souls in the camp and tens of thousands of bodies. I don't know how many people had typhus, how many had recovered from it. All the inmates were living skeletons and totally listless.

The next day, April 16, I came down with typhus. For fifteen days I had a temperature of 39.7° C. During my illness I was moved from Bergen-Belsen to an improvised hospital in what had once been military barracks in Bergen. For the first few days in hospital I lay in a clean bed but with no nightgown, no medicine, and none of the food a typhus patient ought to have had. The nurses were Hungarian men, prisoners of war.

I will always remember with gratitude our officers, prisoners of war from the Falingbostel camp, who came to our assistance within days of the liberation and took care of us as they would their own children.

Finally, on May 1, I awoke without a temperature. That's when it sank in that I had survived the war. Of course I was still exhausted and very weak but, on May 9, I left the hospital and returned to my friends in the collective.

Our officers, the prisoners of war, did all they could to help us return to normal life. They organised our departure to a summer resort, Steinhude am Meer, for recuperation, gave us some spending money, found us materials for dresses, in short they sorted out our lives.

I returned to my country on about August 20. In Zagreb, in a shelter, I met my cousin, my aunt's eldest daughter, who was a doctor and a Partisan officer. I didn't want to stay with her, although she tried to persuade me to do so. Instead I went to Sombor, where I found no one from my family nor anything from our house.

Now began the period in which I had to make the conditions for a new beginning. Those first few months my feelings were torn between happiness because the political goals I fought for had been won and deep sadness because I had lost all those dearest to me and carried the burden of the horrors I had gone through. Thanks to the help of JOINT, I was able to make my wish come true, the wish which had kept me going during the worst days in the camp. In December, 1945, I came to Belgrade to study and this was the beginning of a new life.

Tibor ADAM

MY SURNAME MEANS HUMAN

Tibor Adam was born in Subotica in 1923 to a wealthy family of tradesmen and merchants. His father, Mirko Adam, a watchmaker, was born in 1893 in Kanjiža and killed in 1945. His mother, Margita Adam, née Kon, died in 1936. He was an only child.

When he returned from the war he found none of his closest or distant relatives in Subotica. As a young man, he was immediately engaged in the final operations of the Yugoslav Army. He was demobilised in 1949 and went to work for Radio Novi Sad.

He studied history, geography and law and graduated in political science. In Radio Novi Sad he rose to become editor-in-chief of a five-language news desk.

After his retirement he taught radio journalism at a school for journalism in the Open University in Novi Sad. He is an active member of the Jewish Community. His wife, Olga, née Ungar, is a retired actress whose father was killed in 1941 near Belgrade. Her mother, brother and she managed to save themselves under false names as refugees in Svilajnac. His son Mirko is head of the Television Novi Sad joint production department. He has one grandson, David, a medical student.

Before the war, my generation, almost without exception, were members of the Zionist organisation Tehelet Lavan. We spent all our

free time in the *ken* where there was always plenty of activity. There were lectures and they also organised pacifist, literary and art afternoons. In addition we went camping and on excursions.

After the occupation, Zionist organisations were banned. However, thanks to the head of the Subotica Municipality, Dr Zoltan Lorant, some kind of cultural organisations were allowed to continue operating, though not for long.

While we were still able, we met in the premises of the former *ken* and held lectures with police officers watching. Of course we had to be careful about what we said.

The relatively peaceful life of Subotica Jews came to an end on March 19, 1944, when the Germans occupied Hungary. My father was arrested and interned with the other men in Bačka Topola. After a short time the Hungarians handed him over to the Germans. My friend Đorđe Gros was with him. He later told me that, at the beginning of 1945, when the Germans were withdrawing before the Allied forces, they sent the remaining Auschwitz inmates on a forced march. Exhausted, weak and hungry, many fell. They were killed on the spot. This is how my father perished. A German killed him with a burst of sub-machine gun fire and kicked him into a ditch.

The Jews were ordered to wear yellow armbands. They were forbidden to travel. All their assets were requisitioned. People born in my year were mobilised on April 17, 1944, into what they called the auxiliary labour service. This actually meant labour camps in Hungary. With me were Ivan Herman, Stevan Lederer, Andrija Vajs, Franjo Rozenfeld, Dragutin Rajs and Tibor Gutman. First we built an airport in a provincial town, although I doubt a single aircraft ever took off from there, then we were moved to the outskirts of Budapest, to Drase.

A number of Jewish and Serbian brigades from Vojvodina worked there. We lived in non-operational brick kilns. We moved around freely within the brickworks compound. The compound was enormous. Dozens of kilns, the buildings in which bricks were pressed and an enormous area where they dug clay. The excavations were tens of metres wide and seven or eight metres deep. Real lakes could be found at the bottom of some of these holes. Our job was mainly to unload coal from the wagons. This was hard and filthy work, especially for those of us who were not used to physical labour. But we were lucky to be relatively free and because there were a few extremely

wealthy Budapest Jews with us. There was even a native Hungarian who owned, among other things, one of the biggest hotels in Budapest. He had been on the eastern front with the rank of captain. His wife was Baroness Koner, also a Jew. When the laws on Jews came into force, this captain of ours converted to Judaism. Having done this it was impossible for him to remain in the Hungarian Army, especially as an officer, and they moved him to the labour camp. Because they knew about his wealth and his undoubted influence, the officers and military guards had a great deal of respect for him and even feared him. He and a few other wealthy people paid for our food. So, for a while, we ate very well.

Tibor's parents, Margita Kon-Adam and Mirko Adam, June 22, 1920

FIREWORKS OF DEATH

My cousin Žuža lived in Budapest. She sent me a message to say that I should be at one of the back gates of the brickyard at a certain hour on a Sunday. At that time the city was being bombed by Allied aircraft. The brickyard was in a suburb called Kõbanya. During the bombing we would hide in the disused brick kilns, but to sleep I would go to the stable where I lived. I preferred the stable to the kilns where there were about fifty people accommodated. My fellow-sufferers used to call me a loner. Our guards had a shelter. When the air-raid sirens sounded, they would disappear, and that's how it happened this day.

As soon as I heard the sirens I headed for the gate where I was to meet Žuža. I was halfway there when the aircraft appeared, coming from an unexpected direction. And then all hell broke loose. The brickyard was next to the freight station. We didn't know, although the British did, that there were hundreds of wagons full of war supplies at the station. The aircraft attacked them. They hit the wagons full of ammunition which exploded, destroying everything within a kilometre or so radius. There were wagon wheels flying everywhere. We found one later, two kilometres away. The fireworks of death! It was a sunny day, but within minutes of the attack it was completely dark, the sky obscured by smoke, sand and everything sent flying by the force of tons of explosives I threw myself down and crawled to a hole in the ground. My head was below the surface and my legs in line with it. The blast pushed me out of my tiny shelter. I ran looking for a better place to hide, for the largest hole I could find. I was heading away from the railway station, getting as far from it as possible. My head was buzzing, I was sluggish from the air pressure. I reached a house and rushed to the basement. It was full. Children were crying in horror. The adults were silent with fear. An old lady was praying to God, on her knees although this was difficult for her. It was horrible and painful. After each blast, and there were countless of them, it seemed to us as though the house was shaking. As if it was shrieking. We were choking and coughing. It went on forever. I suppose the planes were already back in England by the time all the wagons in the station exploded into the air one after another, set off by the flames. We heard later that there had been seven hundred of them. It was only late in the afternoon that I returned to my compound. The stable in which I had slept during every air raid had disappeared. It was the very beginning of winter and I was left with just one pair of work overalls. Later my friends gave me trousers, a shirt, a jumper and a short jacket.

FLIGHT

In mid-October, the Hungarian regent, Miklos Horthy, announced over the radio that Hungary no longer wanted to be at war. The Germans immediately reacted to this proclamation. Horthy was overthrown and the Nyilas came to power under Szalasi. Russian troops had already crossed the Hungarian border. It was at about this time that Belgrade was liberated and my hometown, Subotica, was

already free. I have no idea how news reached us, but we knew everything. They took us from the brickyard and established a number of companies in the very centre of the city. We were accommodated in empty houses. We were to be transported or, as they put it, evacuated to Germany. The six of us from Subotica decided against going to Germany. My fellow-sufferers, Dragutin Rajs, Stevan Lederer, Ivan Herman, Tibor Gutman, Franjo Rozenfeld and I.

We found ourselves in some empty houses, lying on bare parquet floors. The wind of disarray was already blowing through Budapest. Our guards, now panicking, became less strict, hoping that once the Soviets arrived we would be understanding and say they had treated us well. Because there were a lot of Budapest natives among us, they allowed us to receive visits.

A large number of civilians came. So we had a good opportunity to escape. The six of us managed to acquire hats or caps and decent coats. Those who weren't brave enough to escape supported us. Even some of the visitors gave us mufflers and gloves or swapped coats with us. They weren't Jews. The visitors were close friends who weren't afraid of being friendly with Jews. Most of them were Hungarian women who were married to Jews. In the end we looked rather good. At the time we couldn't understand why some of those who we had asked to come with us were reluctant. In fact they didn't dare. Most of these were older men, forty-year-olds who were aware of the danger and didn't dare take the risk. And we were 21. When we went to forced labour we were treated like soldiers. If we had been caught trying to escape they would have treated us as army deserters and we would have ended up in front of a firing squad. We took the risk nevertheless. Finally, if we had gone to Germany we would have ended up in one of the death camps where there wasn't much chance of survival. Franjo Rozenfeld got us false identification papers. His father was a wealthy industrialist and was hiding in a sanatorium under a false name. My identification was issued in the name of Aca Tibor and it read that I worked in the hand-grenade industry.

AT LONG LAST, A BED

Spruced up like decent working people, we headed for the exit. Each of us was escorted by those who were staying. At the very exit, in front of the guards, we hugged for a long time and said farewell to

each other. The guard allowed us through without a word. He was in the reserves and couldn't wait to get out of uniform. Of course we didn't all go at the same time, but at intervals, mixing with the real visitors. Once I was on the other side of the gate, I turned around a few times and waved. Before our departure we had agreed to go our separate ways, cope on our own as best we could and then meet among some ruins.

Youth movement members in the ken, 1941. Tibor Adam first on right

I was all alone in the streets of demolished Budapest with very little money and a few packets of cigarettes. I remember that it was very cold. Because there was a curfew, I couldn't spend the night out in the street. I crawled into a ruined building and slept there. I woke up at dawn, stiff from the cold. That afternoon I went to a fast-food restaurant and ate pancakes with raspberry sauce. Then I wandered around the city, not stopping anywhere, hurrying as though I was on my way to work. The city was crawling with soldiers and police. At noon we met at the place we had agreed on. We cleared the rubble while we talked. We all told one another about what we had done and where we had slept. I got an address for a boarding house where they weren't fussy about documents. And that's where I went in the evening. My identification document served its purpose. I slept in a bed after who knows how long! And I was dreadfully tired because I

had been walking all day. The days passed. I no longer know how many, two or three, when we again met in the ruins and decided that we couldn't continue this way. We were all at the end of our tether. We had to keep moving all day and at night we had terrible dreams. Not to mention the fact that the Russians were dropping bombs every morning at nine. The British or the Americans would come in the evenings, with heavy bombs, destroying areas of the city one by one. I spent the daytime air raid alerts in one of the shelters and at night I spent the first one under the staircase of a demolished building and the other three in the boarding house shelter. They asked for my papers there once, but everything went smoothly.

I wanted to take a bath. The city was huge so I decided to take a tram to the bathhouse. I was standing at the tram stop and waiting. Someone seized me by the shoulder. I turned: an officer and two soldiers. A patrol, not an ordinary one a military patrol. This was a detachment, one of the many nationalist, Fascist "patriotic units".

"Why aren't you wearing a yellow armband?" the officer screamed.

"Why should I wear one? I'm not a Jew. I'm a worker at the hand grenade factory. I'm working the night shift today so I was on my way to the Hungaria Bath House. I said this calmly and, I thought, convincingly. I showed them my identification. They pored over it for a long time. They thought I was suspicious.

"You're coming with us and we'll check. If you're telling the truth you'll have time to take a bath and get to work."

I set off with my "guard of honour". I did some thinking and realised that they were taking me to the Party building. That was the headquarters of the Fascist Arrow Cross Party, a notorious place for torture. All they needed was one phone call and I'd be exposed. If they searched me they were certain to find the identification in my pocket, a booklet with a large "Z" on the front. That was for "*Zsido*", the Hungarian word for Jew. All of us in forced labour had these booklets. I should have thrown away this incriminating evidence of my origin. Under the regulations then in force I could have been shot as a deserter. I decided to run. We got into the tram and stood on the platform. At the big square in front of the Western Railway Station, the tram slowed down on a curve. I pushed the soldier standing closest to me and jumped. I ran as fast as I could but, unfortunately, my boots had steel hobs and I slipped and fell. They caught me. I had

actually given myself away with this attempted escape. We continued on foot. We had nearly arrived at the notorious Party building when, in total despair I ran again, hoping that they would shoot me and spare me the misery awaiting me. When I turned to see where they were, a passer-by hit me over the head with a walking-stick. I fell. I was totally dazed, but the two of them carried me, holding me firmly.

SECOND-CLASS PERSON

I don't know how long I stood or how many agents hit me on the back of the head in the basement of the Party building in Andrasi Street, one of the nicest streets in this lovely city, but it was no longer of any importance. Finally they took me to an office. There were some officers there. I had to hold my cap under my nose so as not to soil the carpet with blood. They asked me about things, about people, about an organisation, about some resistance movement I had never heard of. They weren't rough, or loud, like most people from the semi-feudal military horde. But with every sentence they let me know that I was a second-class person and that I should be happy just to have the opportunity to appear before them and listen to their advice.

"What was your former name."

"This was always my name."

"All right, what was your name before your father or your grandfather changed your surname?"

It was highly likely that I would end up in front of a firing squad. Maybe precisely because of this I replied insolently: "None of my ancestors changed their names. They didn't have any reason to. Adam isn't a Hungarian surname, it's Jewish and it means 'Man'!"

There was no reply. They simply looked at me and gave orders for me to be taken away.

They took me to a room with no windows. In the middle stood a writing desk with a chair and a bench. If I remember rightly I was interrogated by two civilians and there was also a gendarme present. They put photographs in front of me on the desk. I was to identify people from these. I didn't know any of them. I knew nothing about the resistance movement. They beat me brutally. I had to remove my shoes for them to beat me on the soles of my feet. They struck me on the palms, again and again until my hands were a bloody mess. And

then came the "telephone". This looked like a field telephone, but was actually a generator. When the handle was turned, electricity was produced. They put the two poles on my ears. I collapsed. When I came to, I was lying on the floor. The gendarme had stepped on my finger. They carried me to the cell, bloody and exhausted. I couldn't stand on my feet.

LIFE-SAVING DOCUMENT

There were about ten people in the cell. I lay on the straw, recovering. Bloody, bruised all over, almost unconscious. The people around me tried to comfort me. Prisoners like me. Among them was a university professor, Gyula Kockas. I don't remember the names of the others. But there's one of them I'll always remember. He told me that he had a Spanish passport, a letter guaranteeing protection. I don't know the name for this life-saving document with which the Spanish Embassy in Budapest confirmed that someone was a Spanish citizen and that their relatives in Spain had asked the Spanish Government to issue a Spanish passport to the bearer. It confirmed that they had citizenship and that the procedure was under way and asked that the Hungarian authorities kindly take consideration of this.

My fellow-sufferer had one of these documents. He told me that one of his relatives had also had one but that it would no longer be of any use to him because he had died in the meantime. I remembered this story. I spent about ten days in the Margit Korut prison. One day they put an elderly man into our cell. He had also been tortured. When Dr Kockas saw him he recognised him and jumped to his feet, standing at attention. He clicked his heels and introduced himself, addressing the newcomer as "Most Honoured Sir". It was General Janos Kis, the military leader of the resistance movement then being organised. They had arrested the entire leadership even before they had managed to do anything.

The general was a kind and courteous man. He knew what was waiting for him. "I shall be shot," he said. "The Germans have lost the war and the tragic thing is that we are falling into the abyss with them." He received cigarettes which he shared with us. But the investigators didn't spare him for a minute. For breakfast we used to be given some black liquid they called coffee. For lunch and dinner we were "served"

turnip and cabbage soup. It was rotten and full of worms, but we ate this swill because there was nothing else. We also used to get a tiny slice of dry black bread each day.

Every afternoon we would hear commands, gunfire and the sound of bodies being loaded into trucks. They shot people almost every day. And we wondered whether we could endure all this without going insane. It was dreadful to sit in the cell and listen to them firing, killing innocent people. Probably the same fate awaited me. My only hope was for a bomb to hit the prison so that I would disappear in an instant. I watched the faces around me: pale, bloodless, tight-lipped. No one said a word. Only later, when it was all over and the sound of the truck driving the bodies off had faded away, would you hear someone talk. "Have I gone grey?" we asked one another.

Still, life goes on. Conversations would be struck up and would continue. We mostly spoke about food. We were hungry, terribly hungry. There were other topics. That's how I heard the story of the relative who had died and whose Spanish Government document could no longer help him. But it helped me. I was young, hungry for life. My brain was working feverishly, trying to find a way out.

UNLOADED AND ABANDONED

One day the cell door opened. They called the man with the Spanish document and me: "Get your things!" This meant we would not be returning to the same cell. Either they were going to shoot us or we were being moved somewhere else. Release wasn't an option! We passed through endless corridors. Complete silence, except for the pounding of our feet on the stone floor. One after another iron doors swung open and swung closed behind us. We were on the ground floor in a smallish room with a counter. The gendarme put a bag in front of me with my name on it. He took from the bag the things they had taken from me when I had been brought here. Two packets of cigarettes. Oh God, what joy to see those wonderful packets of cigarettes! A lighter, bootlaces, great leather laces, thick and greasy. I also had a toothbrush, toothpaste and soap. And it was real soap! They returned my things to me. I signed the receipt, confirmed that they had returned all my belongings in full. The bureaucracy was still functioning, while everything around us was falling apart.

Every day there was greater and greater destruction, more and more dead. The Russians were advancing. This was no longer Horthy's Hungary, because the Germans had interned Admiral Horthy. Power in Hungary was now in the hands of the German Army, which allowed the Nyilas and their leader, Szalasi, to do the dirty work. Hordes of the mindless lumpenproletariat, young men armed to the teeth, were roaming the ruined metropolis. Jews were the primary target of their robbery and murder. In these circumstances, the inertia of the organised state had its effect. Order must be maintained, even when there is no order. There was order in prison. There the state functioned. If they were returning our belongings to us, they weren't going to shoot us! And they didn't. There were about another ten people who were released. They crammed us into a truck and drove us to a barracks.

An enormous building with a big yard, a high fence built of stone. The gendarmes unloaded us and left. There were almost a thousand people there! Some in uniforms, some in civilian clothes, all of them outlaws: army deserters, fugitives, Jews, criminals. Later, much later, I heard that all who stayed there had been killed.

The days passed. I don't remember what we ate, whether we ate at all. I don't even know how many days I spent in those barracks. One day both gates swung open wide to admit several black limousines. Looking at the flags that fluttered on them I came to the conclusion that these were diplomatic vehicles. From them emerged the kind of people I hadn't seen for quite some time: elegant, well dressed. Several Hungarian officers accompanied them.

They sounded the roll-call. We lined up in about ten ranks. The non-commissioned officers and our guards were neither as rough nor as loud as usual. One of the officers stood on a chair and, shouting so that everyone could hear him, called for everyone who had *vedlevi*, letters of protection, or passports from Sweden, Spain, Switzerland or the Vatican to step forward. Twelve men stepped forward. In despair I remembered the story told by my fellow-sufferer from the cell. He was in that line, in front of the full assembly, standing last in line. I stepped forward too. I was the thirteenth. People say this is an unlucky number, but it brought me good luck.

"What was the name of your relative who had a letter of protection?" I asked my cellmate.

"Taler Todor," he replied.

"Where was he born, and when?"

"In 1907, in Budapest."

I broke out in a cold sweat. The dead Todor was sixteen years older than me. By then the police officer had reached me.

"What's your name?"

"Taler Todor!"

"Citizenship?"

"Spanish."

He turned to one of the gentlemen. This man was opening a book.

"What did you say your name was?" the officer asked again.

I repeated it, afraid that he would sense that I was saying someone else's name, not my own. But who in a besieged, bombed city, a city devastated by war, cared about nuances? Who would notice them at all?

The gentleman, well dressed and well fed, probably one of the embassy staff, leafed through his book and found the name he sought.

"Born?"

It was now or never, I thought to myself as I felt the beads of sweat squeezing from under my cap.

"1907."

He swallowed it. My face was covered in stubble, I was exhausted, emaciated, badly in need of sleep. I looked much older than my years.

"In Budapest."

"Mother's name?" I heard the question to which I didn't have an answer. What in God's name was I going to do now. I suppose that at times like this, when your life is at stake your brain works fastest. I had to say something and I had to say it immediately. It was my only chance. I knew that there was no possibility of guessing the name, but perhaps a miracle would happen. And it did.

"Koranyi Margit!" I said loudly, looking the gentleman straight in the eye.

"All right," he said, and closed the book.

Either he wasn't looking at what was written there or, and this is more likely, he was well-intentioned, he wanted to help. And help he did. He saved my life.

"Stand over there!"

Thirteen of us were separated from the others. They put us in a cell in the barracks prison. Of the thirteen, three of us were "Spanish". Late in the afternoon a van with two police officers came for us and they began separating us. We "Spanish" were the last.

"It won't be much longer, children," one of the policemen said. "Do you hear the artillery? The Russians are very close, they'll take care of these vermin."

We drove for quite some time. Eventually we arrived in a smarter part of town, the Fifth District, to the *Védett ha'z*, the protected house, at 48 Pannonia Street. A modern, five-storey building, if I remember correctly. The building was packed with people. There were about ten of us in the two-room apartment where they put me. Oddly enough there was water and electricity. I walked into the bathroom and sat in a real bath, in clean, hot water. What a delight! I hadn't washed for months. The other members of the household gave me some underwear, even a jacket, a nice one made of tweed. I shaved and again I looked like a human.

Budapest was surrounded. It was December. The snow was deep and it was still snowing, which was a good thing because the city's power and water supplies were breaking down. The snow saved us. In the yard we burnt pieces of furniture, melted the ice and drank. We were coping surprisingly well. It was a modern building, the central heating wasn't working of course, neither were the electric water-heaters or the electric stoves, there was nothing for fuel. We fed the fire with furniture. The situation was getting worse every day. At the beginning the Spanish Embassy was giving us some food, mostly honey, not real but soy honey or something like that. The important thing was that it was sweet. Later we didn't even get this. No one came to see us any more. How could they when the bombs were falling? We would also hear bursts of machine-gun fire. Constant hunger. But we were young and wouldn't give in. There were about five or six of us young people in the house. There also happened to be a writer there. At the time I considered him old, but I don't think he was much over forty. Together with the writer we organised literary evenings. We found some books in the house and some of us also remembered a poem or two. There were shells raining down outside, everything was cracking, everything collapsing but we huddled in a freezing room

reciting poems, holding heated debates. We quoted Marx and Engels, Freud and Adler, Zweig and Gorky, Kant and Schopenhauer and God knows who else.

THE RUSSIANS ARE COMING

At the end of December, 1944, Russian aircraft dropped leaflets over the city. They were telling the citizens and the army defending the city that Budapest was surrounded and that the Red Army had pushed through to Vienna. Any further resistance was pointless because it would result only in unnecessary victims and destruction. They urged the Germans to surrender and said that they would treat them according to the provisions of the Geneva agreement. They promised that any Hungarian soldiers who surrendered would be released to their homes immediately. The ultimatum expired on December 25. On that day, Catholic Christmas, there were new leaflets. The Germans had killed Russian parliamentarians. There would be no more mercy, the attack would begin. The leaflet was signed by the celebrated Soviet marshals, Tolbuhin and Malinovsky.

And so it began. Thousands of cannons and mortars spitting fire. The aircraft never stopped bombing. Because of the dust and smoke it was dark even during the day. And we, in our house, spent more time in the basement than in the rooms, hungry and freezing, still in fear of the explosions and the Nyilas. Most of us had good reason to be afraid. Some were refugees, some military deserters. We were outlawed, hunted, persecuted. We were living under false names, with false documents. We were aware of the fact that with each passing day these documents provided us with less and less security. It was the end of the road for the Kingdom of Hungary, which had no king and whose governor was an admiral without a sea. The streets were full of armed, drunken hooligans, Szalasi's storm troopers. In order to protect ourselves we organised a guard. If Szalasi's men broke into the house, the guard would alert us and the men would flee into the neighbour's basement. We'd torn down part of the neighbour's wall, made a passage and camouflaged it well. It was often my turn to keep guard. I would sit under the staircase, from where I could see the street, reading Franz Werfel's *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*, a shattering novel about the suffering of the Armenians.

Budapest was still under siege. Everything was cracking and breaking, everything was shaking and creaking. There were battles being fought close by us. The deep snow had blanketed the city and, to some extent, silenced the sounds of death, covered the thousands of bodies and saved people from thirst. Nothing in the city was working any more, the water mains, the power station, the heating pipes, let alone the city transport. Everything was dead. Deep underground, in the basements, the city lived. Was that a life? Yes, and what a life! We even celebrated the New Year. We gathered in a hallway no larger than two metres square. We put some rags on the parquet and sat on the floor huddled against one another. Then one of the girls said "Hold out your hands. I have a wonderful surprise for you." Feeling her way she went round on her knees and placed something in each of our hands. Two beans. Two uncooked beans. She had found a few beans in a pantry somewhere. What a delight! We chewed them long and slowly. And afterwards we sang and told jokes. We'd stop talking for a minute when some explosion nearby shook our building. Here, on the floor, hugging and huddled close to one another we fell asleep. January 1, 1945, was grey.

I saw the first Russian soldier on January 17. But this was not the end of our suffering. The Russians began pouring in like an avalanche. They freed me, they saved my life, and I would have loved to hug each one of them. But this Red Army was a great disappointment for me. The soldiers were poorly dressed, dirty and uncared for, they had almost no equipment. They carried small bags tied at the end with ordinary rope: these were their rucksacks. Each of them had a sub-machine gun and a few petrol canisters here and there. It turned out they had alcohol in these containers. But they were brave and daring. They looked nothing like the people that we idealists had imagined to be living in the Socialist world. They looked nothing like people living in a system which, at that time, I believed to be an ideal society.

GOING HOME

In the middle of January, 1945, Pest was liberated, while battles still raged in Buda. I wanted to go home as soon as possible, but how could I set off with no documents, with the roads teeming with Red Army troops, how could I cross the front line? I decided to go to the Swiss Embassy, which represented the Yugoslav Royal Government.

But first I needed to reach it. It was located near the Parliament, almost on the bank of the Danube. I had to negotiate a few crossroads, run across streets which were exposed to Buda. The Germans were there, across the Danube. As soon as they saw anything move they opened fire. Horses lay shot on the crossroads, people beside them. Starving people were cutting the horse meat with pocket knives. It was a real accomplishment to get your hands on some food. It was a harsh winter: the dead horses were frozen. Many people lost their lives trying to get some food for their families. I worked my way through, crawling on the frozen, lumpy snow. Bullets whizzed above my head. I was careful. I reached the Embassy, the charge d'affaires. In fact I didn't know what his function was, but I was overjoyed when I realised that I knew the man. In a smallish office, sitting at a desk beneath a picture of King Petar II and Queen Marija, the Queen Mother, was Captain Lingulov. He had lived across the road from us in Subotica, in Jelačićeva Street. Of course he did not necessarily know me. I had been a kid and he was a gentleman captain in the Royal Army. He must at least have seen me and he must have known about my father who was a well-known and prominent merchant. The captain was not keen to issue me with documents. He asked me for my passport. I kept explaining that I hadn't come to Hungary as a tourist but that I had been brought there to forced labour. But he was persistent.

Adam after the liberation, 1945

In the Embassy I met a number of acquaintances who confirmed in writing that I had been born in Subotica and confirmed my identity. I still have this document to this day. But Captain Lingulov stuck to his guns. I was young and youth does not imply levity, it means courage and determination. I was going to go home, I had decided! I certainly wouldn't make the same decision now. This was a risky

undertaking, even if I had had legal documents. For a young man unable to prove that he was a victim of Nazism rather than, for example, a fugitive war criminal or a Hungarian or German soldier, going through the Russian lines, crossing the front line would have meant at the very best ending up in some prison camp.

In Pest I found some old friends, my former girlfriend Iboljka-Buba Štern, with her mother and her stepfather, Dr Rudolf Hok. He was a pre-war Communist who had spent considerable time in prison and had excellent documents which had also been confirmed by the Russian command. They were also preparing to return home. I set off with them. I had no luggage. In my pocket were a toothbrush and toothpaste, a piece of soap and a safety razor. I also had a razor strop which was very useful because at that time razor blades were very hard to come by. I had got this from a girl. The Hoks didn't have much. Their belongings all fitted on a children's sled which I pulled. That's where I also put my strop.

It took us quite a while to get to the outskirts of the city. And what should we find there but a Russian guard. "Women go on, men stop!" Because Rudi had a doctorate there was "Dr" in front of his name in the document that he showed them, but no mention of him being a lawyer. The Russians thought he was a physician. They needed doctors, so they let him through. I remained behind. The soldiers rather roughly sent me away to a large courtyard in which there were a lot of men, young and old. I checked the yard and all around it very thoroughly. I saw that a soldier was standing at the gate and not letting anyone pass. Those who were in the yard were going into the house through a glass door, one by one. The room they went into was empty. It was some kind of an entrance hall. From there you went into another room where there was probably some commission checking people's identities. I was in no hurry to go in. For quite a while I stood and watched what was going on. Ten or fifteen people went in and only one returned. They were leaving through some other door, into some other courtyard. So I came to the conclusion that this meant that only a very small percentage of people were passing the inspection. The one man who had returned was allowed to leave the yard; the guard standing in front of the glass door let him through and shouted to the one standing at the gate to allow the man who had been checked to pass. The people around me, some of whom were experienced, older people, said that everyone without documents was going to a camp.

After thoroughly appraising the situation I summoned up my courage and walked into the empty room. I stood behind the door so as not to be seen by the guard. A few minutes later, walking with determination, I walked out from where I had walked in. I smiled at the guard and said "*Zdravstvuy*!"

He returned the greeting and shouted to the one at the gate: "*Pushchay*!" I walked out into the street.

Later, much later, I heard that those who were checked and didn't pass the "test" ended up in Siberia. I had no documents and, if our officer over at the Embassy hadn't believed me, why would a Russian? I walked fast. The snow was deep but well-trodden. Trucks, tanks and who knows what else roared along the roads. I walked for hours until two soldiers stopped me. I greeted them warmly, said that I was a "Yugoslavian" and that I had come from a camp. I thanked them for liberating me and, remembering that I had a lighter in my pocket, I gave it to them. They looked at it delighted and I went on my way. They were so taken by this beautiful object that they completely forgot about me. I arrived in a rather larger village.

It was already getting dark. I could go no further. The village was called Kiszkunhalasz. I stopped in front of a house and knocked on the door. A woman opened it. I asked her politely to allow me to spend the night there and gave her some money. She took me in, saying that she hoped the Russian soldiers staying there wouldn't have anything against it. I slept like a log. I had walked about thirty kilometres that day. In the morning the Russians gave me two baked potatoes. I don't think anything ever tasted as good as those potatoes. I also learnt from the Russians that the trains were already running from this village. "Well, now," I thought to myself, "I'm not going to stop until I get to Subotica!" That was all very well, but I still had to somehow get to a train. At the station I ran into the Hoks. They were astounded, looking at me as if I were a ghost. They hadn't expected to see me again, they admitted. We waited for the train. A long train of freight wagons arrived at the station and everyone rushed for them. But the guards again blocked the way. With sub-machine guns at the ready. They stopped the men, but the women were allowed to pass.

A winter morning, still half dark. The snow weighing down on the plain, the cold cutting to the bones. Dr Hok put a blanket over his head and, what do you have?" A woman in a veil! He passed between his wife and daughter-in-law. Again I remained behind. I was thinking

feverishly. No, I couldn't stay here. I had to get on that train. I had to go home. Home? Did I really have a home? The chances were that my parents hadn't survived. I had no apartment. There were now other people living in it. Nonetheless my home was calling to me.

The waiting room was spacious. There were Russian soldiers standing at the door. Without thinking about it much I opened a window and jumped. I hurried to get to the train and got there before the Hoks. We climbed into a cattle wagon. Rudi and I lay on the floor. They threw a blanket over us and sat on us as though they were sitting on packages. I saw that many people had jumped through the window and got into the wagon, which filled up in no time. I knew the Russians would notice this. And they did. Shouting and threatening, they took all the men off the train. The two of us remained. The train moved off. There were also women from Subotica in this wagon, the Klajn sisters, close friends of my Aunt Šarika who unfortunately lost her life in a death camp.

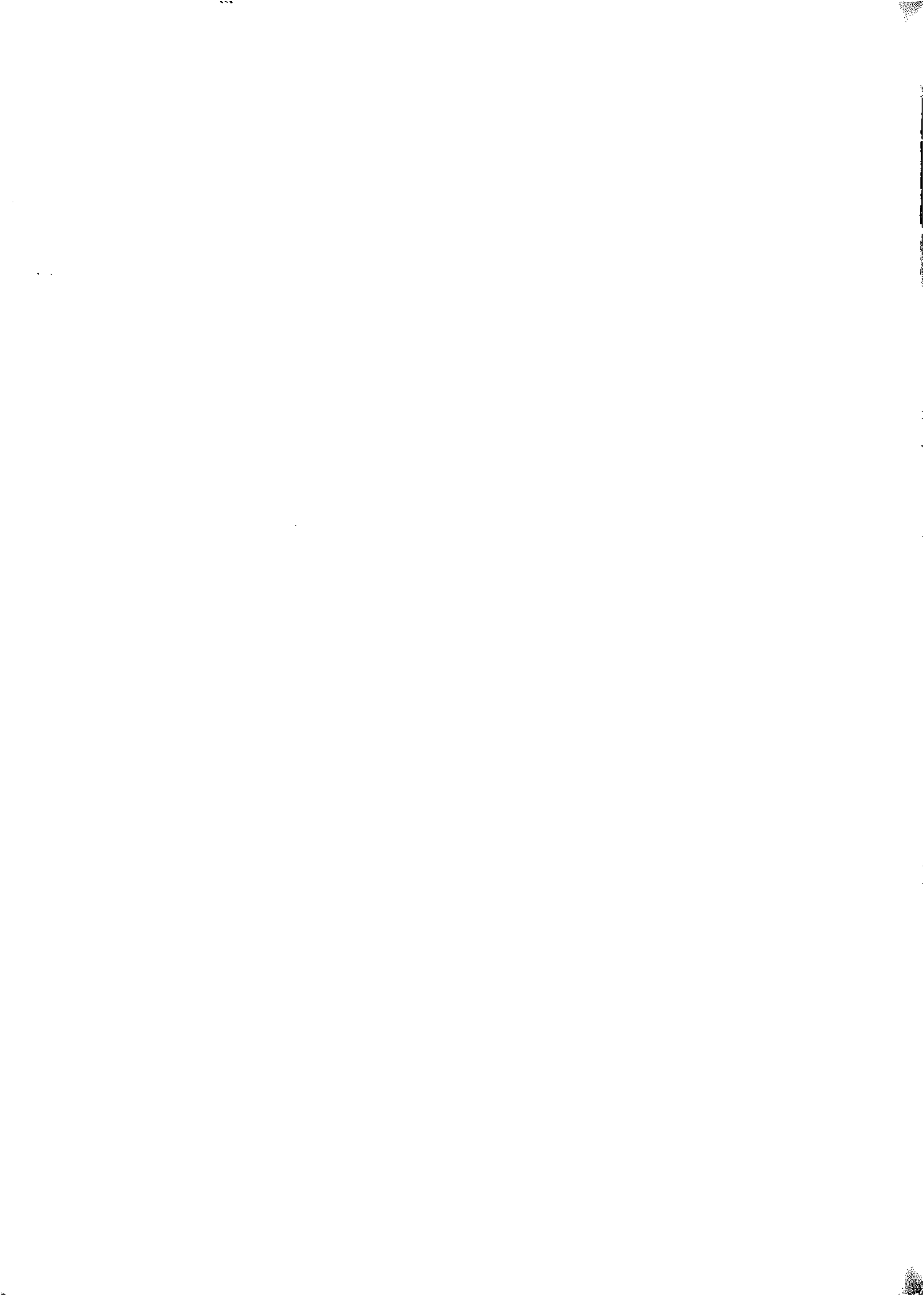
The train sped south. Sped? Of course I'm exaggerating. Freight trains don't speed, even in peacetime, let alone in those dreadful war days. It stopped at station after station. People got on and got off, most of them soldiers.

It was cold in the wagon. And why wouldn't it be? This was an ordinary wooden wagon, an old rattler with countless small and larger holes through which the wind blew. Outside it was five or six degrees below zero. Along with the cold we were also suffering from hunger. I dreamt about a *sholet*, wonderful, hot, red *sholets* with lots of smoked meat.

When the train passed under what they call the Majšanski Bridge, in fact an underpass at the entrance to Subotica, my eyes filled with tears. My father's estate was on the Majšanski Bridge, in Istočni Vinogradi, and I had crossed innumerable times over this underpass, which for me represented my hometown, reminded me of my home and my childhood, of the past, of a whole era which had been blown away by the wind. We pulled into Subotica station. And there were guards again. People had to go into quarantine. Typhus was raging. Thanks to Rudika Hok and his documents I passed through with no difficulties. I was home, but without a home, without parents or relatives, without most of my friends.

VI

FORCED LABOUR IN THE BOR MINE AND IN UKRAINE



Đorđe FIŠER

DEATH MARCH FROM BOR TO CRVENKA AND BEYOND

Dr Đorđe Fišer was born in Titel on March 6, 1920, to Leo and Irena Fišer, née Štajnic. He had a sister, Vera, born 1922.

He finished secondary school in Novi Sad and enrolled in the Medical Faculty of Belgrade University, but interrupted his studies in 1941, when the war broke out. His entire family first hid in Serbia. On his return to Novi Sad he was taken to forced labour and, from July 1943 to September 1944, was in forced labour in the Bor mine. From there he had to withdraw with the other inmates on the "death march" through Belgrade and Crvenka to Baja. There he was admitted to hospital because of a wound on his leg.

After the liberation he joined the Yugoslav People's Army. He completed his medical studies in Belgrade after the war. He specialised in otorhinolaryngology, with great achievements in the field. He settled in Novi Sad and worked there. As head of the ORL Clinic in Novi Sad he took part in many scientific conferences both within the country and abroad. He was a full professor in the Medical Faculty of the Novi Sad University.

He lost his closest relatives in the war. His mother perished in Auschwitz, his father was deported from Auschwitz and died on the way, while his sister died of typhus after being evacuated from

Auschwitz on January 27, 1945. His son, Dr Aleksandar Fišer is also an otorhinolaryngologist. He had two grandchildren.

Dr Đorđe Fišer died on April 25, 1989. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Belgrade.

A convoy of Jews passed along the roads of Bačka in late September and the first half of October, 1944. The "final solution" was applied to about 2,500 of them in Bačka. That was the number killed on this "death march" alone.

UNWORTHY

Overnight on October 6, 1944, the premises of Glaser-Welker-Rauch in Crvenka was the scene of a hideous crime. This is where the journey ended for many of the Jews on the march from the Bor mine. The echoes of cannon fire mixed with the shots fired by Fascist soldiers. The front line was already too close not to hear them, but the SS criminals went on regardless, killing innocent Jews throughout the night on the gentle Bačka plain by the old brickyard.

Just a few days before that night and again on that night itself, 2,500 innocent people were robbed and killed. However their march towards death had begun much earlier, on the day at the beginning of 1942 when the Horthy Parliament adopted a new law on national defence, which obliged all Jewish men to do labour service. In Bor they did the hardest jobs. They were abused and died of exhaustion.

EVACUATION

The autumn of 1944 came. On September 16, in Bor, they rounded up the Jews who were there for involuntary work and told them to go home, that is to say they would evacuate them. They were told that those who could not go would stay in the camp, but that no one would take responsibility for their personal safety. They were warned that no one in the column must fall behind, because the column would be escorted by Kosta Pećanac's Chetniks.

A group of about 3,600 Jews from the Bor mine travelled via Mala Krsna and Smederevo. They travelled for eight days, sleeping in mud and water. Their food ration for the trip was one kilogram of

bread. At the head of the column and providing security were mounted Hungarian soldiers, while the officers rode on bicycles.

Throughout this exhausting trip, ridiculous commands rained down on the column. Echoes from the right and the left interwove and intermingled, both in front and behind them.

"Faster!"

"Walk!"

"Don't lag behind the column!"

"Anyone disobeying commands will be shot!"

The first victim fell in Smederevo. He was hit in the stomach, the wretched man was dying under torture. Attempts by inmates, doctors, to help him were brutally repelled. The column continued on, deafening commands rang out, people lined up listlessly to continue the journey. When they crossed the Danube by ferry and reached Pančevo, they all looked like ghosts.

The people of Pančevo who happened to be there realised who the people in this inhumane convoy were and tried to bring them food, to refresh them for the rest of the journey. These noble attempts by the locals met with disapproval from those leading the column.

"Step back!" shouted a soldier, raising his rifle butt to hit someone.

Many people ignored the orders and continued to give food to the marchers.

"Why won't you let them take some bread?" they dared to ask the soldiers.

"There should be no food given to those who are to die!" a German barked back.

There were also those among the people of Pančevo who wanted to help the quite large team of armed and cruel soldiers and guards. The *Volksdeutsche* from the town bolstered the guard around the convoy. The dull thud of rifle butts was heard, along with curses and insults. The journey went on.

"HOW LOVELY IT IS TO DIE BY MOONLIGHT"

Those who were exhausted began to fall behind. The Germans rounded them up and took them to the Zvezda tavern in Pančevo. And there were quite a few of them, 133 in all were assembled there.

The Germans wanted to put their bloody plan in motion as soon as possible. By October 1 they were looking for inmates to volunteer for work. This actually marked the beginning of the massacre. Twenty of them volunteered. They took them to the adjacent room, searched them, took their documents and valuables and made them go further on.

They were heading for a place called Jabuka. Three kilometres from Pančevo, where there was a road worker's hut, they were ordered to turn. When they were about five hundred metres from the road they were ordered to dig a trench, five metres long, two metres deep and four metres wide. In the meantime, night had begun to fall. A German wearing an officer's epaulettes turned to one of the soldiers.

"I'm going to Pančevo. The trench must be finished by the time I return."

He got on his motorcycle and rode off.

Soon enough the trench was finished. On the orders of the officer present, the Jews left their work and headed down the road to Pančevo. They hadn't got far when they met the officer on the motorcycle and another two Germans. He ordered them to return. They took them to the trench and lined them up in fours. They tied their hands with rope and ordered them to form a circle to the right of the trench and walk towards the little road worker's hut, facing it. First they took the last group of four away. A little later shots and cries were heard. Then it was the turn of the second group, and then the third.

Engineer Malek told me later that before his turn came he managed to untie his hands, but kept them in position as if still tied. He moved with his group as soon as they received the order. When they reached a pit on a rise towards the Tamiš, facing the river, they were stopped by two German soldiers pointing sub-machine guns at them.

Half a metre in front of the people from the convoy a wire was stretched across, behind it was a fairly deep pit covered in bushes.

The moment was more than ominous. Malek realised what the intention of the Germans was. He turned to the officer standing on his right and spoke to him in German.

"Where is your great German culture? What have we done wrong for you to kill us like dogs? We worked in Hungary in the camp for eight months, with no bread, clothing or wages. We worked in

Bor. Our families had nothing to eat. We worked for fourteen months for you Germans! As an engineer I received recognition from your Engineer Supervisor Zajle. And now you want to kill us! You promised to let us return to our families, our homes, and now what? Let me go! My wife and my two children are waiting for me at home! You have no heart! You have no God!" he shouted finally.

The German officer looked at him coldly, then said:

"How lovely it is to die by moonlight."

They were ordered to make a left turn. They obeyed. At that moment Malek turned towards the officer standing next to him and threw himself at him, knocked him down and jumped into the pit. With no more than a few scratches and bruises he continued running towards the sunflower field about ten metres away. He was already in the shelter of the tall sunflower plants when he heard shots behind him. He dropped to the ground. He could tell the Germans were firing blind, so he crossed to the bank of the Tamiš and stepped in. He was afraid he wouldn't have the strength to swim. Nevertheless he managed to swim across to the other bank of the river before he staggered and fell from exhaustion. Meanwhile the Germans were scouring the terrain with their torches, searching for him.

He was too exhausted to go any further. He crawled into a haystack and spent four days there. Hunger forced him to leave this shelter and seek a new one. He headed for a house; from its façade he guessed that it wasn't German. He was not wrong. The farmer, Stevan Milošev, gave him refuge. A few days later Jabuka was liberated. Malek remained alive.

THERE'LL BE ENOUGH FOR THE FIELDS AND THE WORMS

The Jews continued their journey. Between Prelez and Titel, they came across watermelon rinds scattered on and around the road.

"Eat!" one of the guards shouted.

About thirty people from the starving column who were closest to the rinds hurried towards them. Suddenly they were sprayed with fire. Their cries rang out.

"There'll be enough of them for the fields and the worms," one of the non-commissioned officers said.

The column continued on. The contorted bodies of the dead remained, like piles of rags which had been strewn around.

The convoy arrived in Novi Sad, via Titel, on October 2. After a short stop they continued on in the direction of Srbobran. Passing through Sirig, where the occupying forces had colonised the entire population, a number of inmates tried to escape. They were betrayed by some of the locals, caught and shot. As they passed through Sirig, a group of children from Fascist families jeered at them.

"Jews are all degenerates. Whatever they are, they earn their bread by swindling."

In Novi Vrbas, the convoy was intercepted by a group of *Volksdeutsche* leaving a church. "Halt!" the order rang out.

The column stopped. The camp inmates, exhausted and starving, their faces unwashed for days, could hardly stand on their legs which were like stone from the endless walking. The Germans surrounded them, spat at them, insulted them and laughed in their faces.

In the middle of Vrbas the prisoners were ordered to lie down in a pit, piled on top of one another. As the guards looked on and smiled approvingly, the *Volksdeutsche* plundered them for anything they still had which took their fancy. Then the column moved on, farewelled by the roaring *Volksdeutsche.*

"It will be the happiest day of our lives when Jewish blood starts flowing through the streets!"

THE LAST ASSEMBLY, GENTLEMEN

The death march continued. Having failed to find accommodation in Crvenka, on the way to Sombor, the Jews, their number now considerably less than the original 3,600, thinned out along the way by the murders, the deaths from starvation and exhaustion, left the road and entered the abandoned hall of what had once been a brickyard, very close to the town. Exhausted from the journey, the inmates just threw themselves on the ground. Early in the morning they arose, expecting the order to move on, but none came. The day passed in uncertainty and, eventually, night fell. Nothing! A second day and a second night passed. Still nothing! As the hours and days went by they were in a state of restless expectation.

It was not until October 7 that they saw the guards in action again. They separated a group of about eight hundred Jews from the

others and continued on with them to Sombor. The majority stayed behind in the brickyard. At about nine in the evening, a Hungarian junior sergeant burst in among the inmates and addressed them.

"Hand any valuables and money over to me, the Germans are going to shoot you anyway!"

The broken bodies stirred, dishevelled heads were raised and turned in the direction of the command. Some got up and handed over whatever they had. The sergeant took everything and said:

"This is the last assembly, gentlemen!"

His job done, he remained for a while, watching the Jews, enjoying their discomfort and fear.

Not long after a group of furious SS men burst into the yard. There, before everyone's eyes, they killed five Jews with their rifles. Angrily, without a moment's thought, as though they wanted to kill even the last ray of hope for salvation, if any of the inmates still had any.

Late in the evening, about eleven, the commands echoed around the brickyard.

"Up! Quickly! In ranks of ten! Hand over all your money and your valuables! Anyone who fails to do this will be shot! If you don't obey you'll be decimated." They moved them into the next yard in groups of twenty, explaining that they had to search them there to see if anyone was hiding anything.

VILIM POTESMAN from Subotica was in one of those groups and described it this way:

> *"When my turn came I gave them everything they had asked for. What I still had left, that is. Then I was moved to the neighbouring yard. Although we could hear shooting now and then, I couldn't have suspected what was happening. There was a pile of earth in the yard and a long trench in front of it. There were about twenty SS men standing next to the heap of earth, light machine guns at the ready. There were bodies and blood in the ditch and around it. We were ordered to stand up. Each of us had a butcher facing us and a body or two in front of us. We were given orders by the executioners to throw the victims into the trench. We were allowed to say goodbye to one another. We embraced and then each of us picked up a dead friend, dragged him to the trench and threw him in. I picked up the body of a*

Jew I didn't know. But when I threw him into the trench, I jumped in as well. Shots rang out. I fell down to the bottom and the body of one of my friends fell on top of me. Later I lost consciousness.

"Meanwhile the German soldiers were bringing new victims, lining them up along the edge of the trench and mowing them down with machine-gun fire. Groups came one after another. They were also killing Jews in the yard of the brickworks. A revolver shot would be heard now and then, settling accounts with those who were only wounded and trying to save themselves.

"I don't know how long this went on. When I began to come to I saw only the dead around me. There were so many I couldn't count them. A shudder went through me. Now and then a clump of soil would slide down into the grave. My nostrils were full of the cloying smell of bodies and blood. From time to time there would be a moan or a rasping breath.

"I thought there were no longer any guards around. I tried to get up, but someone turned a torch on from some distance away. The beam of light walked along the trench. The guards were looking for survivors. They were coming closer to me. My face was covered in blood. The skull of the corpse beside me was split in half. I smeared myself with his brain. My breath froze. The light fell on me, passed over me. I felt relief. There were cries from the other side. Then the light went off and again it was dark. The Fascist began throwing hand grenades. I don't know how many, about ten, perhaps even more. I was wounded in my right hand, but I was saved from death by the bodies of my dead friends. The butchers decided that there was no longer anything for them to guard, so they left the execution site. I was overcome by sadness because I would never again see those with whom I had been joined in suffering, but I soon threw this feeling off: I had to run far away from this trench of death.

"When I had gone some distance I turned towards the brickyard. It was dark and horrifying. Antal Nanai from Crvenka took me in and hid me until the liberation."

After this twentieth century St Bartholomew's Massacre, the remaining Jews from the Bor mine, about 1,600 of them, were moved

on in their journey of death, under the burden of this terrible massacre. The column left the brickyard. The last group left at about six in the morning. They left behind their unburied friends and a mass of belongings, books, school certificates and letters as a sign that a whole mass of people who no longer existed had been there, as evidence of a bloody crime committed by Hitler's men. A few days after the massacre, the Seventh Gendarmerie of the occupying force ordered the locals to bury the bodies.

ĐORĐE LAUFER was among the group which survived the massacre. As they were leaving the brickyard, he managed to escape from the convoy:

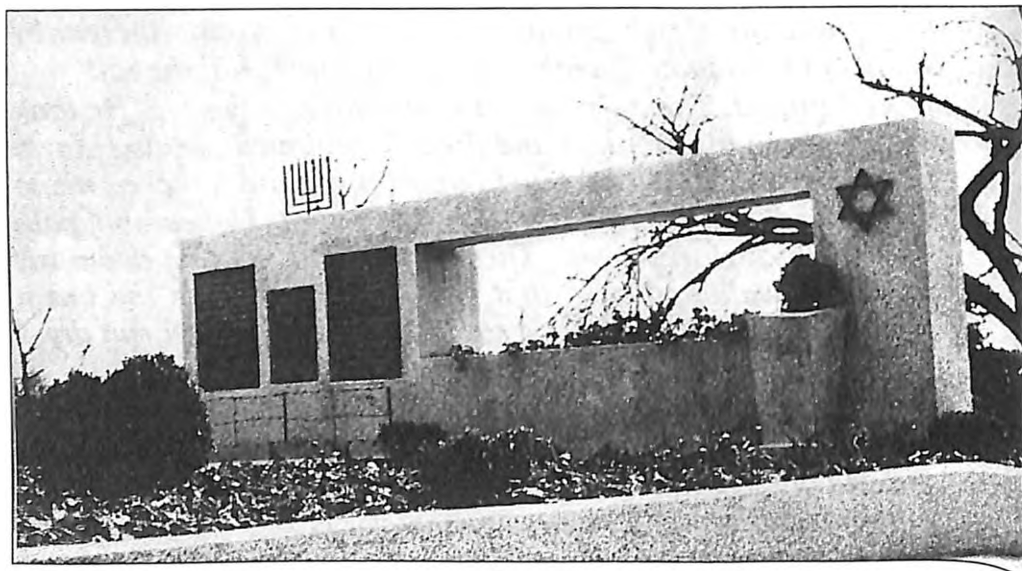
> *"I was in the last group to leave the brickyard. Entering Crvenka we walked past a field sown with corn. It was morning and the local Volksdeutsche were already up and about. They watched us. I took advantage of the guard's recklessness and managed to get to the corn. One moment more and I would have been out of sight, unnoticed, but I was struck with fear by shouts in German: 'There's one, getting away! Kill the rat!'*
>
> *"I turned. There was a German running after me. He took the rifle from his shoulder and fired. I continued running, down through the field, but he caught up with me and knocked me to the ground with his rifle butt. I heard a shot. Unbearable pain flashed through my head. There was blood pouring down my throat. I swallowed it so that it wouldn't suffocate me but it seemed to be pouring from a source that would never run dry. I sank into darkness.*
>
> *"I was awoken by pain in my chest. I shuddered and opened my eyes. There was a Hungarian soldier standing over me. He ordered me to get up and led me to the brickyard where I found a group of Hungarian soldiers. A non-commissioned officer approached me, kicked me a few times with his boot and knocked me to the ground with his fists. He ordered a soldier to keep an eye on me until he returned. After a few minutes he went away with the others. I gave as good an imitation as I could of being asleep. I breathed as evenly as I could manage. Each moment lasted an eternity. The soldier stared at me for a while then began to approach me. I froze in anticipation. Suddenly I felt his fingers on me, sliding into my pockets. He rolled me on*

my side, searching my trouser pockets. Then he pushed me away, swearing: the pockets had already been emptied. Disappointed, he moved away.

"When I sensed he had gone, I looked around, got up and, on hands and knees worked my way out of the brickyard. I ran like a madman, through the corn, with no idea where I was, but after a few minutes I had to stop and catch my breath. The Bošnjak family hid me until the liberation."

"SAY A PRAYER BEFORE YOUR EXECUTION"

A group of inmates who had left Crvenka before the mass killings on the night of October 7 were sent towards Sombor. The leader of the convoy was a non-commissioned officer from the SS Handžar Division, Alija Sentešić from Sarajevo. There were about another thirty SS men with him.



Monument in Sombor in memory of the Jewish forced labourers from the Bor mine killed by the Nazis in Crvenka in 1944

All the way from Crvenka to Sivac the commands rang out:

"Double time! Head down!"

Anyone who raised his head was struck with a rifle butt or whipped by the SS men.

In Sivac, the men from the column were ordered to dig two trenches. When both were finished they got their orders.

"Say a prayer before your execution! You are all to be killed. Lie down on the ground."

Talk was forbidden. The guards focused their attention on finding a victim and convincing him, by hitting him with a rifle butt, that he had to obey orders.

They made three Jews climb a tree and sing religious songs.

Night fell. Rain began to fall. Sleeping was allowed only in a sitting position without blankets. People sat, enduring terrible suffering. They were soaked to the skin and the entire area was a massive mud-pit.

Orders to move were issued at dawn on October 8.

Killing followed killing, all the way from Sivac to Sombor. Anyone who didn't walk fast enough was killed by the SS men. About 150 victims were left behind on this road.

In Sombor the inmates were all put in the synagogue and, three days later, the march continued, via Bački Monoštor to Mohač.

Another ten Jews were killed on the bridge over the little Kođoš river on the road between Bački Monoštor and Bezdan.

In Mohač, the Hungarian soldiers took the column over.

At the same time, the 1,600 Jews who had survived the massacre in Crvenka, their numbers now reduced by the roughly 160 who had been killed in the meantime, headed further towards Sentkiraljsabađ. This stretch of the death road was also accompanied by murders. Anyone who stopped to drink water or relieve himself was killed. In the end, the Fascists no longer bothered with a reason to kill.

Near Stari Sivac, the convoy was intercepted by a cyclist with a Schmeisser. He stopped, looked at the column, reached for his Schmeisser and began shooting.

There was a commotion in the column, but it kept moving nonetheless. It looked like a column of ants that someone had cut off. The forced march continued for a day and a night. They came across bodies, evidence that the previous group had also been driven along this road.

Between Sivac and Krnjaja they came across the Sombor-Bečej railway. The roar of a train was heard. The column stopped. A train was approaching. As it came closer, they recognised the greenish uni-

forms. This was a transport of German soldiers on the retreat. The locomotive snarled ominously, accelerating. They were in a hurry.

Shots rang out! From inside the train the Germans had opened fire on innocent people, killing about sixty of them.

The exhausted marchers arrived in Krnjaja and found accommodation on a farm owned by Adam Džinić. They lay down in a field of clover and were ordered to face the ground. All around this oasis were fields of sugar beet. The starving men rushed towards the beets, pulling them out with their hands and wolfing them down.

But the shots rang out again. The Germans killed about ten people and then backed off.

They picked out five people and ordered them to bury the dead, then killed them straight away. They killed them with a shot in the back of the head or the throat.

The farmer asked the soldiers to return his spades and shovels. The soldiers feigned surprise.

"Haven't they been returned to you?"

They turned to the column and ordered ten people to step forward. The men backed away, knowing what was coming. The SS men approached them, pulled about four of them out of the crowd and shot them dead.

At about four in the afternoon they set off towards Sombor. There they were placed under the command of Sentešić's SS men. Later in the march about another forty people were killed. The Bosnian SS men left the dead behind only after cutting their gold teeth out with a razor.

Both groups reached Sentkiraljsabađ via Baja, where this writer was detained in hospital. There the men fell into the hands of Lieutenant-Colonel Maranyi, who proclaimed his power by ordering seven Jews to be executed by firing squad. The Jews who survived, just over a thousand of them, were deported from Sentkiraljsabađ to various concentration camps where they shared the fate of their countrymen.

Zoltan BRAJER, Ladislav LOŠIC, Deže KENIGSBERG

FORCED LABOUR IN UKRAINE

At the end of September 1942, Jewish men between the ages of 21 and 45 were mobilised from occupied Bačka and the whole of Hungary into labour gangs and taken by force to the eastern front, to the River Don. There, under the command of pathologically cruel Hungarian officers and non-commissioned officers, SS men and gendarmes, they were subjected to brutal torture. They worked on clearing minefields and lives were lost to exploding mines, they died of cold, hunger, typhus, beatings, they were killed for no particular reason, for nothing, for a pair of decent shoes.

Only two or three per cent of the men taken from Sombor survived and the testimonies which follow are from three of those. The memory of the martyrs who perished and the extent of this little known tragedy again oblige us to publish these testimonies.

These survivors of the Sombor Jews mobilised into labour gangs speak about their memories of that tragedy, of the hundreds who were killed or died. These accounts were dictated to Milenko Beljanski and originally published as an appendix to Sombor Jews (1735–1970)[1].

[1] *Somborski Jevreji* (*1935-1970*), Milenko Beljanski, in *Zbornik 4* (Anthology 4), publ. Jevresjki istorijski muzeji, Beograd 1979 (in Serbian). pp. 47–50.

ZOLTAN BRAJER, pensioner:

"On July 1, 1942, the occupying forces ordered the mobilisation of Jews from Bačka and Szegedin. They rounded us up in Bačka Topola and grouped us into seven companies. There were at least two hundred people in each and the companies were numbered from 105/8 to 105/14. They drove us to Erdelj and the occupied part of Slovakia. We did the worst kind of work under constant military escort and guard.

[...]

"I was a member of the 105/10 company in which there were 214 of us. As far as I know, four of us stayed alive. The others were killed at the eastern front by the Fascists and people also died in massive numbers in Soviet camps because of the typhus epidemic. But, to return to the course of events, our company was driven to Erdelj, to Mištotfalu. They made us build an airport on a piece of rocky land. That is where the swearing, the slapping and the beatings began. From there we moved to Košice in Slovakia. On September 1, 1942, they sent us to the Russian front. The trip took twenty days in wagons and ten days of walking. From Ostrogorsk we were sent to Koški, in no man's land, to dig ditches, set up barbed wire, make machine-gun nests. Lieutenant Nikler, the head of the company, fled because of illness. His replacement was a brutal staff sergeant, Kakonji, because Second Lieutenant Janos Vashegyi had fled.

"The Russian winter struck us on October 17 and became even harsher on November 6. We were given a new commanding officer, Lieutenant Janos Hortobagy. He really finished off the Jews. He stood in front of us and told the soldiers that he wanted to spend the Christmas holidays with his family, and that if the soldiers wanted the same thing they should know that it wouldn't happen as long as the Jews were alive. After this the guards really unleashed their sadistic behaviour. They tortured, struck, beat and killed whoever they could whenever they could. From Ribalcin we were moved to Kamenka. It was winter, forty degrees Celsius below zero. There were now a hundred of us left in the original company of 214. The guards, the Hungarian

gendarmes who had come along, stripped us naked. They stole everything we still had, whatever we'd saved or hidden. They took wedding rings, rings, watches, knives, warm underwear. By the end of December ninety of our friends were among the dead. Many people barely dragged themselves along, walking with difficulty. The company was down to 99 in number. These were the ones who could still walk.

"On January 14, 1943, orders were received to retreat. I had earlier tried to save myself with the help of a Russian woman, but she had been very suspicious. I noticed that an elderly and rather shabby man, looking like a beggar, was visiting her house. In the end the Russian woman told me to come to her house in the evening. Who should I see there but the old man! And then he began questioning me, interrogating me in High German! Who was I, what was I where did I come from, what languages did I speak, how did I come to be at the front? He told the Russian woman to put me in the cellar. Three days later the advance contingent of the Red Army arrived. I emerged from my spot, got a pass from the Soviet unit and almost made it. Because the people who arrived in a wave after the breakthrough of the Stalingrad front didn't have the slightest idea about me or my meetings with the Soviet troops, they told me that I didn't need a *bumashka*.

"I found myself in a column of captured German, Hungarian and Romanian soldiers and ended up with them in the prison camp in Hrenovoy. The cold, the hunger and terror I went through, the typhus, all of it devastated the camp. There were about 40,000 prisoners. There I also met Yugoslav Communists, Partisans who, like the prison units, had also been driven to the eastern front by the Hungarian authorities. They wore yellow armbands with black patches. I remember Ljubiša Protić, from Bačka Petrovac, and Julije Spevak, from a place called Usta, north of Nižnji Novgorod. There I asked an elderly woman "Will I have to spend the entire war in hospital? I'd like to go somewhere." She replied that there had been Czech and Polish army units set up in the USSR. What would I do among Poles and Czechoslovakians? I was a Yugoslav. She replied that she hadn't heard about any Yugoslav units. I

thought and thought about what to do. I wrote to the Yugoslav Embassy in Moscow, without knowing how things actually stood. I received a reply from Moscow that there was a Yugoslav unit which I could join and that I should round up anyone else who also wanted to join. I was relieved: thank God! Twenty of us set off from the Romanian Camp Oranki to Tesnicko near Kolomna, where the Yugoslav Partisan unit was. As far as I could see there was one battalion in training there. Because I was a lieutenant in the Yugoslav Army reserves, I became company commander. In April 1944 we received orders to transfer to the First Yugoslav Tank Brigade, which had been formed in the USSR. There I was promoted to assistant brigade chief. I was in this post until the end of the war. The brigade came to Yugoslavia on March 24, 1945. I took part in the breakthrough of the Srem front on April 12 and won battles to get through to Zagreb and Trieste where the state of war had ended."

LADISLAV LOŠIC, pensioner

"I was in labour gang number 105/11. We were drilled in Bačka Topola for a month so that we would learn Hungarian commands. The company was then moved to Bilke, in the occupied part of Slovakia. We worked in a quarry, doing the worst kind of physical labour. And how did we do? Of the two hundred in the company, only four of us survived. We were at the eastern front on September 23, 1942, in a place called Ilinče. Our last commander was Laszlo Vay, lieutenant, who in civilian life had been the director of the Szegedin hemp spinning mill. We were escorted by 26 soldiers. There are no words to describe the way they beat and tortured us. And not just torture: they killed as well. The ones they spared died of typhus in the Soviet Union. Very few of our men lived to see the liberation. Those who were forced to retreat were killed by the Fascists because they were in the way. Squad leader Andras Bercsek from Szegedin, farm number 108, told me that he had overheard the officers saying that all Jews from the labour gangs were to be liquidated.

"On October 24, 1942, I decided to cross the frozen Don River to the Soviet side with three friends. The Soviet units weren't far away. We listened and heard that when the guards challenged they replied with a password and with that "ours" which they use. When the Red Army soldier stopped us, when he asked "who's coming?" I shouted "ours". I reported to the Slavyansk camp as a Yugoslav Army reserve lieutenant, but then I was called in by the Soviet commander who told me that they couldn't keep me in the camp because of what I was. Instead, they would transfer me as an interpreter to a camp for captured Germans and there I spent eleven months. Because the formation of Yugoslav Partisan units in the Soviet Union had begun, I submitted an application and was accepted into our tank brigade as chief quartermaster. We were given new uniforms and sewed the badges of Partisan officer and non-commissioned officer ranks onto our sleeves. I remember that in Moscow we were on a tram and the people were looking at us. We heard the Soviet officers talking among themselves, wondering who the three of us (Đurđe Kesler, Nestor Borđoški from Senta and I) could be, whether we were British, American or Polish, to whose army we belonged. When he heard this, Nestor Borđoški stood up and walked over to the Soviet officers saying "we are Tito's officers, we are Yugoslav Partisans!" Then came the hugging and kissing, we were simply besieged by the Soviet officers, they asked us to go with them to their headquarters to celebrate and just wouldn't take no for an answer. We were guests in their headquarters, not just for an ordinary visit, but for a whole day.

[...]

"When the brigade arrived in Yugoslavia, I had already passed through Sombor a number of times, even during the war, that was when I met my future wife. It was now that I heard what had happened to the Sombor Jews and that my parents had also died with them. While I was in the Soviet Union I had enquired, I had even asked our general, Velimir Terzić who headed the Yugoslav Military Mission, but he couldn't tell me anything certain about the fate of the Jews in Bačka. He mentioned, however, that he did know what had happened to the

Jews in Belgrade and so it became more clear to me what had happened and what I could expect. My forebodings proved true: our families had perished.

[...]

"Many years passed and I had never managed to reach Szegedin to enquire about the fate of our squad leader, Andras Bercsek, whether he was still alive or had died. He was a decent man who enjoyed the confidence of those of us in the labour camp. On one of those critical days, Dr Volf from Novi Sad gave him his watch. The squad leader told him that his watch would wait for him in Szegedin, at his farm, number 108. Dr Volf would never go to collect the watch, he was killed. But if the watch was saved, may it stay in the squad leader's family as an extraordinary memento!"

DEZIDER KENIGSBERG, pensioner

"I was mobilised on July 1, 1942, into labour company number 105/13. From Bačka Topola we were driven to Erdelj, to Holmožd, where we quarried stone and mended roads. We were there for about three months. We arrived in Kosice and from there we were sent to the eastern front, always under the *Honved* guard at all times. Our commander was a Lieutenant Reinhard. There were no more than fifteen men in the military escort. Our company stayed in the occupied part of the Soviet Union, in Nikolayevka, about five or six kilometres from the Don. I worked as a blacksmith and shod horses until the Germans were defeated at Stalingrad. After this everything was in general chaos again. The next day, fourteen of us fled the company. The platoon sergeant, Veres, was also with us. We fled to Dimitriyevka, because I thought that there I would meet my brother Šandor from 105/14.

We ran and ran, wandering around the Russian steppe for seventeen days. In fact we were going round in circles. Snow, cold, blizzards. Whenever we stopped in the evening, we'd realise we'd already been there. In some warehouse, or whatever it was. And so we came across the village of Siroka. Empty, houses abandoned: only in the last house did we find a woman. Then we noticed that soldiers were passing through the village,

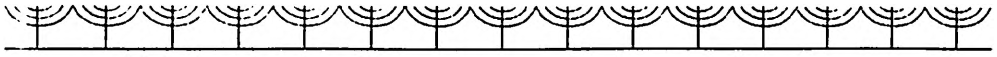
fleeing. A Hungarian major-general burst into the house. We weren't indifferent to this: we became really frightened. Sergeant Veres explained to the general that we were on the move, that we had only taken shelter for a short while, but it was also obvious to us that the general had escaped from his unit in an attempt to find shelter until the Russian troops arrived. We weren't starving at this time. We had two horses, and so... We also managed to get our hands on some weapons. Russian soldiers from the Red Army arrived on February 1, 1943. Two of them, like an advance reconnaissance party. They went from house to house. We reported as fugitives. The Russian landlady in whose house we were living confirmed this.

1964 photograph of the Sombor Jewish Community management, including Dezider Kenigsberg (first from left), Ladislav Lošic (fifth from left) and Zoltan Brajer (first right)

On the third day the advance echelons of the Russian Army arrived. They gave us instructions about which direction we should head. We were accommodated in a *kolkhoz* surrounded by a barbed wire fence. This was probably also a camp when the Germans were advancing. I spent three days in this camp. I and another four fugitives were then called out from a

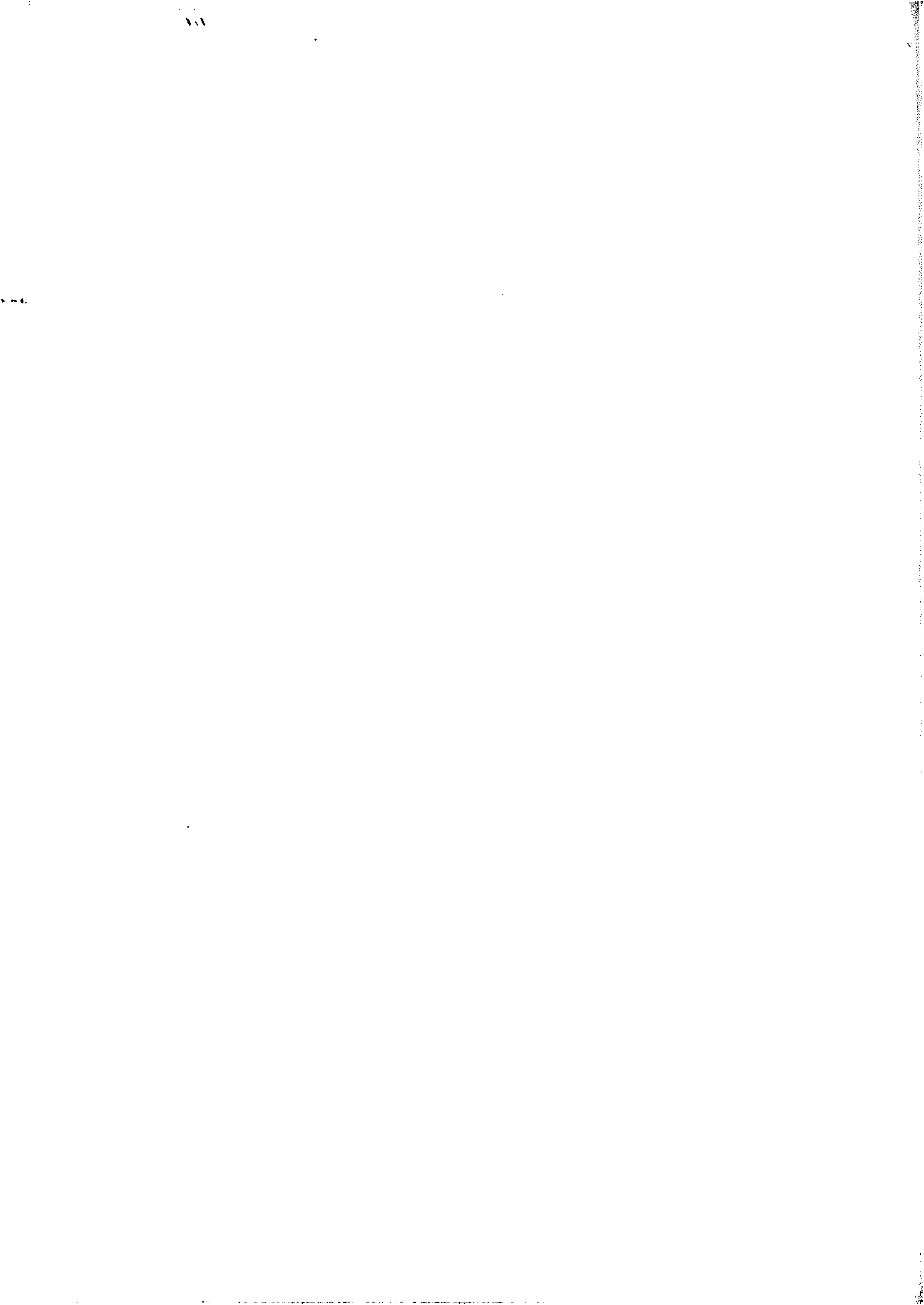
list which had been drawn up earlier. So, from having been a persecuted Jewish fugitive from 105/13 company, I was now transformed into a Russian soldier, a member of the Red Army. I ended up in the 108th Soviet Bridge-Building Battalion, but before that I spent a month in a mortar platoon. The battalion was heading towards Kiev under the command of Major Pitoshen, or perhaps his name was Petar or Pyotr. I was given a Red Army uniform after six months. In May 1945 we stopped in a place in Germany called Landsberg am Warthe about eighty kilometres from Berlin.

In October, 1945, I was demobilised from the Red Army and returned to Sombor. There I heard about the tragedy and the dreadful fate of the Sombor Jews. Of my immediate family I was the only one who had survived. In the German concentration camps the Fascists had killed my father, five sisters and two brothers who had been driven off to Prague. As far as I was able to establish, of the 210 Jews from 105/13 company, only three of us survived: Miško Gevirc, Eugen Daniel and I.



VII

IN OCCUPIED SERBIA



Sonja BARUH

I HID THE CHILDREN'S DEATH FROM MY MOTHER

Sonja Baruh was born in Požarevac on March 5, 1922, to Ilija (Elijahu) Baruh and Bulina, née Jarhi.

She grew up in one of the best-known Jewish families in Belgrade as one of seven children, of whom one, Haim, died as a child.

The Baruh family had been progressive and patriotically oriented, even before the war, but did not escape the tragic fate of many Jewish families in the second world war. Sonja's three elder brothers, Isidor-Isa, Bora and Josif-Joža, perished in the first years of the war. Isa and Joža were killed in Užice in 1941 fighting in Partisan units against an enemy which far outnumbered them. Bora was executed by firing squad in Jajinci in July, 1942.

Nor did her sisters, Berta-Bela and Rašela-Šela, survive the war. They perished in the Banjica camp. Of her large family, only Sonja, her mother Bulina and her father Ilija survived the war.

Sonja and her husband Armando Moreno had a daughter, Dolores-Šela, and in her second marriage to Solomon "Moni" Alkalaj she had a son, Isa. She had four grandchildren.

Sonja Baruh worked in a number of organisations and institutions. She died in Italy in 1999 and was buried there.

She was the recipient of a number of decorations and society awards.

I don't know how far I am capable of separating my life from that of the family in which I was born and raised and which I lost before I had realised what having a family means, or from the family which I created and again lost, this time in a different, but equally painful way.

I don't know how far I am capable of separating my life from that of the country in which I was born because we are, perhaps precisely because we are Jews, perennial wanderers, deeply devoted to the soil in which we take root, to which we come to live and on which we feel "at home". More so than those who have been given this as their natural and inalienable right.

The Požarevac of my birth... March 5, 1922... a small town... a location... a village... there's not much of it I remember. It's with Niš and Belgrade I connect my childhood... mine and the childhood of my three elder brothers, my younger sister and my elder sister. My fourth brother, Haim, died as a child. The memory of him has faded.

We had to move frequently... father was a tailor for the army and the state, he was often transferred... and sometimes we had to move because we had no money to pay the rent.

Niš, a flood in which we lost, overnight, our house, furniture, everything... a dress rehearsal of what awaited us. These are the memories of my earliest childhood.

My mother Bulina, her hands always full with work, with children.

I remember the stories from her past and her childhood in Vidin as I remember her head bowed over a darning mushroom, mending socks... Out of these unrelated fragments and memories there springs, as though from a fairytale, a grassy yard near the Vidin synagogue, with a huge cherry tree in the middle. My grandfather, her father, was a cantor at the *kal* and assisted at the rituals of slaughtering cattle and other animals. I remember her explaining to me, this way, what "kosher" meant, although we were never great traditionalists.

The sweetest story from her girlhood was that of how she married my father Ilija (Elijahu) Baruh, a Belgrade tailor.

Her Serbian was odd – a strange mixture of Serbian, Bulgarian and Sephardic words and we would often tease her about this. Despite that, it is as though I see a young girl wearing glasses, as do all we Baruhs. I see her secretly, being careful not to be seen by her father, climb the cherry tree with a book in her hand so she can read in peace. At that time, in the 1880s, in little Vidin, reading books wasn't exactly the best recommendation for a girl of marriageable age.

One such summer afternoon she heard that someone had come to visit her parents. She decided to stay in the tree at any cost and so avoid the inevitable coffee making, the serving of sweets. Later, as the dusk thickened, her father's voice recalled her from the world of imagination in which she had submersed herself while reading.

Elijahu (Ilija) and Bulina Baruh with their sons Isa (standing) and Bora (on her lap) in Belgrade, 1912

There was nothing she could do. She climbed down and learned that she had just been promised in marriage. Her future husband, Ilija Baruh, a tall, well-built young man with a thick moustache was not very talkative (and what use would it be if he was in any case, when she still didn't speak Serbian!). He took her to Belgrade. Could she count on love and happiness? What was she hoping for? This she never told

us, but her long letters to her brothers in Vidin testified to the great love and longing she felt for her home.

Many things about her life remained a mystery to us, only hinted at through the Sephardic songs which she softly sang to us before bedtime, a life rolled up in a little bundle in which she kept her father's *kipa*, and a bundle of the faded letters she had once exchanged with her brothers.

DORĆOL, MY CENTRE OF THE WORLD

Our life was rich in events, laughter and loud conversations, the constant comings and goings of brothers and sisters, the constant concern about money. Sometimes it seemed to me that I didn't exist as an individual, we were important as a family, as a group of individuals who didn't just live beside one another but also because of one another.

Bulina with her six children. From left to right: Joži, Bora, Isa, Šela, Sonja and Bela. Požarevac, 1925

In a large family the elder ones are important. If I were to say that I was brought up more by my brothers than by my parents, that I looked up to them, I wouldn't be wrong.

How could my mother pay enough attention to everyone? Whoever gets up first is better dressed and gets more attention, love; one after another we grew up holding close to one another.

We were bonded by a great love. With music, books, paintings and poverty I came to love and grow very close to the people who surrounded me more than I felt alienated and labelled as a Jew.

In 1929 we all finally moved to Belgrade again.

Dorćol became for me the centre of the world.

Closed yards with taps in the middle, surrounded by houses whose windows, overlooking the balcony, faced the white sails of washing, slender blades of grass between the stone cobbles in which the courtyards were paved, the grass thick and green only around the tap, the laundry copper breathing steam in the cold winter morning, the neighbourhood which linked us all in fate: all this gave my childhood a feeling of security, despite the poverty and the constant struggle. We were together.

Dorćol was a Balkan melting-pot. As well as Jews there were Serbs, Turks, Gypsies, Albanians... we were united not only in poverty but also by a deep feeling of understanding and warmth. At least that's the way it seemed to me.

Life began to settle into a routine.

ARRESTS: MY FAMILY'S JOURNEY OF NO RETURN

My three brothers at their studies: books and learning were sacred in our house. Isidor-Isa graduated as a technological engineer, Baruh-Bora finished law (although painting was his only true interest and passion), Josif-Joži studied philosophy and Rašela-Šela chemistry. There was never enough money: my brothers studied and worked, they delivered milk, gave lessons and, of course, worked for the Party.

The first arrest happened early, in 1934: Joži, because of the demonstrations for autonomy in his faculty.

It was followed by his departure for the camp in Višegrad. This was just the beginning and would mark, until 1941, the journey of no return for me and my family into the tragedy which followed.

But there were some good times. Bora won a scholarship and in 1935, once he had graduated from law school, went to Paris to study painting. A brother who loved me, whose love and protection kept me warm.

That same year father again lost his job, finally this time, not only because he was a Jew but mainly because of the Communist activities of his sons. This time it wasn't so easy to get back on our feet. The

reason is not completely clear to me – I was too young to understand – but we saw his departure from home to Sarajevo to look for a job as his withdrawing from us. This was very difficult for us at the beginning, but people can get used to anything. My mother and the six of us (Haim had already died) continued our day-to-day struggle for survival.

Arrests, police surveillance... these were the years of my youth. There were Party meetings in our house, clandestine and dangerous, at which we youngest kept guard, ran messages and gave signals if some agent approached. These only served to strengthen my bond with my family and my awareness of the world surrounding us.

My older sister, Šela, was forced to drop her studies and she found a job at the Elka factory. In 1937, as a union worker, she was arrested and taken to Glavnjača and to the camp on Ada Ciganlija. There was a happy moment after she was released: her wedding to Lazar Simić. Great love and shared passion for the Party and the struggle. Their witnesses at the wedding were Anđa and Aleksandar Ranković... my family grew and filled my world.

News from Paris: Bora was painting, and managing to sell something from time to time... he fell in love and was married! He was exposed for cooperating in sending fighters to Spain and he was banished from Paris.

He too served time in Glavnjača... And my mother, my younger sister Bela and I were detained and interrogated on suspicion of collaborating with the Comintern.

That, too, was youth. With my sixteen years, in 1938 I felt that I belonged to something greater and more important than Sunday dances and chatting in patisseries. Of course I also left school, partly because of the persecution to which I was exposed and partly because of the constant lack of money. By working, at least I contributed something to the household, but more important than that was the satisfaction that by doing this I was closer to the things my brothers and sisters were fighting for.

My first employment was in the Darling dressmaking salon in Uskočka Street, my first salary... In September, 1938, I joined Polet, through Rada Levi, who was later shot in Banjica. Polet, although officially a sports association, was on the inside a collection of young, progressive, courageous and wonderful people who, in 1939, founded the first SKOJ organisation in Belgrade. The members included Jaša

Rajter, Rade Kušić, Moša Bošković, Branko Tasovac, Milada Rajter and Agnesa Sas.

This was the best part of my youth: our excursions, lectures, the drama club, working with younger children – all this, along with a great deal of laughter and a feeling of belonging made it easier to bear the grey and arduous days which hung over the whole progressive society in our country, and the Jews in particular.

BROTHERS IN CAMPS, BEFORE THE WAR

Harsh winter, December 1940. I remember these days by the police raid in our apartment. They took Bora and Joži to the Bileća camp, while Isa and Šela went underground. What could my younger sister and I do but continue their work? We collected money to help the inmates in Bileća, took them food, organised help for the comrades who had lost their jobs because of politics.

Years of fear and danger, but also of hope and satisfaction, which is difficult to understand for anyone who didn't share this feeling of belonging and dedication, boundless confidence in friends and a courage in one's own convictions.

The situation peaked on March 27, 1941, when from inside all of us a great dissatisfaction erupted, a feeling of rebelliousness and the determination not to succumb to what had already pitched half of democratic Europe into the darkness of Fascism. My friends from Polet and I were among the first there. Youth and truth, rebelliousness and the desire to change the world made no distinction between Jews and non-Jews, there was only a huge abyss between those who wanted freedom and those who, out of fear, were prepared to make any kind of compromise.

The bombing of Belgrade on the spring morning of April 6, 1941.

My new, freshly-ironed dress was hanging on the wardrobe ready for an outing we had planned for that day. It fluttered in the wind where three of our apartment walls had been as an enormous cloud of dust carried our hope and youth irretrievably away.

Whenever I think of that day when, for the last time, even if just for a moment, our family was together, I see this dress of mine exposed to the whole world... I see a wound on my city, on my country, I see the rubble of the youth of thousands and thousands of people who were born in that place and that time...

DREAMS AND A WORLD UNDER THE RUBBLE

What remained buried under the rubble were dreams and a whole world which would never again emerge. In the Balkans the phoenix is exhausted from too many fires.

The shelter in the basement of the Elka factory. My mother, a queen bee, with my sisters and brothers gathered around. They escaped from their prisons under the bombing. My sister-in-law Elvira, little Žan, Bora's son.

That morning everything was scattered, like a reflection in the water shattered by an enormous stone, thrown from the hand of a giant arrogant brat. We scattered, some underground, some into the Partisans, some fled. Words in dry mouths, not comprehending that all of this around us is the truth, not just a bad dream from which we can awake by the power of will. This nightmare, this night, went on and on. To this day I sleep with my door open, in case all those who walked out of my life that day walk back in, in case I have to run again.

Thousands of times I have replayed those images, those sounds, that pungent taste of death and destruction in the air, the howling of the sirens and the dull rumbling of the bombers in the Belgrade skies.

Not for the last time, unfortunately! And the latest rape of our freedom, some new sounds of bombers, some new abyss, some new despair. The summer of 1999 is only *déjà vu*, I hope the last I have to survive. Or is it?

And what happened to us on that April morning in 1941? What didn't!

Šela and her husband were in Belgrade, underground. They were working on the production of hand grenades and taking part in various operations. Explosions in the underground workshop, their flight through basements and yards... bloody and blinded. Their bloody tracks gave them away: they were caught and executed in Banjica. Just days before this explosion Šela managed to inform me that Isa was dead and Joži wounded. His death was the price of the Užice Republic and the first liberated territory in Europe! I kept these deaths to myself, because this news would have been demoralising for many people, especially my mother. Still, I couldn't believe it. I was to learn much later about Bora's activities in Užice, about his death. Because, from the first moment when my brothers managed to join the first Partisan units... within just a few months... they were no longer alive.

My younger sister, my mother and I were the only ones who had remained alive... for now. The grindstone of death turned relentlessly and there were so few of us left in the narrow groove of the stone.

Each of my family members who was killed could have written a novel about the last months of their lives. Every month has thirty days and every day has 24 hours in which each minute lasts an eternity while the awareness of certain death implants itself inescapably in our thoughts.

I don't believe any of the four of them had any illusion that they would return alive, although this certainty is often blurred by the instinctive hope for survival.

Bora had a son, a wife... Joži had a fiancée, Nada Ćurčić. Šela had a husband... life had only given a hint of itself to them. For me and Bela it had not yet even begun. For my mother, her life was only worth as much as ours were, and she had to be protected from the knowledge of what was happening to us.

Sonja Baruh, 1944

December 10, 1941, arrived, the day we were to report to the camp at Sajmište.

At five in the morning we were ready to go underground and join the Partisans. Another parting, the last with what was left of my family.

Months passed. Dozens of rooms, hideouts, people whose names we weren't allowed to know in case we were caught, contacts, people to whom we owe our lives and a lot more – we owe them our faith in human beings.

We no longer had our own identity. Instead, with false identity papers, subconsciously we began to assume a different consciousness... the pain is such and so great that the less one remembers and thinks, the easier it is to bear. The day of the review was approaching, when all apartments were to be searched.

I, at the time, was Dragica Vučković, allegedly born in Sarajevo in 1926, a refugee... The fact that I was skinny and short allowed me to

pass for four years younger. Now even sheds in people's yards were no longer safe, nor ruins, nor basements.

The 1942 "March revelations", the day the press published the names and photographs of comrades who had been exposed as connections, was the last call to flee Belgrade. My contact was also among the names. I got documents for travel and set off by train towards south Serbia, without a plan, carrying my diary and a few photographs as my only connection with the outside world and my last connection with what had once been my world... and a chaos of memories and images which mixed with the events of the recent, unreal past. Belgrade lay behind me in ruins, desolate and deadly, while ahead lay a frozen tundra of uncertainty.

My only certainty was the knowledge of the death of my brothers and sister, while the fate of my mother and my younger sister was in the hands of my comrades. It was not until much later that I would learn where that fate was to take them.

I read in the papers that there was a camp for refugee children in Leskovac and made for there. In the train an elderly man chatted to me and offered to help me find a job in Jagodina. Can one accidental encounter have the power to turn someone's life around? He recommended me, through a woman, for work as a maid in the house of Dragi Bošković. Before the train stopped in Jagodina I had made my decision. It would be better to hide in a house than to be exposed to questioning. What if they asked me for details there in the camp?

NEST OF VIPERS

Sonja Baruh set off from Belgrade with Dragica Vučković's identity card and, in Jagodina, Dragica Vučković stepped off the train with painful memories of Sonja Baruh, of twenty years spent in a dream because now what was happening had become the reality.

I got the job! It was only a few days later that I realised I was in a nest of vipers.

My boss was a Nedić man, a Fascist, the chief of the Jagodina district, formerly the police chief of Skopje. I was trapped.

My identification document and travel papers were in his hands, and so was I! In my hands were his two children, and I felt a special affection towards little Magdalena. Children! In them I found my allies, my sanctuary. Is it possible to describe something more than

physical harassment, that something more which leaves indelible traces? My heart pounded and buzzed in my ears when I heard the most abusive language used to describe Partisans, Communists and Jews. My days and nights were filled with impotent rage. It accumulated enough poison for not just one but a hundred lifetimes. I swore that never again would I tell a single lie, that never again would I swallow another insult.

People in battle could react, although they were in much worse conditions, they could give vent to the terrible pressure of humiliation and the inability to return an injustice. I tried to look at this from another angle. I collected information from what I managed to hear in informal discussions and decided to find a connection, a way to get this information through to our people. I found out which routes were being used to send assistance to the Chetniks, I found out who they were suspicious about.

I even found a contact! The risk was enormous. I didn't know the man, but he seemed to me like someone who could be trusted. He was Judge Dević. He often asked me questions about what was going on in our house. Pretending to be naive, I told him all the information I had collected, precisely and in detail. German officers would come to the house, there were official lunches. General Böm attended one of them.

The lion's den in which I was living was, nevertheless a source of information for our people. I was finally able to give some meaning to my misery. Just the same, preparing lunch for Fascist leaders was too much.

There were two hand grenades and a revolver in a room to which I had access, but I simply didn't know how to use them. Poison also crossed my mind. But which poison?

One opportunity passed me by. In February, 1944, a band of Chetniks invaded Jagodina and, during the night, slaughtered 177 people, including Judge Dević. I was left all alone in my own hell.

The days passed one by one, and only the children grew. I tried not to see them as the children of Fascists. I came to love them, although at the same time I feared their questioning looks, their unconsciously dangerous comments and questions. My shelter became a trap and it was closing on me all the time. In the meantime, my nerves had become so strained that suicide was the first thought which

came to my mind when I awoke and the last when I went to bed. I don't know what kept me going.

The lists with the names of Partisans who had been executed or otherwise killed which I sometimes found around the house, news about the crimes committed by the Chetniks in Jagodina and the surrounding villages, the discovery of the death of my brothers and sisters and the uncertainty of my mother's fate and that of so many other relatives and friends, this was a huge, far too huge a burden for me. It took me so much effort to restrain myself every day, 24 hours a day, to identify with Dragica! Once the curtains go down, actors can go back to their own lives, although sometimes the one they temporarily adopt feels comfortable for them. My role was difficult and odious, so far from me, yet the curtain never seemed to fall. If I happened to become confused, forget my lines or change them, a far more brutal punishment than rotten eggs would await me: it would be torture and death.

My employer was becoming more and more suspicious. Once, when a group of Chetniks arrived at the house unexpectedly in his absence, I was certain that they had found me out and come for me. It was winter, and only the deep snow softened my fall when I jumped from the first floor window into the yard.

The tragic and the comic are never far apart: beneath the snow was a septic tank and my dramatic jump ended in the filthiest place I could think of. I feel like crying when I think that my life could have ended in a septic tank.

Fortunately they hadn't found out about me on that occasion, but it became all the more unbearable for me to wait passively for the liberation, with all this risk involved.

By three months before the liberation I had fallen into a deep depression. One evening my employers sent me to fetch fresh water from the Đurić hill.

While I fetched the water I also made an irrevocable decision. When I returned to the house I told them that I wanted them to let me go. They couldn't understand the reason for this and my employer insisted that I tell him. I had to provoke him until he finally shouted at me and said that he also wasn't overjoyed to have a maid who reads all night long.

Of course I couldn't tell him that, as well as reading the books from his library, I would also find among them some documents

whose contents I used to send to Davić, my connection. One of them also contained a list of the names of Communists from Skopje whom he had sent to prison. I was really delighted when I discovered after the liberation that all this information I had supplied had been passed on to the illegal Party organisation, that at least I had been of some use.

Finally I saw losing my job as a liberation from the worst kind of imprisonment and left the house in which, despite the fact that I had survived, I had left behind my life, my nerves and my strength. I moved in with the Satirević family and, besides working for them, I also worked in other houses where I cleaned and ironed. I had the "luck" not to get any kind of recommendation from Bošković, only the remark that any person who left his employ didn't deserve to live or work!

From my clandestine listening to the radio, it had become clear to me that it was only a matter of days before our people entered Jagodina. The fact that the Soviet Army was getting closer alerted me to the need to flee the city and go out to meet the Partisans. In an uneasy suspense, on the night of October 17, 1944, our people and the Soviets liberated Jagodina.

BROTHERS AND SISTERS: MOVING INTO MEMORY

With the first light of dawn emerging around me and in me, having learnt where the district military command was, I went to report.

Years had passed since I had last said my name aloud: Sonja Baruh! I was even more delighted when I saw that the political officer of the military district was Tanasije Mladenović, my brothers' friend. He had known me as a little girl, but now a young woman stood before him, as tiny and skinny as she had always been, but strongly determined to finally place her life at the disposal of freedom and the future.

This was the happiest day I remember – my mobilisation! No longer the unbearable lie of hiding behind someone else's identity, the anxiety and despair, the fear and depression. I worked on the mobilisation of young people in Jagodina. My knowledge of the situation in the area was useful to the command and Commissar Mladenović

received detailed information about the crimes of the Chetniks in the past years and the names of the criminals.

There was only one, great and indescribable sorrow which kept dragging me to the depths each and every minute I was alone. Like an endless string of black holes in my universe, that was how the void, the absence, the death of my brothers and sisters hurt. Until that moment, not having any concrete proof apart from the scanty information I had received, I secretly hoped and, in the back of my mind, waited for them to return. Now, however, everything was certain: Joži, Isa and Bora, Šela and Bela were alive only in my memories.

As I put together the mosaic of my life in the years that followed, the centre of my existence, everything that was an integral part of me and my past had disappeared. Nothing and no one could fill the lacunae in the picture which, though full of details and colour, remained empty and destroyed forever. None of my own remained alive! There was only the hope that somewhere my mother was still alive. I asked Tanasije Mladenović to kindly allow me to go to Belgrade after October 20 in an attempt to discover something about her. Belgrade: the old and new ruins were just pieces of the stage setting in my tragedy. From Borka Nikezić and Đura Paripović, my pre-war comrades, I learned that my mother was alive! She was in Drugovac, a village near Požarevac, where they had found her a place to stay and taken care of her all this time.

In 1941, I had left my mother in Belgrade, a woman who had fought with all her heart and strength to keep her seven children together, to give us the strength to resist evil, but in Drugovac I now found an old woman, the shadow of my mother. For years she had hidden as a refugee from Romania, this was the only way in which she could explain her poor knowledge of our language, customs and religion. Walking unsteadily, with a broken left arm, without glasses. All these years she had been afraid to put them on, apart from a few, rare occasions when she introduced herself as a *daskalica*, a teacher.

As we returned to Belgrade, she told me how the Chetniks had broken her arm: one Sunday morning they chased everyone from the village into the church. She attempted to make the sign of the cross, but used her left hand by mistake, and paid with a blow from a baton.

KEEPING THE TRUTH FROM MY MOTHER

From the moment we met, until some time later, we were separated by a great secret: she did not know about the execution, the death of any of her children, while for me the disappearance of my sisters and brothers had become certain knowledge of their death.

Sonja with her daugher Dolores-Šela and son Isa in Zemun, 1962

I had someone, someone dearest to me, still alive, my mother! I had to protect her from the truth for which she was not yet strong enough.

I was transferred from Jagodina to Belgrade, to the propaganda division of the Supreme Headquarters, so that I could take care of my mother and protect her from discovering the tragedy. Most of the comrades who visited had been warned not to say anything. No newspapers were brought into our house, we never listened to the radio. She was waiting for them to return, and the tangle of lies we invented about secret missions became all the more convoluted. Liberated

Belgrade, and later the general liberation, began arousing the strength which had abandoned me.

Despite that, we who survived were still not alive.

All my life since then I have wondered how issues so miniature in scope can be important to people, how can they bicker over trivial matters. Is it possible, after everything that has happened, to live without love and tolerance? Can the new world we are building also contain the seeds of the darkness which destroyed the old one?

Two shipwrecked people adrift on a raft, my future husband Armando Moreno and I, didn't expect anything more than to try to resume life from the moment it was interrupted. One of us with more, and the other with less success. The first time music was heard in our house and a smile was coaxed onto my mother's face was in 1948 when my daughter Dolores-Šela was born.

Monument to the Baruh brothers and sisters in the Walk of Heroes in the New Cemetery. (Stone relief by Božidar Obradović)

Those many deaths began to retreat in the face of new life – or did a new life begin to grow in their shadow?

There was one dark area of our life which was never mentioned but which was constantly on our minds: my father's fate was unknown. The last news we heard about him was that he was alive, somewhere in Sarajevo, that he had managed to save himself thanks to the fact that he was living with a Muslim woman and had concealed his Jewish

identity. Whether he learned from the newspapers about his sons' death and that mother and I were still alive, I don't know. One morning, unexpected and unannounced, he turned up on our doorstep.

It was a painful meeting. I wanted at all costs to avoid him seeing my mother, who was only just managing to maintain her mental balance. That was the last time we saw each other... I still keep the watch he gave me that day.

Work, divorce and my second marriage to Solomon-Moni Alkalaj and happiness at the birth of my son Isa in 1958 finally brought me back to life. Now I, too, had a family again and my children would learn what it meant to have brothers and sisters, what great power it is that gives people a feeling of security when they find in their family, the one they have chosen and not just that based on blood relations, the confirmation of their values, love and warmth.

The years passed and grandchildren arrived, Leo, Igor, Simon and Jovana. Like a forest after a destructive fire, life was returning to my desert.

I began to paint. Every stroke of my brush was a memory of my brothers and sisters. I began to write, so that I could leave these memories to my children and grandchildren and anyone who doesn't hide from the truth and wants to use it to protect themselves from evil. Until 1991, when the ground began to shake, when life began to scatter away, until my children and grandchildren left Belgrade. Dolores and her three sons to Italy, and Isa to Israel. I understood their reasons – my life had served as a clear enough signpost for them to move their children away from the winds of war and senseless divisions. In no time at all I was also left without the country into whose fate I had woven myself, without my children and the laughter of my grandchildren, without Moni Alkalaj, my husband, who died just a year too soon to see his grandson and namesake, little Moni, born in Jerusalem.

Could I really find the strength to begin all over again, to become reconciled and to wait, to fight and to understand?

No. I buried myself in my solitude and sorrow, fixed myself to the past and, in the cave of events, waited for it to pass.

The beginning of the end of 1999 was, for me, also the end of life. I didn't want to go down to the shelters. I stayed in my

apartment in my Dorćol with my son and night after night listened again... AGAIN!

For the last time I thought that perhaps I should not have survived after all, so that I would not have to watch all this once more. For the last time I looked at the Belgrade sky lit up with anti-aircraft missiles on their curved trajectories; for the last time I watched my Danube burn in the roaring of the aircraft and the ghastly wail of the sirens.

They pulled me out of Belgrade and took me to the false security of Italy. The only good thing about this was that my children were there.

While the newsreaders promised, in Italian and English, the efficient destruction of my dreams and the coup de grace for a past which had already been destroyed, with the last remnants of my strength I tried to understand.

I couldn't, and nor do I believe it is possible.

The two warm arms of my children were all that held me to the thread of life which no longer meant anything to me.

Liberation from physical pain and death would bring me peace, if only I could be sure that the constant, never-ending destruction of life could be stopped.

Can these lines help do that?

Despite the fact that we have survived, we will be alive only when life becomes something more than merely existing.

"And everything went to hell!" Those were the last words my children heard from me. I should have liked to be able to tell them something else.

I hope that they will to their children.

Maks ERENRAJH

LIFE-THREATENING ROMANCE

Maksimilijan-Maks Erenrajh was born on March 15, 1921, in Travnik (Bosnia and Hercegovina), to Josif Erenrajh and Ljubica, née Ostojić. He has an elder sister, Nada, married Jovanović.

His grandmother and his father's two sisters, who lived in Vienna, perished in the Holocaust, as did his father's brother and his wife, who lived in Paris.

Maksimilijan-Maks Erenrajh (Karlo Ostojić) is a well known author and long-time journalist for DUGA *magazine and weekly* NIN. *He has published a number of literary works and articles. For his novel* KARAKTERISTIKA *he received the 1999* NIN *critics award for the best novel in the Serbian language. He lives and works in Belgrade.*

For more than forty years he was married to Ljiljana Grujić who died recently.

His great-grandfather's brother, Moses Levi Ehrenreich, was rabbi of Rome and chief rabbi of Italy. He also taught the Old Testament to the heir to the Italian throne and was a senior lecturer in this subject at the University of Rome. His grandfather, a Belgrade banker, received the highest award, the Takovo Cross, from King Milan and the highest decoration, the Golden Mecidiye from the Turkish sultan for loans and assistance in building the Niš-Istanbul railway line.

One period of my biography, that covering the time of occupation from 1941 to 1945, could not be adequately understood without explaining in detail the earlier periods, from the year of my birth up to the eruption of World War Two. This is the main reason I go back here to the first years of my life.

I was born in 1921, in Travnik, where my father was the district chief. I was christened in the Catholic Church of Christ the King and my baptism certificate reads that my father was a Catholic, born in Vienna in 1889, and that my mother, who was born in Mostar, was an Orthodox Christian. My other name, Karlo, was given after my godfather Karlo Zajdel, a lawyer from Vienna, my father's best friend from primary school. The certificate also reads that my father was an Austrian citizen, as am I. My father died in 1930, at the age of 41.

As district chief, my father worked in six different towns until 1927, mostly in Bosnia. Because he had to move around so much, he left this job and settled in Belgrade where my grandfather, the director of a branch office of the Austrian Lender Bank lived. Two years later my father passed the Bar examination and was employed in the law office of Jakov Čelebonović, my grandfather's friend. From my discussions with Čelebonović when he returned after emigrating to Switzerland, I learned that, when he arrived in Belgrade in the 1880s, he was employed in my grandfather's bank and, as a bank employee, he won a scholarship to complete his law studies abroad. Through Milan Bernard, a Jewish manager at the Franco-

Maks Ehrenrajh's mother, Ljubica Ostojić, about 1910

Serb Bank in Belgrade, I learnt that, thanks to his Vienna connections, my grandfather had arranged for Čelebonović to be legal representative of the princely Austrian family Thurn und Taxis in their law suit with the Kingdom of Yugoslavia over a huge expanse of woods in Slavonija worth 200,000 dinars in the currency of the day. Čelebonović won the case.

Čelebonović also acquainted me with certain information about my grandfather's activities: it was thanks to him that the Lender Bank gave the Weifert Brewery, through the First Serbian Credit Bank, a large loan for the modernisation of outdated plant. According to Čelebonović, my grandfather also played an important role in arranging finance for the construction of the Belgrade-Niš railway. As representative of the Lender Bank he was involved in negotiations between a consortium of major European banks and Serbia and, after the loan was approved, by agreement with both sides, he was appointed supervisor of the Serbian state monopoly's revenues in order to secure the funds for the repayment of the loan. It is of interest to note that Čelebonović never once made any reference to my grandfather's origins: for him he was simply an Austrian. Čelebonović's son Aleksa, a painter and art historian who I used to see after the second world war, was later very surprised to learn that my grandfather was of Jewish origin.

When we arrived in Belgrade, my father enrolled me in the German primary school because, all things considered, he felt it was very important that, unlike my sister, I was brought up as a German. To this end he bought the most appropriate books in German, such as Grimm's *Fairy Tales* with miraculously beautiful colour illustrations, an abridged version of the *Nibelunglied*, also with illustrations, and poems for children my age. There were many Serbs and Jews at the school. Some of those who were at school with me were Milutin Garašanin, Gradimir Bajloni, Aleksandar Đermanović, whose father was a well-known lawyer and mother a German cellist in the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra, and Ljubica Đorđević, the daughter of a prominent academician. At the time Hitler was still only fighting for power and the evil spirit of anti-Semitism had still not been felt at school. It was thanks to all this that I was very familiar with and felt very close to German culture, although not to the point where I would forget my mother's roots. Siegfried coexisted with Kraljević Marko and Brunhilde with Fairy Ravijojla. The turning point came after my father's death in 1930 when my mother took over my education. At the

age of eighteen I felt much more a Serb than a German, however, because of my documents, when I appeared before the draft board in 1940 it was as a Belgrader of German nationality.

WITH ARYAN PEERS

When my grandfather noticed that I had forgotten a great deal of my German, he decided that my sister and I should spend the summer of 1936 among our Austrian peers: me in a summer resort for Vienna secondary school students in St Wolfgang and my sister in Waldhausen. I had the impression that the great majority of my peers were pro-German, that is to say Hitler-oriented. There was no dangerous tension, nor conflicts, but lively debates could be heard. The most ardent and aggressive was the extremely blond Karl Heinz, who was rather reserved toward me from the very beginning, probably because of my surname, and a little later he asked me directly if I was a Jew. I said that I wasn't, but this did not reassure him and he continued with almost a police-style interrogation.

"Where do your parents live?" he asked me.

"In the Thirteenth District, Hitzinger Haupstrasse."

"Of course, the street of the Vienna Jews. What more is there for me to ask," he replied, walking away almost angrily. From then on, he never said another word to me and, when we passed each other, I saw contempt if not downright hatred in his eyes.

It's interesting that one of the group, a Viennese boy, liked to spend time with me. He was short and had short, black hair with tight curls. I remember his name was Moritz. Even his face indicated his Jewish origins. Whether he felt instinctively that I, too was of Jewish origin, or whether he wanted my company in order to some extent to protect himself in the shadow of my height from his Aryan peers who were ready to play practical jokes on him from time to time, remains a mystery to me.

The summer in Sankt Wolfgang was important for me because, for the first time in my life, I was suspicious about my father's German origin. Immediately after I returned to Vienna I asked my Granny Beti and my Aunt Maria Theresa over lunch: "Are we Jews?"

My grandmother pretended not to hear the question, while my grandfather said "Nonsense!" But the next day my aunt took me to the huge Gerngross department store to buy me a pair of short Tyrolean

trousers, probably to let me know that I was Austrian. However this garment did not wipe my suspicions out. I returned to Belgrade with some relief. My mother's presence, and her Hercegovina dialect, certainly held my doubts at bay, at least for some time. I admit I felt that knowing I was Jewish on my father's side would have been quite painful for me at the time. I would have had to change some of my opinions, show greater respect for my Jewish friends and, together with them, put up with a lot of unpleasantness incurred simply because someone is born a Jew rather than a German or Englishman.

Maks Erenrajh, 1944

Immediately after Austria joined Germany, my aunt Maria Theresa arrived to ask Čelebonović personally to have his lawyer take care of all the legal formalities required for my grandfather's estate. When she opened her suitcase in front of me, I was shocked to see a large Star of David on the inside of the lid! It had once been sewn onto the lining of the suitcase lid and later removed, but the mark of the star remained visible. "Weren't you afraid to have this star when you crossed the border where German customs officers and police are now stationed?" I asked her.

She shrugged her shoulders: "I didn't think about it. The suitcase is from the time I spent summer in Italy with my mother". That day I realised, more clearly than ever before, that my father was a Jew. What was still not clear to me was why his parents had decided to change their religion.

GERMAN OR JEW?

I then threw myself into a physiognomical and anthropological analysis of my father's immediate family and more distant relatives. My grandmother, Barbara-Beti, née Ehrenreich, because she and my grandfather were the children of two brothers, was a typical Ashkenazi Jew, short, her nose hooked at the end and protuberant in the upper

part, thick lips. She had blue eyes, the colour of many Jewish women. Aunt Maria Theresa took after them, so did Aunt Frederika, but a little less, it was only about Aunt Margarita, with her blond hair. that one could say she might be German. Alma von Poliakoff, my grandfather's niece, was one of those typical black-haired Jews. As for my grandfather, Edvard, just by looking at his rather parrot-like nose one could say that he was of Semitic origin. I saw Josef Reis, the son of my grandfather's sister for the first time before the war. He was a Romanian citizen who spent more time in Paris than he did in Bucharest, he was the prototype of an Ashkenazi Jew. Still, even after this analysis I was not quite certain about my father's extraction: there was still the possibility, I believed, that I was German.

The very same day the German troops began arriving in Belgrade I realised, late in the afternoon, that as soon as they arrived the Germans would search the premises of the Anglo-American Club in Devojačka Street (now called Andrićev Venac) and I was a member of the club. I was horrified at the thought that, if no one had destroyed the files and the register with the names of the club members, then the Germans could easily get their hands on the members' addresses and immediately arrest them. I didn't hesitate. I rushed off from Kneza Miloša Street to Devojačka Street, where I found both the gate and the club door open. Someone had already been in the premises before me. I came to this conclusion because the little doors of the cabinet and the drawers were open. Probably thieves who had thought they could get their hands on some valuable loot. They hadn't touched the drawer with the files nor the register of club members. I wasted no time: there was a fireplace in the clubrooms. I tore up all the compromising material, threw it into the fireplace and set it alight. In no time all traces of the information were burnt to ashes. Just as I was about to leave I heard, through a broken window, a car pull up. I looked out and, to my horror, saw two German officers get out of a motor vehicle, some kind of German jeep. I had just enough time to get to the ground floor before they entered. I escaped through the open or broken door of the patisserie (Mendragić's, I think) into Kralja Milana Street, and got away before the Germans noticed that someone had beaten them to it. And so I saved myself on the very first day of the occupation and, by saving myself, I believe I saved the other club members.

Two days later two printed notices appeared on telephone poles, on the walls of houses and wooden fences. One was for Jews and the other for Germans. The first explained which people were considered to be Jews – any citizen who had three ancestors of Jewish religion out of four. Such citizens were to report at Tašmajdan. Failure to do so would attract the death penalty. In the other notice, citizens of German nationality were asked to immediately report to 25 Brankova

Maks' grandfather Edvard Ehrenreich with his grandson Heinz, the son of his daughter, Margareta Dorndorf, nee Ehrenreich. (Dorndorf is also a Jew)

Street; a German was any person who had at least one German parent. I was faced with an enormous dilemma: I had two Aryan ancestors so didn't have to report as a Jew but, because of my German father, I was required to report in Brankova Street. I hesitated for a

few days and finally plumped for the German option. When I walked out of the building in Brankova Street as a Belgrade *Volksdeutscher*, I felt like a traitor to all those generations of Jews and Serbs who had come into this world and left it faithful to their past, to their religion, to their tradition. I was returning to my mother and sister, Serbs, as a member of the German ethnic group, and the registration certificate read that I was obliged to return to Brankova Street a month later in order to get an identification document which would confirm my national affiliation. These were the most agonising days of my life. Luckily they didn't last long. Soon afterwards, the Germans sank the Hood, Britain's biggest and deadliest warship. I was deeply shaken by this event and decided not to report as a German again, despite all the potential consequences.

IN THE HEART OF THE GESTAPO

In mid-May, 1941, I found employment in the Weifert Brewery, for which my grandfather, as director of the branch office of a large Vienna bank, had secured a rather large loan for modernisation of the production facilities. Because of my knowledge of German and because I had completed secondary school, the management decided that I should be assistant head of the warehouse. This was a good position in which I would not be much exposed during the war, so no one in the brewery, not even Doctor Granberg, Weifert's nephew, knew about my father's true origin. One day, at the end of autumn 1941, Granberg invited me to a fine villa within the brewery compound for a special task. He handed me a white envelope and told me that the brewery's motor tricycle would take me to the city, to the Serbian Gestapo headquarters in the building of the pre-war Military House. "Look here," he said, "you are to hand over this letter to Meissner, the head of the Gestapo, personally. He has already given the guards orders to take you to him." It was a bolt from the blue. To find myself in the very heart of the organisation so greatly feared by both myself and the people. I could hardly say that it was inconvenient for me, as a potential Jew, to carry out this mission. As we parted, Granberg added: "Give the general my regards!"

Everything happened just as Granberg had told me: a sergeant wearing a skull emblem escorted me to his commander's door, opened it and said from the doorway: "Dr Granberg's courier."

I expected to find myself before a man who looked appropriately cruel for one of the heads of an organisation which was synonymous with human evil. Instead I was standing before a fine and civilised-looking man. He looked like the film actor Curt Jurgens but his appearance and bearing were rather more refined. Was it possible that someone form the Gestapo could look like this, I thought, as I tried to collect myself and explain to him the point of my visit. He saw my confusion and smiled slightly, probably used to visitors behaving this way. I handed the letter to him with my trembling hand and repeated Granberg's words. Later I learnt that a number of women from the heights of Belgrade society had been unable to resist the Gestapo general's charms. These included two sisters from a well-known family: both were his mistresses and both were shot after the liberation. After completing this task, satisfactorily it seems, I took letters to General Meissner on another two occasions, and twice also to General Turner, the Belgrade commander. I also went once to the Parliament building, but can't remember the name of the colonel to whom I gave Granberg's letter. For a long time I didn't understand the real reason I was playing the go-between for a respectable, wealthy Belgrade German and figures from the highest echelon of the occupying authorities. It was only after the war ended that I discovered that Granberg and his uncle, Weifert, were respectable members of the Masonic lodge, so the conclusion could be drawn that Masonry was perhaps represented in the highest circles of the Wehrmacht.

Granberg apologised to me after the war when I explained my father's Jewish ancestry. "You can be sure that I would not have sent you on such a mission had I known about your father's origin. I attended your grandfather's funeral and, if I'm not mistaken, it was a Catholic service. You know, with each of those letters you contributed to saving a human life."

In addition to my visits to General Meissner, I went to the Gestapo headquarters another twice: the first in order to give evidence, and the second because I had been denounced as a Jew. On both occasions I exposed myself to the danger of my Jewish origins being disclosed. But before I proceed I must address a very dramatic episode from the occupation phase of my biography.

WITNESS AGAINST A FRIEND

At the beginning of 1942, I met N. at a party, a girl a little younger than I. She was particularly dark-haired and it was perhaps precisely because of this that I was attracted to her. From that day on we began seeing a lot of each other, largely at my insistence. I fell in love. She was the daughter of a respected Belgrader and lived in their family villa in Kotež Neimar. After matriculating she had opted for art – singing and theatre. Because it was a very harsh winter we often went to the cinema or to patisseries, we preferred one in the premises of what is now a bookstore in the building of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences, famous for its *indijaneri* and *torte*. We usually sat at a table up in the gallery, the favourite place for couples. Sometime in the middle of March she told me to listen to Radio Belgrade at five in the afternoon because she would sing the *Habanera* on an entertainment program.

She spoke in a beautiful, deep voice. Obviously she was imitating Zara Leander, the Swedish star who was then at the height of her career. I listened to her another two or three times, growing more downcast as I realised that I was investing far deeper feelings into this relationship than she was.

One lovely March afternoon we were going for a walk when we ran into a close friend of mine from secondary school, Aleksandar Jovanović. They laughed when I introduced them and, instead of shaking hands, embraced. They had known each other as children but hadn't seen each other for a long time. "How are your mother and your brothers?" she asked.

"Branko and mother are with me and Mima is with the Partisans," he replied.

"That's what I would expect," she said. As we parted from Aleksandar, N. said "You and Maks should come to my place tomorrow. My parents will still be in the countryside." We agreed.

The following day, late in the afternoon, Aleksandar and I went to her villa. She gave the impression she was pleased we had come. As could be expected, N. and Aleksandar began reminiscing about their childhood. When they had exhausted the subject, N. said "Let's listen to some songs, and dance, if you like." The *Habanera* was among the records.

She danced, it was immediately obvious, with more enthusiasm than us. And so we spent a pleasant afternoon talking, listening to music and dancing. After this, N. cut back on our meetings. We didn't see each other again until the end of March. There were enormous, wet snowflakes falling that afternoon. Because it wasn't exactly the weather for walking, I suggested we go to the cinema or to our favourite patisserie. She refused, but suggested she take me somewhere. I agreed. She was far more nervous than usual, and visibly distracted in this nervousness of hers.

The "somewhere" was a new, pre-war five-story building in what was then Frankopanova Street and is now called Resavska Street, second or third on the right from the corner of Kralja Milana Street. As we approached our destination I tried to take her hand, but she refused almost rudely. There was obviously something on her mind. Very soon, without talking, we arrived at our destination: across the road were the offices of the pre-war British Cultural Centre. We climbed the stairs, still in silence and stopped before a door. It was on either the first or the second floor, I no longer remember. She rang the bell vigorously and the door soon opened. A German sergeant appeared. "Hello, Willi," she said and, with no hesitation or explanation, began walking towards the room closest to us. "What are you standing there for," she said, having noticed that I was hesitating to cross the threshold. I followed her, confused, which didn't seem strange to Sergeant Willi.

It was warm in the room we entered, which was cramped rather than spacious and this added to the pleasant, intimate atmosphere. In the room there was a rather wide sofa covered with cocoa-coloured velour, two rather shell-shaped armchairs in the same colour and a small table with a Blaupunkt radio standing on it.

"Sit, what are you waiting for," she said, in a rather softer tone of voice. I sat on the sofa and she joined me. A wonderful opportunity for an outpouring of emotions, I thought, aware however that all this was incomprehensible, unexpected and so impossible. Then Willi knocked and, standing at the door, addressed N. "Brandy," she said. Turning towards me she asked "What will you have?"

"Tea," I replied, "with a little rum, if possible."

We were silent. Having seen through my plan to hold her hand in order to calm her down and let her know that my feelings for her remained unchanged despite Willi, in this warm room in which she

doesn't feel at all strange, N. quickly stood and went again to the window. It was obvious to me that she was avoiding any kind of intimate contact with me and any discussion of how and why we had found ourselves in an apartment which had clearly been requisitioned for senior German officers. At one point she moved away from the window, through which the wind could be clearly seen blowing away the large March snowflakes, and walked decisively towards the door. However she didn't open it. She stopped. It was as though she had changed her mind, had decided not to do what she had planned. Again she walked to the sofa and sat next to me, a little further away than the first time. Willi appeared soon after, deftly managing a tray with the tea and brandy. She drank nervously from the fine, conical little glass, letting me know with her silence that I should not begin a conversation. I listened to her, wanting to drink the warm, aromatic tea as soon as possible, hoping that everything would be clear as soon as we were out in the street again.

"Let's go," she said, when she saw that I had emptied my cup and that I was also anxious to leave this ambience. When we reached the street the dark had begun to fall. It was snowing a little less. She allowed me to slip my arm under hers for about a hundred metres, but only until we were across the street from the old officers' residence with its dome. "I'm going home," she said, "don't walk with me!" I was defeated by her behaviour.

"When shall we see each other?" I asked as she walked away, although I know that this was irrevocably the end and that nothing would change her decision. I watched her until her light grey coat sank into the dark, even before she reached the end of Manjež Park.

About twenty days later I heard that Aleksandar was in the Gestapo prison. No one knew why. And a few days later I, too, received a notice to appear at this notorious institution. What else could I do but respond to the summons in fear that they had perhaps discovered something about my father's origins. The investigator began with personal information. I said that my mother was Serb, my father German, avoiding describing him as Austrian. "So what is your nationality?" he asked me.

"I'm a Serb," I replied, "because my father died when I was nine and my mother raised me as a Serb." Luckily, I remember, he didn't make much of this, but asked me who my friends were. It was only then that I began to suspect that the Gestapo had called me in as a

witness in connection with Aleksandar's arrest. At first I avoided mentioning him, but when it became clear that it was he the investigator was aiming at I gave his name.

"All right," asked the investigator, "and what friends do you have in common?"

I was no longer hiding anything. "N.," I said. After that I had to tell him about Aleksandar and my meeting with N. and briefly describe that afternoon and what we did. I didn't conceal anything from him.

"Do you remember whether, in your presence, Aleksandar asked N. to get him some white oil paint so that he could write anti-German slogans?"

I was totally surprised by the question and by the discovery that N. could have accused Aleksandar of such a thing because, at the villa, N. and I had been together the whole time. I roundly rebutted N.'s claim, emphasising that Aleksandar had complained to me several times that he was having a lot of trouble because of his brother, who was a Communist.

"Do you really believe that I, a staunch anti-Communist, could be friends with a fanatical Communist?" I was resorting to lies to convince him, but it seemed that these words had worked. The investigator dropped the questioning but asked me, at the end, to confirm in the record my statement that I felt Serb, despite my father having been German. I walked out of the Gestapo, happy to be free again but uneasy because of the statement I had signed.

Not three days had passed when Aleksandar's brother, Brana, came to my home. "They let Aca out," he said while still at the door. "He's sick. He wants to tell you something very important."

We set off together to Karađorđeva Street where they lived. Aleksandar was in bed when I got there, his face haggard and pale. Obviously his time in the prison had worsened the damage to his lungs from the tuberculosis he had caught six months earlier. We had not even shaken hands when he said, his voice trembling. "N. denounced me. Can you imagine? They brought us face to face at the Gestapo! She was pretending that they had arrested her too. And you know why they arrested me? They claim that, when we were at N.'s place, I demanded that she get me some white oil paint so that I could write anti-German slogans. What a complete frame-up!" He told me

this in front of his brother and mother. Aleksandar died on the eve of the liberation.

I didn't see N. again for the rest of the war. In the meantime I tried to find out what had happened to her, but no one could tell me anything for certain. One person said that during the war she had been the mistress of the head of part of Radio Belgrade which was under army control and which became popular at precisely that time because it played the German song *Lili Marleen*. Someone else said that her lover had forced her to collaborate with the Gestapo and that this was the only way she could get a visa for Germany where she wanted to study. At that time the Allied bombers had not begun destroying German cities and factories.

And so it was only on the basis of this information that I could, to some extent, understand her behaviour. Everything indicated that she had only begun going out with me so that, as an Anglophile, I could be her victim when the time came. But in the encounter with Aleksandar, the brother of a well-known Belgrade Communist, she decided to pick her childhood friend as the victim instead of me. For some time she had to hesitate, to think about whether she should choose me or Aleksandar, and it was not until the afternoon in her lover's apartment that she decided who the victim should be. Had I been N.'s choice, this story of an unusual wartime romance would probably never have been told.

UNSOLVED MYSTERY

Not long after the war I was summoned by the War Crimes Commission. The Commission chairman asked me to testify against N., who had been arrested and charged with responsibility for the death of Aleksandar Jovanović. I tried to avoid doing this, but my efforts were in vain. The chairman cornered me: "I'm not asking you to explain what happened in 1942. I'm just asking you to repeat the words the deceased said to you in the presence of his brother and mother." There was no way out of this, although I didn't want to harm N. I gave evidence out of respect for Aleksandar's mother and brother. N. was convicted and sentenced, I think, to six years in prison, but released soon after because she was pregnant. I was unable to establish whether she spent time in Germany during the war, as people said. She was married soon after the liberation. When she was released

from prison, she graduated from the Philosophy Faculty at Belgrade University, divorced, went to Italy and married a famous Roman painter. She died of cancer in the sixties.

Many things are unclear about her relationship with me and Aleksandar. Why didn't she denounce me? I once confessed to her that I had destroyed the files of the Anglo-American Club and that I believed my father was of Jewish origin. Perhaps at the time she didn't understand how significant all this was. Why did she betray Aleksandar, her very close childhood friend? I never tried to obtain the indictment against her, but when my close friend was looking for documents about the trial of his father, a pre-war colonel from Army Intelligence who was sentenced to death, he discovered a record noting that I was the leading witness in the trial of Neuhausen, the general representative for the Serbian economy. During my relationship with N. I had said on one occasion that I occasionally visited Neuhausen because he was the person in charge of procuring material needed for the brewery. Nothing more than that. The mystery remains unsolved to this day.

A few months after the hearing of the "Aleksandar and N. case", I found myself once more in Gestapo headquarters, again as a witness, but this time as a witness to the truth about myself. As soon as I appeared before the investigator he asked me "Are you a German or a Jew?"

"You see, my father was a German, born in Vienna, and my mother is a Serb from Mostar. However, as I was only nine when my father died, over time I became a Serb." It seems to me that the investigator was somewhat confused by my reply.

"Do you have documents which show your father's religion and his origin, and that of his parents?" When I said I did he nodded and said "Then bring them here tomorrow."

For the first time in my life I opened my father's baptism certificate. TAUFSCHEIN (baptism certificate) was stamped on the front in large Gothic letters. Parents, Roman Catholic, godfather Teodor Riter fon Stefanović Vilovski of Vojvodina and of Serbian origin, who had made a thorough study of the hydrological situation in the zone of the Danube basin and is also known as a writer. I didn't see anything suspicious so the next day, almost calmly, I returned to the Gestapo. I handed the baptism certificate to the investigator. I could tell from the way he sat over it that he was examining it thoroughly and studying it.

Twice he seemed about to fold it and twice he hesitated to look at some item which he must have found suspicious or not clear enough. Then, with the certificate in his hand, he went to the adjacent office and, a few minutes later, returned with a serious-looking elderly man with very dark eyes. When he walked in he remained standing and immediately told me to stand up. I obeyed: first he observed my stature and height, then he came closer to look at my face. He was succinct. "The stature is Nordic, eyes grey-blue, hair light brown, but the forehead and the lips could be Semitic," he adjudged, and immediately walked out. The investigator began examining the certificate again, then folded it and returned it to me without a word. It was the end of August, perhaps the hottest day that summer, far too unpleasant for anyone to waste his energy solving a dilemma on which depended not the fate of the Third Reich, but the fate of a young man who had forgotten that he was German. Wiping the sweat from his forehead with a handkerchief, the investigator finally said "You may go."

As I made my way down the Gestapo stairs I wondered what it was that he was unsure about. According to my reading of it, my father's baptism certificate had nothing to accuse me, to expose me. I solved the mystery as soon as I left the building and opened the certificate: this time I immediately noticed what could have been a fatal oversight – my father had been born in 1889 but not baptised until 1894, five years later! This piece of information could have meant that my father had come into this world as a descendant of Moses. As I returned home I wondered what the investigator's attitude would have been had he known that my height and stature were determined by Hercegovinan genes rather than Jewish ones.

JEW UNDERLINED

I also dealt with the German military police just before the end of the occupation. I had stayed at a friend's place later than the curfew allowed and was unable to spend the night with my host so, despite the fact that it was later than the limit, I decided to try to somehow reach my street and my house. My awareness that the occupation was drawing to an end was responsible for my diminished caution and my excessive optimism that the night time adventure would end well. Right in front of the Voznesenska Church in Kneza Miloša

Street, in the half-darkness of the poorly lit street, I saw a very familiar silhouette: a pair of *Feldgendarmie*, the German military police.

"*Halt!*" one of them shouted. I obeyed, waiting for them to approach me.

"*Nachtausweis!*" the bigger one demanded. I didn't have a night pass, I only had the document which certified that I was employed in the brewery which supplied the *Wehrmacht*.

"This is not a *Nachtausweis*. If you don't have one, then we're taking you to the police." There was nothing I could do but resort to lies, playing on the sensitivity of the two Germans.

"I'm guilty," I said and began justifying myself. "I'm returning from my girlfriend's. You know my father is a German I'm not in the *Wehrmacht* ranks because I have tuberculosis and I live in this street." At 193 centimetres tall and weighing only 59 kilograms, I could easily give the impression of being very sick.

"Should we let him go?" the older and bigger of the two asked the other. He just nodded. No doubt their consciences were affected by the war psychology as well. Two months later, Belgrade was no longer an occupied city.

My origins could no longer drive me to death. It was not until the beginning of 1945 that I learnt, from Radio London and *Politika* that almost all the Jews in occupied Europe had died in concentration camps, most of them in Auschwitz. Among them were all my aunts and my uncle. My grandmother had died a natural death in Vienna before they began taking the Viennese Jews to Minsk, where they killed them in primitive gas chambers.

In 1986, after a persistent search, I finally discovered where and when the members of the Erenrajh family had perished. The international service for the identification of victims of the Holocaust in the German city of Arolsen informed me that all my relatives had been killed because they were Jews. The word "Jew" was underlined as though to eliminate any remaining doubt about my father's origins. What irony! While those nearest and dearest to me were still alive, their roots, their ethnic and religious affiliation were kept secret from me. Now they had disappeared in the fire and smoke of the Holocaust. And only now were all those things revealed to me: things like history and fate which determined the lives of the people among whose tragic members were so many generations of my father's ancestors.

Sava BOGDANOV

HOW LEA ROZENCVAJG SAVED HERSELF IN 1941

Lea Rozencvajg Bogdanov was born in Osijek on June 9, 1916, to Eduard and Olga Rozencvajg, née Braun. She had a brother Oto, two years older. All members of Lea's immediate family perished in the course of 1941. Her brother Oto immediately joined the Partisans and was killed in the very first clashes with the Germans. Her father and mother, as well as her paternal grandmother, who moved to Belgrade in 1938, were killed in the Sajmište and Topovske Šupe camps.

Lea became an active member of Hashomer Hatzair in 1934, preparing to move to Palestine. Having decided to postpone her aliyah until after she graduated, she enrolled in the Medical Faculty of Zagreb University in 1935. Lea was caught away from her family by the second world war. She is the only surviving member of her immediate and extended family.

During the war she worked as a nurse in refugee centres for children in occupied Serbia under the name Olgica Rodić. In the refugee centre in Aranđelovac she met Sava Bogdanov, whom she married in 1943. After the war Lea quickly finished the few exams she had left at the Medical Faculty and began specialising in microbiology. Over the years she became a recognised and respected scientist, physician and professor and received many scientific awards. She has a daughter, Branka, and a grandson, Borjan.

Dr Lea Rozencvajg, married Bogdanov, died in 1983 in Belgrade with the rank of retired colonel in the Yugoslav People's Army and professor of microbiology at the Military Medical Academy.

Even as a child, Lea's father Eduard Rozencvajg showed great interest in reading books. He was a bright boy who kept to himself. His parents decided to educate him. His mother, Marija (née Vajs, born 1860), took him to Budapest when he was fourteen to study to be a rabbi. He was admitted to the *heder* and so a search began for a family with whom Eduard could stay while he was at school. However for his mother no family was religious enough, kosher enough for her to leave her son with them. So, instead of studying to be a rabbi in Budapest, Eduard was sent to Osijek to study to be an assistant merchant. Sometime in 1913 he married Olga Braun. Their children were born not long after, first their son Oto, then their daughter, Lea.

Eduard and Olga Rozencvajg (sitting) with their son Oto and daughter Lea

Eduard Rozencvajg became a partner in Fachat & Friend, a shop selling men's accessories in Osijek, in about 1924. However, in this time of global crisis, the shop went out of business. Eduard took this very hard, withdrawing into himself and prayer. The family was now

left without income. His wife Olga proved very practical and soon took over the role of provider for the family. She began taking in laundry and ironing for other families. However she never allowed this to bother her, every afternoon she would get dressed and go to the City Cafe to meet her friends for coffee.

In 1938, Eduard found work with Vukojičić & Sons in Zemun. He moved to Belgrade with his wife and mother, who lived with the family. Their son Oto stayed in Osijek, where he had a job. Lea was studying medicine in Zagreb and supported herself by giving lessons. She visited her parents during the university vacations.

Immediately after the German occupation in 1942, when there was a census of Jews in Belgrade, Lea was not registered because she was in Zagreb as a final-year student at the medical faculty. She had planned to take her final examinations in September. However the university authorities in the Independent State of Croatia would not allow Jewish students to sit exams, even those who had completed their full courses.

Lea came to her parents, now living at 3 Karađorđeva Street in Belgrade. At home she found the atmosphere difficult. Her father Eduard had completely withdrawn into himself while her mother had devoted herself to sewing and knitting so that they could feed themselves.

Her parents insisted that Lea immediately register as a Jew, as they themselves had obediently done. Lea refused. She went from one friend to another trying to find a way to save her parents, her grandmother and herself. When she went out she wore her mother's yellow armband.

One morning the Germans came and took Lea's father, mother and *omama*, which was her name for her grandmother. Since Lea wasn't on the list and because she wasn't at home when her parents were taken they never looked for her. She discovered what had happened when she came home. Her father had been taken to Topovske Šupe and her mother and grandmother to Sajmište. She tried to bring them some clothing, shoes and food. In Topovske Šupe she saw her father from the distance, the guards took her parcel. She wasn't even able to get near Sajmište.

IN ŠUMADIJA WITH A NEW NAME

The Aleksić-Jakovljević family lived at 1 Karađorđeva Street. The Rozencvajgs had met them in 1938 and they had become friends. Because they had seen what was happening, these next-door neighbours and other acquaintances of Lea suggested she should try to save herself by adopting a new identity, a new name and then moving to some smaller place in Serbia. Lea agreed to this.

Because of the large influx of refugees from Croatia, Bosnia and Slovenia, and because of the need to provide for these people, Milan Nedić's government established a Commissariat for Refugees in Belgrade. This commissariat was authorised by the Serbian Government to register refugees and issue refugee identification papers based on documents and witnesses. Mile Jakovljević obtained a hospital release form made out for Olgica Rodić, born in Drvar in 1918, treated for schizophrenia. And so, in October 1941, Lea Rozencvajg became Olgica Rodić, a nurse from Drvar.

At the beginning of November 1941, her friends suggested she should go to Aranđelovac. Lea set off with the very small amount of money her friends had given her in a bus driven by a refugee from Slovenia. Mile Jakovljević asked him to take care of "Olgica" during the trip and help her find accommodation. Near the village of Banja, between Mladenovac and Aranđelovac, the Chetniks stopped the bus and checked the identification papers of the passengers, some of whom were arrested by the Chetniks and had to break off their journey. When the search and the document checks began, Olgica thought the end had come. However everything went well, thanks to the explanation given by the driver for Olgica as a refugee from Bosnia.

After not leaving the house for a day or two for fear of the unfamiliar surroundings, and having realised that she was going to be left with no means of support, she began looking for a job.

First she tried to find some distant relatives who lived in Belgrade and had a holiday house in Aranđelovac. She found the house locked. Later she learned that her relatives had managed to flee to Italy.

FEAR OF SISTERS, FELLOW STUDENTS

She registered now with the refugee office which made it possible for her to get food coupons for the refugee kitchen. Lea was claiming

to be a nurse, so she looked for a job at the Serbian Health Cooperative, whose manager was Dr Srpko Vukanović. As he was short of trained support staff, Dr Vukanović offered Olgica a job, with a salary which barely covered the cost of her accommodation. Because of her grasp of medical terminology and Latin expressions, Dr Srpko Vukanović suspected that Olgica Rodić was more than just a nurse. Lea eliminated his suspicions by telling him that she had begun to study medicine but had been forced to interrupt her studies because of the war.

In late December 1941, or early January 1942, in the main street of Arenđelovac, Olgica suddenly spotted two fellow students from Zagreb, Mirjana and Tijana Mikić, who were known in the faculty as having nationalist affiliations. Alarmed at the possibility of running into the Mikić sisters, who knew her as a Jew and a Leftist, she decided to leave Aranđelovac immediately.

Back in Belgrade she stayed with a younger fellow student from Zagreb, Smiljka Rebić and was fully confident that she would not betray her. Smiljka lived with her parents in a small apartment. Because of the large number of refugees, at the beginning of 1942, the Commissariat for Refugees had continued setting up refugee centres in most health resorts across Serbia. There was a pressing need for professional staff and so, together with Smiljka Rebić, Olgica applied for a nursing position in a refugee home. The first position she was offered was that of a nurse in a refugee home in Aranđelovac, which she could not accept, having just moved away from the town. Smiljka, and then Olgica as well, got jobs in Vrnjačka Banja, where only Smiljka Rebić and her friend Dušan Ćalić, who worked in this refugee home, knew Olgica's real identity.

At the end of 1942, because of the large number of small children arriving, refugees from Bosnia both with and without parents, the Commissariat for Refugees set up a home for preschool children in a place called Letnjikovac near Šabac. Olgica was transferred to the refugee home together with the carers, Borka and Anka Gajić, refugee sisters from Bosnia. There she became friends with the sisters and with Boško Živković and really came to trust them. Olgica was confident that they would not denounce her. And she was right. The conditions in the home were really harsh. Both the children and the staff were accommodated in old, run-down barracks which were

very difficult to keep clean. There was very little food and it was difficult to obtain it. The children were undernourished and poorly fed.

In the autumn of 1943 the Commissariat for Refugees passed a decision to move the preschool children to the Serbian Maternal Home in the village of Bukovik, near the Arandelovac spa, where living conditions were more suitable for the young people.

Lea at the beginning of 1944

The move was set for September, 1943. Olgica was offered a transfer to Arandelovac but refused, fearing that she could again come across the Mikić sisters.

At that time I was accountant and treasurer of the Serbian Refugee Homes in Arandelovac. The staff in the homes were refugees from Bosnia, Croatia and Slovenia, with the exception of a few locals. The manager of the homes was Dr Sima Grozdanić, a refugee from Sremski Karlovci. Later he was arrested and Jovo Čubrilo, a refugee from Croatia, was appointed to the job. The atmosphere in the Homes' Administration and relations with the professional staff were good, people worked hard and were dedicated to their work. Everyone was expecting the war to end. We lived as a family, driven by our desire for the country to be liberated. Every month, sometimes more frequently, I travelled to Belgrade to submit the monthly cost accounting for the homes and the refugee kitchen.

Once the carers, Borka and Anka Gajić, complained to me, saying they needed a nurse to take care of the children's health. They asked me to help and proposed that I submit a request through the personnel department of the Commissariat for Refugees, for Olgica to accept this transfer. At the same time they told Olgica that there was a good atmosphere in the refugee homes, that the Serbian Maternal Home was not in Arandelovac itself, but near it in the village of Bukovik, and that they believed she had no reason to be concerned for her personal safety.

In September 1943, in Belgrade, I visited the head of the personnel department, Dr Novković, who informed me that Olgica Rodić had refused to go to Aranđelovac. "If she won't accept the transfer, dismiss her," I replied. Dr Novković asked Olgica to come to Belgrade, informed her of the decision and advised her to accept the transfer after all. Not knowing where to seek refuge, and encouraged by the Gajić sisters and the preschool children whom she had come to love while looking after them in Letnjikovac, Olgica accepted the transfer to Aranđelovac, though reluctantly and with trepidation.

MEETING LEA AND MARRIAGE "ON ONE CONDITION"

It was a beautiful and extremely warm September day in 1943 when, on a voluntary basis, we organised the making of sugarless plum jam to have better winter nourishment for more than five hundred children. All the volunteers were dirty and sweaty because the jam was cooked in huge vats and then poured into prepared boxes for cooling and easy storage. Olgica Rodić walked in and asked the group of volunteers who Sava Bogdanov was, because she was reporting for her new post as nurse. They pointed at me. I had plum jam smeared all over me. Olgica gave me her travel warrant and her transfer document. I looked at her and said, harshly "So you're the one who doesn't' want to come to her children."

Olgica Rodić was given accommodation in a room shared with carer Dobrila Gutalj. I soon learned that both the children and the other carers were overjoyed that Olgica had arrived because she had charmed everyone with her diligent and gentle manner.

Because of my hostile approach at our first meeting, Olgica asked the Gajić sisters what kind of man I was. She was told that I was short-tempered but good and fair. They also told her that I didn't know her real identity.

At about that time a refugee from Banja Luka called Tomić who worked in the warehouse was celebrating his saint's day. A number of the staff from the homes, carers, refugees from Bosnia and others, attended the party. I joined them later in the afternoon. That's when I first really had a good look at Olgica. At one point, looking at her over a glass of wine, I asked her "Do I know you from somewhere?" Olgica was visibly disturbed by the question. The party continued and

I continued to court her. I was soon head over heels in love. We were together whenever possible. I remember well that whenever I was travelling to Belgrade, or returning, I counted the sounds of the wheels hitting the rails, thinking I was a little closer to Olgica with each click. During one of our conversations she suddenly interrupted me and asked me if I was aware she was a Jew. She added then that she would understand if I put an end to our friendship.

I wasn't surprised, because I had had my suspicions about her real identity. Red hair and freckles, an accent which wasn't exactly Bosnian, too well educated for a nurse. And my suspicions had been confirmed by a refugee from Osijek, Pero the barber, who knew Lea's brother Oto. Once when he was cutting my hair Pero asked me whether I knew that the girl he had seen me with the previous day was a Jew. When I told him I knew, he said he had been friends with Oto, that Olgica's real name was Lea, but that he couldn't remember the surname. Pero kept his promise not to expose Lea.

Lea and Sava, 1944, in Aranđelovac, where they married

I told Lea all this and she became very upset. I tried to calm her and then added "Marry me; you'll be safer that way." We talked for a long time. Eventually Lea agreed to marry me, but on one condition. When the war ended, if her boyfriend from Zagreb, the engineer

Mirko Fridman (alias Mirko Mirković) were to return from captivity sick or badly wounded, she would feel obliged to take care of him and we would have to end our marriage. I agreed.

I prepared all the documents necessary for me and Olgica Rodić, scheduled the wedding in the Orthodox Church in Bukovik for February 11, 1944, and taught Olgica the Orthodox wedding ritual.

On the day of the wedding, Aranđelovac was covered in deep snow and the only way to get to and from the church was by taking the well-trodden paths through the snow. I took Olgica, on my skis part of the way, to the church. The wedding ceremony was conducted by a refugee priest, Dimitrije Glumbić, who didn't know about the bride's real identity. Along with the marriage certificate, we also took out a new refugee identification document in the name of Olgica Bogdanov, born in Drvar. This made Lea feel much more secure, although a number of people in Aranđelovac knew she was a Jew: Anka and Borka Gajić, Dobrila Gutalj, Mirjana, Tijana and Braco Mikić and Pero the barber. After the war, when word got around Aranđelovac that Olgica Rodić was a Jew, we learnt from an acquaintance that Glumbić, the priest, was unhappy about this and felt that he had been tricked into marrying a baptised man to a woman who was not baptised.

Attending the wedding were my sister Milena, brother Borivoj and brother-in-law Časlav Gaković (they had come from Belgrade), and his brother Tihomir with his wife Olga, from Aranđelovac. There was a luncheon in the hall of the Serbian Maternal Home for about fifty friends and acquaintances.

It was already clear to everyone that Germany would lose the war, so this lunch party was held in an atmosphere of anticipation, as we looked forward to a rapid end to the war.

FROM PLACE TO PLACE AND INTO BATTLE

During her time in Aranđelovac, Lea was in touch with the staff of the Wehrmacht hospital stationed in Bukovička Banja. A resident of the Refugee Home, a boy of secondary school age, had fallen ill. The Home physician, Dr Rumenić and Lea diagnosed acute appendicitis. They also found that the patient's condition was such that he wouldn't be able to make the trip to Kragujevac, where the nearest hospital was, for surgery. Because she spoke no German, Dr Rumenić

refused to try and negotiate an urgent operation in the German hospital. Lea took the initiative and organised his transfer to the Wehrmacht hospital, begging and demanding that the patient be operated on immediately. The officer refused any possibility of him being admitted. However, thanks to her persistence, and her excellent command of German, Lea managed to talk him into letting her speak to the doctor on duty, a surgeon, to whom she explained professionally the condition of the patient. He was examined and underwent surgery immediately. The surgeon asked Lea how she came to speak such good German. She replied that she had learnt the language in a place she had lived and then when she was studying before her study was interrupted by the war.

Lea and Sava Bogdanov with their daughter Branka

In April and May 1944, the Chetniks put greater pressure on me, asking me to get them blankets and food. I couldn't meet these requests. We spent the 1944 Easter holiday in Belgrade, where we were bombed by the Allied forces.

My family suggested that I take my mother and my sister Mirjana to Arandelovac to give them shelter and this I did soon afterwards, renting an apartment in the same building in which Olgica and I lived.

As the summer approached, the pressure from the Chetniks was increasing and Olgica and I decided that it would be best to move

somewhere else. The situation was such that, to put it bluntly, I was forced to flee Aranđelovac and go to Belgrade. I asked my friends at the Commissariat for Refugees to arrange a transfer.

I was transferred to a job in the Commissariat's accounts department in Zabela, near Požarevac, and Olgica began work as a nurse at the refugee home in Požarevac. Until we got the transfer we stayed in Belgrade, hiding from the bombing, mostly with Stana Ratković, the wife of my eldest brother Nemanja, on the Avala road. During our time in Belgrade we paid a visit to Vera Tomanić, a Jew from Osijek, the wife of engineer Milorad Tomanić who was in captivity. This was when Lea received a message from a friend in Palestine which came to Belgrade via Turkey, because people in some kibbutz had discovered that Lea was hiding somewhere in Serbia with a false identity. One day while we were in Belgrade, before we moved to Požarevac, we were walking down Kolarčeva Street and Lea was recognised by a fellow student from Zagreb, Bogdanka Galogaža, with her husband Milan Kovačević. I immediately crossed to the other side of the street.

When Lea signalled to me that there was no danger, I walked over to them. Milan and Bogdanka knew very well that Lea Rozencvajg was a Leftist because they too had been Leftists as students in Zagreb. Lea told them that her name was now Olgica Bogdanov and that I was her husband. Not for a moment was she concerned that they could betray her.

When we arrived in Zabela, all the employees of the Commissariat for Refugees accounts department and their families were accommodated in a large, shared hall, where people slept on the floor, which was covered with straw mattresses. We left Zabela as soon as Belgrade was liberated. Ahead of us lay uncertainty, and a parting, because we had decided to join the army for the liberation of the remaining part of Yugoslavia. After a few days in Belgrade, on October 28, 1944, Lea signed up with NOVJ, the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia. She was assigned to the medical corps of the First Proletarian Division and sent to the Srem front. She was extremely satisfied and happy that she no longer had to hide her identity and her nationality. She had many acquaintances from her student days among the senior officers in the ten military medical corps (Voja Đukanović, Đani Popović and others). As I was a reserve pilot, I was sent to the Aviation Centre in Pančevo to

undergo additional training for ground attack aircraft pilots. When I completed the course I was assigned to the NOVJ Air Force 421 air assault regiment.

JOY IN NIŠ: BIRTH OF OUR DAUGHTER

When we parted we agreed to keep in touch through my family, who lived in Francuska Street in Belgrade.

I managed to use my leave to visit Lea twice before the end of the war. Her hospital was stationed in Ruma. These were difficult journeys because traffic had not yet been re-established.

I took advantage of the army vehicles which went in that direction and walked a large part of the way.

Immediately after the country was liberated, Lea was sent to the new Army Student Residence in Zagreb to finish her studies. She graduated in February, 1946, with the highest honours, while I was transferred with my regiment from Sombor, to Skopje and then to Niš.

When Lea graduated I was in military service in Niš. In June, 1946, she was assigned, with the rank of a Yugoslav People's Army lieutenant, to the Military Hospital in Niš. We began our life together again in a tiny, rented bed-sitting room. I wasn't interested in joining the army so, at my request, I was demobilised in August 1946 and went to Belgrade to find a job. And that was the end of our brief military life together. I immediately found a job in Belgrade. I returned to Niš to get Lea and arranged transport to Belgrade. Just before our departure she went into labour prematurely so I had to immediately have her admitted to the maternity ward of the Niš hospital, where conditions were really poor. It was in these conditions that our daughter was born in September 1946. We named her Branka. Soon after this Lea was transferred to the Military Hospital in Belgrade. We arrived in Belgrade and moved in with my family in Francuska Street, although the place was packed because of the housing crisis at the time. Still, with a lot of effort, I managed to arrange a tiny flat for us at 2 Kosančićev Venac.

And so our life in Belgrade began.

In January 1947, Lea fell ill with typhoid. The illness and her recovery took about eight months.

Life wasn't easy in the first post-war years. On top of all that, I was left unexpectedly to take care of a three-month-old baby. I cared

for our little daughter as best I could. Before going to work I would take Branka to my sister's place or, more often, to Bogdanka Kovačević's mother. When I returned from work I would again take over looking after Branka. After some time I found a girl who I trained to take care of the child. I taught her as much as I knew myself. This girl looked after Branka while I was at work. Lea's illness was very hard. In order to cheer her up I would sometimes, even in very bad weather and a few times even in heavy snow and wind, take Branka to the hospital. They would bring Lea to the window and she could look out and see her daughter, even though it was from a distance.

When Lea finally returned home she was shocked to see what Branka looked like. Despite all the care and attention, the chubby baby she had left behind when she went into hospital was now a skinny, undernourished baby. We realised that this was because the girl who had looked after her used to throw some of the milk away so I wouldn't be angry because Branka hadn't drunk it. Lea took matters into her own hands and Branka was very soon thriving again.

MARRIAGE WITHOUT CONDITIONS

I should mention the outcome of the agreement we made in Aranđelovac when we married.

Mirko Fridman, otherwise known as Mirko Mirković, returned to Zagreb from captivity in Germany. Lea told me about this some time in November, 1945. Because I was very impatient to learn whether Lea would stay with me or end our marriage, I took leave and went to Zagreb so we could talk openly about it.

When we saw each other at the Army Student Residence in Zagreb, Lea told me that she had spoken to Mirko and had decided to continue her life with me. I must admit that I hadn't expected this outcome. I was very proud that Lea had made this decision and returned to Niš, to my unit. My feeling was that Lea had no longer been obliged at all to make this decision. The marriage we had entered into in Aranđelovac was no longer valid. Later, sometime in 1953, we were officially entered in the register of marriages in Aranđelovac with Lea's real personal information.

There is another interesting event from our life together which is worth mentioning. In the population census of March 31, 1953, people were given the option of stating their ethnic affiliation.

When filling in the census forms, Jews in the Military Hospital were faced with a dilemma in completing this column. One day around that time, Lea came home not knowing what to do. She said that some of her colleagues had declared themselves as Serbs, Croats, Bosnians or whatever, depending on their place of birth or their feeling of belonging. This was the option backed by the political line at the Military Hospital. Lea said to me "I was born in Osijek, but I'm not a Croat. I married you, but I'm not a Serb."

"Well then, what are you?" I asked her.

"My mother and father were Jews and I can only be a Jew," came the reply.

I said to her that this was the only right thing to do and that she should describe herself as a Jew by nationality in the census questionnaire, regardless of the political recommendations.

Before, and especially after, the Israeli-Egyptian war in 1967, anti-Semitism was on the rise in Yugoslavia. Anti-Semitism was becoming obvious in everyday life, but was also present, in a veiled form, in the ranks of the Yugoslav National Army. In early 1969 Lea told me about some anti-Semitic excesses she had seen at work. For example, all Military Medical Academy employees were asked to donate blood for the Arabs. Lea did not agree to this and said openly that, given her national affiliation, she believed she was unable to do so.

During one conversation she asked if I could get a posting in one of the Yugoslav Chamber of Commerce offices abroad. She felt that this would perhaps be a way for her to get away from the Military Medical Academy for a while.

And so, in the second half of 1969, I was appointed head of the Yugoslav Chamber of Commerce office in India, based in Calcutta. I took up this new post in October 1969, and Lea joined me at the beginning of 1970, after taking retirement and transferring to the reserve units of the Yugoslav National Army.

Soon after her arrival, Lea made contact with medical and humanitarian circles in Calcutta. Within a short period of time she became one of the most prominent and respected members of Calcutta society. In her free time she studied Indian philosophy and history. Her activities in Calcutta society also reflected very positively on my reputation in India's commercial life. Very often the reputation she had won opened doors for me in those areas of the

economy which had shown some reserve towards Eastern European countries.

After I retired we first visited Israel, where Lea had many close friends in the Shar Haamakim and Gat kibbutzes. She was most warmly received by friends she had known in the *hasharah* she had attended in 1935.

After her death, Branka and I had ten trees planted in the Memorial Forest in Jerusalem in memory of our Lea.

Julijana CIRIC

(as told to Jasna ĆIRIĆ)

YEARS OF HIDING AND FEAR

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

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

Julijana Ćirić died in Niš in 1998.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Happiness on their faces: Sofija, Julijana and Aron

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

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

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

Lucky to survive: the Hajon family

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

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

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

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

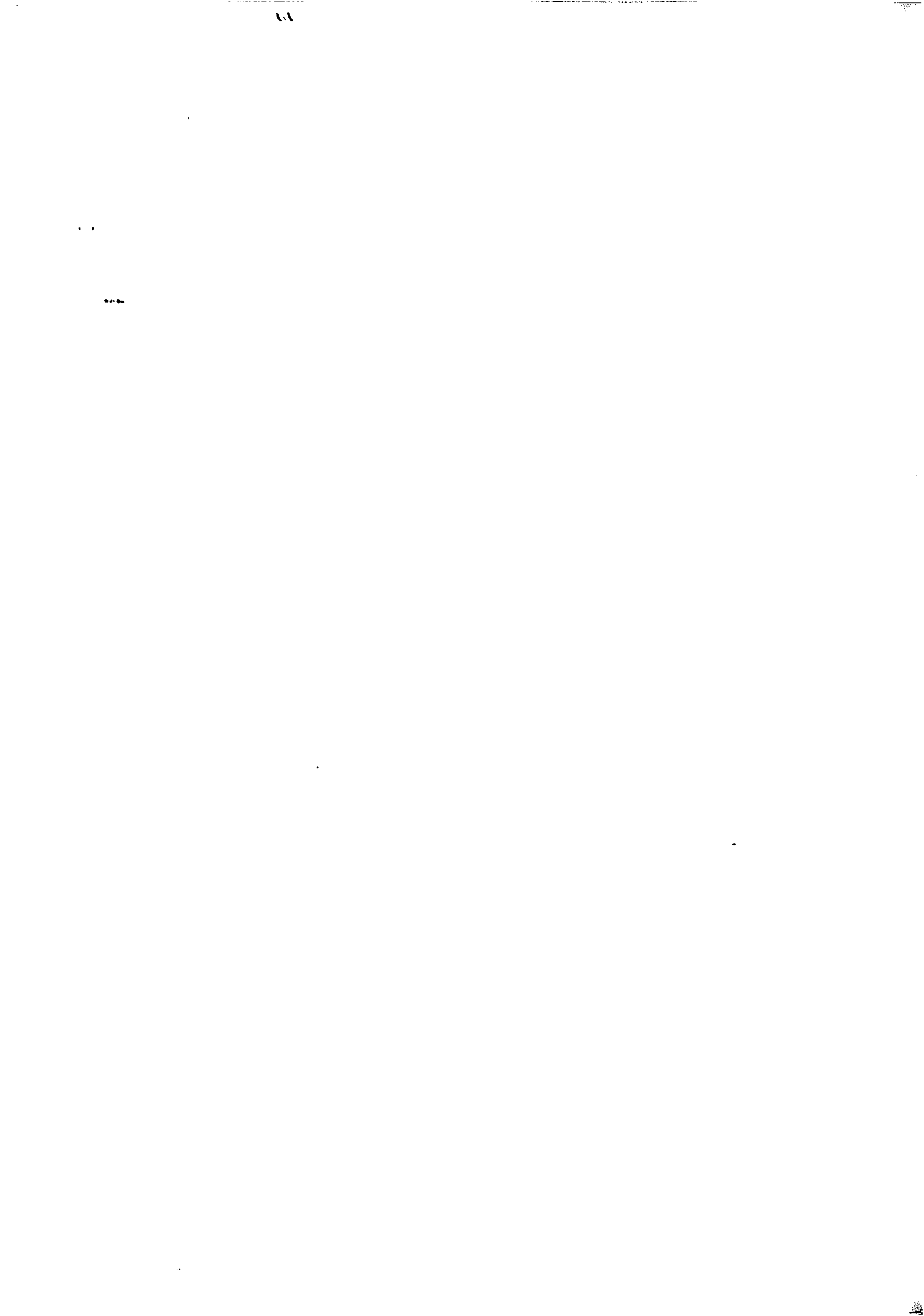
My father, Aron, died in Niš in 1967 and my mother Sofija in 1973, also in Niš.

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

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

VIII

THROUGH SPAIN



Bonka DAVIČO

FASTER THAN DEATH

Buena-Bonka Davičo, née Demajo, was born in Sarajevo on June 16, 1920, to Moric and Estera, née Papo. The family moved to Belgrade in 1928. She attended the Kralj Petar primary school and the Kraljica Marija secondary school in Belgrade. Before the second world she married lawyer Jaša Davičo. She went through the war saga with her whole family, from Dubrovnik and Montenegro, through Italy, Spain and Portugal to London. Her daughter, Svetlana, was born in Madrid.

Bonka Davičo had a long career as an announcer on Radio Belgrade, after beginning at the New Yugoslavia radio station in London in 1944. She was an active participant in the work of the Jewish Community in Belgrade and its Women's Section.

She died in Belgrade at the beginning of 2003, and is survived by her daughter, Svetlana, one granddaughter and two great-grandchildren.

It was March 27, 1941. We were all celebrating and cheering "Better war than the Pact!" But the next day, March 28, my father left for Zagreb. People there were already expecting Germany to attack Yugoslavia.

Father returned on March 29 and told us "You have to leave Belgrade immediately." I had just married Jaša Davičo. He had been mobilised and was stationed in Stracin, on the Bulgarian border.

I was married on December 1, 1940. People were already afraid that there would be war, but I didn't believe it. Everything was wonderful for me, I was happy. My husband, Jaša Davičo, worked for the Pančevo glass factory as a lawyer. I lived in Belgrade with my father, my mother and my brother, who was three years younger than me. Father would travel to Zagreb on business because he worked for the Riunione insurance company whose head office was there. When he returned on March 29 he said "Listen, I don't think this is good: you should get going and flee Belgrade. I can't." He was a captain in the reserves and had to stay in the city.

So, on March 30, my mother, my brother and I left for Dubrovnik by train. We arrived there the following day. It was very cold, almost unbelievably cold for Dubrovnik. On April 6, we heard on the radio that Belgrade had been bombed. This was horrifying for me because I had left the city thinking that I'd be coming back in ten, fifteen, twenty days' time. Because of this I had only brought a small suitcase and by some miracle – perhaps I had some kind of presentiment – I had also taken three photograph albums and very few clothes. We waited and worried about what would happen to my father. In my eyes my father was a great hero. During World War One he had crossed into Albania, where many soldiers and children had lost their lives. In April 1941 he was captured in Sarajevo. He managed to escape while they were escorting prisoners. This happened in the Muslim part of the city. He knew a Muslim, a friend of his sister who lived in Sarajevo. He hid in his yard and so managed to save himself from falling into German captivity. The Muslim helped him a great deal. He managed to get him a pass for Dubrovnik He arrived there dressed as a Turk, with a tarboosh on his head and found us.

NO PEACE ANYWHERE

We lived peacefully in Dubrovnik for a short time, in hiding with another two or three Jewish families who had also fled there. When we heard that Croatia would become independent, my father said we must move again. And so, hurriedly, we packed and left for Mon-

tenegro by taxi. There I saw Germans for the first time, the first and only time: they were coming down from the hills into Dubrovnik. That was also when I saw the Ustashas.

We set off from Dubrovnik, where they were welcoming the Germans warmly. We set off by taxi for Petrovac-na-moru, but after about twenty kilometres or so the taxi driver refused to go any further so we completed the journey to Petrovac on foot. This was a very difficult, exhausting walk over many hills and through woods. When we arrived we found accommodation in a hotel whose name I don't remember. In Petrovac we found another two or three families, including Dr Čelebonović with his son, Aleks, and Mirko Demajo with his wife.

My husband arrived from Belgrade at the end of June. Marko Nikežić lived with his whole family in Bar and we asked his father to bring my Jaša to Petrovac. Before that he had been living in Belgrade, wearing the yellow armband and clearing rubble as part of a forced labour gang. We all stayed at the hotel in Petrovac until the uprising began in Montenegro.

The first land conquered by the Italians in Montenegro was Mala Plaža, the small beach in Petrovac. We were all captured there, taken to a hotel and locked up. These were the *camice nere*, the Black Shirts. Here for the first and only time I saw my father's distant cousin, Aleksandar "Saša" Demajo, a lawyer from Belgrade, the father of Moric Demajo. He was wearing traditional Montenegrin costume with a Montenegrin cap. He was standing next to the hotel. I heard then that they arrested him on the very spot we were standing. Later we heard that he had been shot in Cetinje.

Before that, as soon as the Italian Fascists walked into Petrovac, the *camice nere* lined all of us up in the house against a wall. There were about ten of us, together with the hotel owner, Sava Petrović, and they told us they would shoot us. A number of the Black Shirts went to set fire to the village, and we waited to be shot. We could hardly wait for them to open fire and put an end to our suffering. But the Black Shirts came back and said "We couldn't kill anyone over there, there are too many women and children. Leave these ones alone, too. Lock them up and we'll see what we should do with them."

We spent ten days in the hotel before they took us, in chains, to a prison in Bar. I was interned in the women's prison in Bar for four months. In fact this prison was in the secondary school building. There I shared my suffering with Montenegrin women who were so brave that their company somehow managed to distract me from our grave fate. We were there when, four months later, they moved a group of Jews to the island of Korčula. We also spent about four months on Korčula. In the beginning we had to report to the *Questura* every day. Later the women were not required to do so and only the men had to report.

The Pelješac Peninsula is just across from Korčula, only two kilometres away. This was already the Independent State of Croatia. The Ustashas often came to Korčula by boat. This caused my father a great deal of concern. He always looked ahead so he decided to find a way for us to cross over to Italy. Marinka Arneri, a Korčula local, and her father, a great Yugoslav lawyer, helped us. He somehow managed to obtain documents for one group to go into Italy into *confino libero*. We got permits to go to Bolgo Valditaro, in the province of Parma, a village in the hills where we lived for about six or seven months. I have to say that the Italians really welcomed us, they were wonderful. I even think we may have been the first Jews they had seen. They didn't know who we were or why they had brought us there. I was pregnant. They knew this and every day in front of the door of our little room I'd find eggs, vegetables, cheese, a small chicken, so that I would have something to eat. I certainly couldn't say that we were starving, but things weren't easy for us. Six months after we arrived, people began expecting Mussolini to fall. And so again my father decided that we should somehow cross the border and go somewhere else, to England, anywhere as long as we didn't stay in Italy. A Jewish lawyer who lived in Parma, Otto Lenghi, helped us. Through him we again managed to obtain *lasciapassare*, travel permits, for Rome. We stayed in Rome for two months, in hiding because the Germans were still there. After two months, with the help of Catholic Jesuit priests who were helping anyone who was being persecuted, even Jewish refugees, we managed to prepare for departure. We again managed to obtain documents and set off for Spain. General Franco was in power at the

time. Things weren't easy for us there either because we didn't feel free. I frequently saw German soldiers in the streets, mainly passing in cars. General Franco was in an alliance with the Third Reich, although he did not take part in the war.

MADRID, LONDON, BELGRADE

We lived in Madrid for four months and I gave birth to my daughter Svetlana there. With the help of the then Yugoslav Embassy and charge d'affaires Ljubiša Višacki we moved to Lisbon where we waited for a month to get documents for London. The Hajas organisation helped us. We arrived in London by plane on April 1, 1943.

In London the procedure of questioning and accepting refugees usually took nine days. For women this waiting period was pleasant because they were accommodated in a beautiful castle. Of course we also had guards there and couldn't go anywhere. Things were much worse for the men, who were in a real prison. However my husband and I were released from confinement the same day we arrived in the Royal Patriotic School procedure. After this we lived in Harpenden, a small place outside London. *Politika* journalist Miša Sudžić, who stayed with his family in London throughout the war, helped us to settle in. They were already living in a small house and we also moved in there. Soon after this, General Vladimir Velebit came to London to set up and manage the new Yugoslav diplomatic office. As far as I know he was entrusted with this office by Josip "Tito" Broz. When I met him he asked me if I wanted to work, and I gladly accepted. He told me "There are two possibilities here: one is to work in the Red Cross, and we also have a radio station here which produces news from London for our citizens every second day, it's called Free Yugoslavia." I chose the second option. The director of the radio station was Krista Đorđević. I worked there as an announcer until the end of the war. After the war ended I wanted us to return to Yugoslavia as soon as possible. My husband went there a year earlier by plane and landed by parachute somewhere near Valjevo. There he took part in the fighting. Later he was badly wounded in a place called Sesvete, near Zagreb. He was treated in Zagreb, in the Rebro Hospital. He barely survived. He was one of the first to walk into liberated Belgrade. I waited for quite a while longer to leave London for Yugoslavia. Nevertheless, that day final-

ly arrived and we boarded a ship in Southampton and set off for Bar and from there to Split, also by boat. I arrived in Belgrade on November 15, 1945. My husband was waiting for me in the apartment in which I had lived before the war. During the war years, the apartment had been occupied by a woman, a Gestapo lawyer, who even left some of her things behind, but many of our belongings were missing. My husband, my daughter and I moved in.

As soon as I returned to Belgrade I got a job in Tanjug as an English language translator. Not long after that, applications were invited for an announcing job at Radio Belgrade. As I had done this work in London, I more or less knew the job and so I applied. I remember that once Vasiljević, the then director of Radio Belgrade, had listened to me doing a radio program during his visit to London and said to me "Please, when you return to Belgrade, come to Radio Belgrade."

I began working for Radio Belgrade in September, 1948, and was an announcer there for exactly 31 years, until I retired in 1980.

Jaša ALMULI

IF ONLY THEY'D REALISED THE DANGER

Jaša Almuli was born in 1918 and is a journalist by profession. He comes from a Belgrade Sephardic family. His mother, Sofija, was a Jewish activist, and his father, Isak-Žak, from Šabac, was a merchant.

In his early youth he was a member of the leftist, Zionist youth organisation Hashomer Hatzair, *but left the organisation at the age of sixteen with a group of young people who believed that Zionism was redundant because the international nature of Communism would also solve the Jewish issue. He again became active in the Jewish Community at the end of the 1980s, when excerpts from the anti-Semitic publication* The Protocols of the Elders of Zion *were published in the book* The Mysterious World of the Masons, *for whose banning he immediately fought. He then turned to research and writing on the suffering and salvation of Serbian Jews during the occupation. In 1989 he was elected president of the Jewish Community in Belgrade. During his three years in office, major work was done on the synagogue and the cemetery chapel and a monument to the victims of Nazism in Serbia by sculptor Nandor Glid was erected on the bank of the Danube on his initiative. He was very actively engaged in the work of the Crisis Staff of the Federation of Jewish Communities of*

Yugoslavia. Reserves of food and drugs were established several months before the outbreak of civil war in Yugoslavia. In the early spring of 1992, about four hundred Jews were evacuated from Sarajevo to Belgrade.

In the 1990s, Jaša Almuli focused on creating documentation on the Holocaust. He interviewed about 170 surviving Jews in Yugoslavia and Greece, recording their testimonies on videotape for the Fortunoff Video Archive of the Yale University Library and for the American memorial Holocaust museum in Washington.

He worked as a journalist for Tanjug *and* Borba *and was a correspondent in Rio de Janeiro and Washington.*

The testimony which follows was written by Almuli in the early summer of 2002 using, in some passages, the testimony he gave for the Fortunoff Video Archive at the beginning of the 1990s.

JOURNEY TO THE COAST

I left Belgrade on April 6, 1941, at about noon, after the first major wave and second minor wave of German bombing had stopped. The beginning of the attack had found me on Sunday, April 6, at seven in the morning with my friends in Krunska Street (known from after the war until recently as Prolaterskih Brigada Street). There we were awaiting the beginning of a rally called urgently by the Communist Party over the pact of friendship between Yugoslavia and the USSR which had been signed in Moscow the previous evening. Now, instead of joy and hope, bombs were falling on us. For the first time ever we felt the horror of being unprotected during an air raid. As soon as it quietened down I hurried home with my university friend Feliks Gorski, a Sarajevo Jew. There I met my sister, Šeka, and my aunts' sons, Žaklen Ruso and Mirko Davičo, who lived in the same building.

We packed a few necessities in rucksacks and hurried through the streets full of rubble and corpses to get out of the city. We headed for Dalmatia, knowing that the Allied forces were in that direction and that the Germans would not immediately go there. There were six of us in the group because, near Senjak, we stopped to pick up Feliks' girlfriend, Dada Konstantinović, also a technology student, a Serb from Sarajevo who was later killed tragically in Belgrade during

the occupation. None of the six of us even thought about returning to Belgrade until the bombing was over. We travelled through Ostružnica from where, with great sorrow, we saw the burning sky above the city, and then continued via Ub, Valjevo, Zvornik and Sarajevo towards the coast.

We travelled almost six hundred kilometres without catching a train. Twice, once in Hercegovina and once just before we reached the coast, we were given a ride in army trucks. Mostly we walked, although now and then we ran into some horses and used them to carry our belongings. We took a break in Sarajevo. Dada took us to her house. We were at her place in Marin Dvor when they bombed Sarajevo. Sarajevo was not bombed as heavily as Belgrade but, because we were going through it all for the second time, it seemed even worse to us.

Sofija Almuli with her family: Zlata Almuli, Ela Almuli Flajšman, Vesna Korać, Šeka Almuli Korać, Žarko Korać, Jaša Almuli (from left, standing), Žarko Almuli (sitting), Sofija Almuli, Zoran J. Almuli

In Sarajevo we turned a deaf ear to Betika Romano's call for all Party members passing through to stay in the city. We didn't want to be there when the Germans arrived. After Sarajevo we ran into a

writer and Communist, Radovan Zogović, and his friend, Vera, who joined us. Ten days after we left Belgrade we arrived in the Bay of Kotor. In this bay, in a place called Prčanj, the Jewish Women's Society in Belgrade had a summer resort called Karmel, where many underprivileged children from Belgrade and Bitolj had free summer holidays. For years my mother, Sofija, was the administrative secretary and the vice-president of the society and was already in the home in Prčanj when we arrived. She had left Belgrade a few days before the German attack, with my elder sister Ela and my sister-in-law, Mara Blasbalg from Vienna, who had been rescued from a Šabac camp thanks to her marriage to my brother Mončelo. My mother's two sisters and their families had also left Belgrade before the attack.

DRAMA AT THE TRAIN

The departure from Belgrade hadn't been without drama. This was something that we began discussing in our house immediately after March 27, because it was obvious to us that the Germans would attack. It was understood that my sister and I must stay in the city to be available to the Party, as members. The discussion was about the departure of my mother and my elder sister and sister-in-law. Ela wasn't a member of the Party but she was an intellectual, and worked for the leftist paper *Woman Today*. She was wounded at a demonstration in Valjevo where she worked as a teacher of French and she didn't want to become a refugee now. My mother, on the other hand, didn't want to leave without at least one of her children, but my elder brother Mončelo, already in the uniform of a reserve cavalry lieutenant, insisted that the three of them go. It took quite a lot of persuasion but eventually he managed to take them to the railway station where, outside the wagon door, there was new hesitation, new resistance. Ela again refused to leave and my mother followed suit until my brother, desperate and determined, at one point drew his officer's revolver from its holster. He didn't point it at them but, having seen it they were dumbstruck and climbed into the wagon. My aunts, Rea Talvi and Sara Ruso, also left with their husband at about the same time and they all met up in Dubrovnik where there were a few more families from Belgrade. Among the others were the family of Enriko Josif, whose mother was also forced to produce her little lady's revolver and tell her sons she would kill herself if they refused to go with her. The

family of Dr Margulis, who had a prosperous private medical practice, had left Belgrade earlier. They were advised to do this by Egon, a German military spy, who later became the master of life and death for Jews in Tašmajdan. At the time he was claiming to be an anti-Nazi refugee and was studying medicine with Margulis' sons, who later became doctors in America.

There were a lot few Belgrade Jews who were wealthy enough to have left Belgrade, even Serbia, and avoid the Germans if they had been fully aware of the danger they were in. We were a politicised and well-informed family, unlike many others. My mother's uncle, a paediatrician who had graduated in Vienna, said when his nieces asked him to join them "The Germans can't be that bad; I know them, they're civilised people."

There were other examples which also testify that full awareness of the danger was often the decisive element rather than someone's material situation. The family of Matilda Baruh, whose elder son was fighting in Spain, fled Dorćol almost without a single dinar in their pockets and went to Đeram to hide under false names, while the wealthy family of Boža Rafajlović did quite the opposite. Keen to join the army, Boža got as far as Boka and then returned to Belgrade with fake Italian passes to get his two sisters out, but returned alone after his father, a merchant, refused to let them go, saying "Well, they're not going to kill all of us!" It wasn't easy for Belgrade Jews to foresee what was about to happen to them. The German activities still unknown in this country at the time had been introduced to Europe virtually only in the remote conquered areas of Ukraine and Russia.

Belgrade was the first city in Europe which the Germans declared "cleansed of Jews". This was in the spring of 1942, at the very beginning of the "final solution" to the Jewish question. All our adult men had already been shot as Serbian hostages during the Partisan uprising in October 1941, at a time when the German Jews had only just been made to wear yellow stars. There were still no death camps in the East in the summer and autumn of 1941. Even when our women and children were interned in the camp at the Belgrade Sajmište, in December 1941, in order to be killed later in gas chambers, it wasn't easy to foresee that a civilised European state would hand down a collective death sentence on an entire people, that it would kill six million European Jews. The uprising in Serbia in July 1941, and the heavy battles against the Germans up to the proclamation of the Užice Repub-

lic, brought the destruction of the Serbian Jews forward, ahead of all others in occupied Europe.

UPRISING IN MONTENEGRO

My mother, sister and sister-in-law went from Dubrovnik to Prčanj, where my entire family soon gathered, apart from my older brother who was captured during the short war and deported to a camp for officers in Osnabruck, Germany. There the Germans observed the Geneva Convention and didn't kill the Jewish officers of the Yugoslav Army, although they put them in segregated barracks.

The Karmel home in Prčanj, where underprivileged children from Belgrade and Bitolj had free holidays every summer

Veljko Korać, my sister Šeka's future husband and later a teacher, and Erih Koš, a Communist and later a writer, soon arrived in Prčanj also. I went to Cetinje to join my friends from Belgrade University. I went with one of them, my Party comrade, architecture student Sveta Pejanović, to his village. However, on our way through the rocky country between Cetinje and Podgorica, I collapsed and fell. An infection that I'd contracted while travelling in an open army truck through Hercegovina in rain and sleet had caught up with me. They took me to the Cetinje hospital where, at the time, the only treatments they had

for pneumonia were caffeine and glucose injections and the body's own resistance. When I recovered, I went to Prčanj to convalesce.

Veljko Mićunović, who later became the post-war head of OZNA, assistant foreign minister and ambassador to Moscow and with whom I had worked much earlier in the Belgrade SKOJ and at the university, was working in the Bay of Kotor at the time as Party instructor. Together with him I prepared a small Partisan detachment in Prčanj. These potential fighters were a group of new arrivals from Belgrade and a few young people from the local area. There were fifteen of us, but we had only three rifles and very little ammunition, and only one of us had previously served in the Yugoslav Army and so acquired at least some military skills. Prčanj is a place with just one row of houses along the coast, squeezed in between the sea and the hills where the Italians had their positions, so there was no suitable place for the training which almost everyone needed, because they had never once fired a rifle. The uprising in Montenegro began on July 13, 1941, and the Italians soon brought in reinforcements who sailed into Boka in seagoing passenger ships.

Eight days after the uprising began in Prčanj, we prepared for our little detachment's operation. Veljko Mićunović set off for a destination unknown to us, we gave him our courier as escort and the courier returned with the plan for the operation we were to carry out. To this day I don't know whether it was Veljko who made this plan or someone else, but I do know that it was megalomaniacal and, in a military sense, impossible to carry out. With just three rifles and one soldier in uniform, our group was to attack the Italian artillery positions on a hill above Prčanj, seize their cannons and use them to open fire on a captured Yugoslav war ship anchored in the Kotor part of the bay. No one in our detachment knew how to fire a cannon. I sent the courier back where he had come from with objections to the plan and asking in what direction the detachment should withdraw once the operation was carried out, who would wait to meet them and where, because there had been no mention of this in the original orders. I don't knew if there were any other unrealistic plans of action at the beginning of the liberation struggle. I know about the Kosmaj detachment's unsuccessful attack on a group of gendarmes with military experience stationed in a village in this area which, according to Dr Maksim Šternić who took part in it, was reckless and cost many young Belgrade Communists their lives in vain. While I waited for the couri-

er to bring me a reply, we were informed by the Prčanj Municipality that the Italian police would come to our holiday home to check on Jewish refugees who were registered with the authorities. The manager, a local woman named Tone, was also the secretary of the Municipality, so we were all registered in the home apart from Korać, Koš and Feliks Gorski, who lived elsewhere. We gave the three of them the summer home's dinghy and they sailed out to the middle of the bay and waited for the Italians to finish their inspection. However instead of an inspection, this turned out to be an arrest. That day about two hundred Jews who had fled to the Bay of Kotor were rounded up from various places, most of them from Herceg Novi. They put us all on board a ship and, a few days later, on July 25, took us to Albania, to a military camp near a place called Kavaja. While our ship stood at anchor off Kotor, the courier who had returned to bring me the reply came out by boat. He couldn't get to me and I didn't hear the message he had brought. I only know that much later, after the war, Veljko Mićunović told me we would have been killed and that he, knowing the terrain, had barely managed to get himself out of Boka. The Italians had blocked all exit roads.

CAMP IN ALBANIA

In the Kavaja camp we were treated as civilian prisoners of war. Even now my friends and I have no idea why the Italians rounded us up and took us to Albania – whether it was to get the Jews out of the war operation zones and so protect them, or to evacuate us as suspicious elements. I don't know what the real motive was, but when we arrived in the camp we were given a lecture by the commandant, an Italian major. I would say that he had been mobilised, that he was not a professional soldier. He told us that he was very sorry about our women and children and that they were "deep in his heart". The camp was surrounded by a barbed wire fence, but we were free to move around in the narrow space between the wire and the huge concrete building in which we were accommodated. This looked like a disused warehouse with no windows or door and three-tiered wooden beds. We were given some coarse blankets full of fleas. The food was completely tasteless, mostly dark beans with macaroni, but there was a canteen in which we could buy sheep milk cheese and excellent canned Italian jam from the Albanians. The Italians didn't search us when we entered the camp, nor did they take our money and valuables. Those who had

only known a comfortable life in the city found the filth and lack of comfort in the camp very difficult, but we younger people adapted more easily, particularly those who had gone camping and slept in tents with the scouts or with Hashomer Hatzair. At the very beginning of our life in the camp we saw for ourselves that the inmates weren't all angels and that not all inmates displayed solidarity and loyalty.

Jaša Almuli, Mirko Davičo and Lala Ivković-Nikoliš on Mt Goč, 1936

An engineer from Sarajevo, whose name I don't remember, and one middle-aged Belgrader whose name isn't worth mentioning both spoke Italian and they curried favour with the command. They thought they would win some advantage if they said there was a group of young Communists and leftists among the Jews in the camp. We found out about this denunciation and for some days we were worried what the consequences would be, but nothing happened to us.

TO ITALY

Our commandant, an Italian major, told us at the outset that we would not be staying there long and that they would show us how civilised the Italians were. And, in fact, we arrived in Kavaja at the end of July 1941, and by the beginning of November, before the winter and

the heavy rains set in, they put us back on board a ship again in the Albanian harbour of Durres. From there they took us to the southern coast of Italy, to Bari, and we continued by train to Calabria, to the southernmost part of the Italian boot, to the Ferramonti camp near the village of Tarsia. Before we arrived they had already brought Jewish refugees from Austria, Germany and other countries.

Basically they treated us well in Ferramonti. There was no harassment, no arbitrary punishment, no psychological pressure. The camp was surrounded by a wire fence and the local rural people kept guard outside. They were members of the Fascist militia, wearing black shirts, and we were able to trade with them. They brought olive oil, garlic, even turkeys from their villages and sold them to us across the fence. There were about two thousand of us in the camp, from various countries, most of us Jews. We had freedom of movement on the inside, we had cultural, educational, religious and sporting activities. I was 23 at the time and played right fullback in the Yugoslav team against the Polish and other young Jews. A Jewish teacher from Austria gave me English lessons, while we all learnt and mastered Italian along the way. But there is more to this pleasant part of this story. Yugoslav composer Lav Mirski was also in the camp and organised a choir and there was also Fingesten, a cubist painter from Germany who had his own studio in which some of the inmates learned to paint or improved their painting skills.

MIRKO EXTRADITED TO THE USTASHAS

Despite everything there was always a feeling of uncertainty hanging over us, some unexpressed fear of being turned over to the Germans or some other Nazis in Europe. But only one inmate was so unfortunate, Mirko Davičo, my cousin, a talented 27-year-old lawyer. Mirko was eloquent and intelligent and, here, in this relaxed atmosphere he spoke, among other things about Marxism and other delicate topics. It seems that this talk of his had reached the ears of a Croatian woman who had arrived in the camp together with a respectable Jewish family from Belgrade for whom she had worked as a nanny. At the beginning of 1942 she was released to return to Croatia and there, we presumed, they had obviously asked her about the camp and the people in it. They didn't know about Mirko Davičo in Zagreb – he had been a Communist from before, but in Belgrade. However they knew

very well about his older brother Oskar, a writer who, prior to the war, had moved to Zagreb because he had come into conflict with the Party over literature and his writing and there he had joined Miroslav Krleža and *Pečat* magazine which wasn't to the Party's liking at the time. Oskar was a Communist who had spent five years behind bars in Lepoglava and Mitrovica. The Ustashas knew all about him and probably thought that he was the Davičo in Ferramonti.

Ferramonti, 1942: (standing, left to right) Ernest Laub?; Mara Almuli; Viktor (Morica) Levi; Ela Almuli; unknown; Šeli Alkalaj, married Laub; Nina Jakovljević-Furht; Moric Levi; Rebeka Amodaj; Bojana Jakovljević; Sofija Almuli; Cana Mošić; Avram Mošić; Natalija Munk; Dr Moša Munk; (front) unknown; unknown; Oskar Munk; Olgica Jakovljević; Kaponi; Pavle Furht; Bata Jakovljević;

When the Italians were asked for and agreed to Mirko's extradition, Oskar was living in fear in a small place in northern Italy, in free confinement with his wife from Zagreb, Dr Ruta Lederer and their small son Kolja. However nothing happened to Oskar. After Italy capitulated in 1943 he headed south, crossed the front line and joined the Partisans. All in all this seems to have been a tragic case of mistaken identity. In the camp Mirko was a member of our family and we did all in our power to save him, but nothing helped, not the intervention in Rome of Delasem, the forerunner of Joint in Italy, nor the Ital-

ian Jewish lawyers, nor the connections established with the Catholics, nor the gold coins given to the camp administrator. He was escorted from the camp prison to the border with the Independent State of Croatia at Metljika and disappeared without trace. There was some information that they had taken him to Jasenovac and slaughtered him there, but we couldn't believe that.

In Ferramonti the single men lived in their own part of the camp in separate barracks, while families were put into different barracks partitioned into miniature apartments with two rooms with beds and a small entrance in which there was some kind of primitive stove for cooking. The barracks were crawling with bedbugs and the whole camp swarmed with mosquitoes because the camp was built on what used to be a swamp. However, all in all, I would say that everything was tolerable given that this was a concentration camp.

HALF-FREE IN MIRANDOLA

At that time the Italians decided to allow the larger Jewish families to leave the camp and move to free confinement (*confino libero*) in places chosen for them by the Ministry of Internal Affairs. They assumed that members of these families would not attempt to escape for fear of endangering those who remained behind. The inmates who didn't have families didn't have the option of leaving the camp unless families which went out declared some single man was their relative. Many resorted to this ploy of joining up with families because the Italians didn't bother much about checking who was related to who.

We applied for permission to leave the camp as a family and were sent north to a small agricultural town called Mirandola, near Modena in the fertile Reggio Emilia region whose capital is Bologna. We lived and ate in a small hotel, the Aquila Nera (Black Eagle). We still had some of the money that we had brought from Belgrade. The only limitation on us was that we weren't allowed to leave the town without the permission of the authorities and that the men had to report to the chief of police every day at noon and he would record that they were present. Otherwise we had unlimited freedom of movement around the town and the local population had a positive attitude to us. I remember that the owner of the tobacco shop in the main square would always tell me what he had heard on Radio London. If someone fell sick they would go to the local doctor, who had once been a

social democrat and was really friendly to us. An elderly retired civil servant who used to eat at the hotel restaurant would point at the photograph of Mussolini on the wall and say "What a clown!" There was also a secondary school teacher who ate there who would appear every Sunday in a Fascist uniform with a black shirt; apparently he was only a Fascist on Sundays. He knew who we were and where we came from and was kind to us. I remember that I would often listen to the radio with the hotel owner, Vetruvi, and that we had heated arguments during the battle for Stalingrad. I used to tell him that the Germans would lose the battle. He had the opposite opinion, but didn't hold anything against me. The police chief, to whom we reported every day, behaved correctly in a civil servant kind of way. He once allowed the tobacconist to take me hunting mallards. As a Jewish internee I was even allowed to use a hunting rifle. I also used to tour the city and the surrounding area by bicycle with some Italian girls.

Despite the relaxed atmosphere, after what happened to Mirko, I was afraid they might come for me, too. Mirko was registered as a member of our family, and I was known to the police in Belgrade. I had spent a month in the Glavnjača prison and my photo appeared in the anti-Masonic and anti-Communist exhibition in the autumn of 1941 in Belgrade. We still didn't know the story behind Mirko's extradition to Croatia and I would often sleep restlessly, listening carefully to the drone of every truck which approached the hotel. So when my family and I had an opportunity to leave Italy we leapt at it. At that time, the beginning of 1943, the Italians began allowing Jewish refugee families to leave Italy if they could manage to get a visa for a neutral country. Such visas could be obtained from South American countries, on the condition that the potential immigrants had to prove they were Catholics. It wasn't difficult to obtain such proof from the local priest and we applied for departure to Paraguay. Thus in February 1943 we arrived in Rome, where we stayed for two weeks until we got all the documents, the entry visas for Paraguay and permission from the Italians to leave the country. It was then that I saw the Roman museums and archaeological discoveries. And then, at the end of February 1943, in the midst of the war, with everything still hanging in the balance, the five members of my family and the families of my aunts boarded a white Alitalia civilian airliner and took off for Madrid. I had never flown in a plane before and not in my wildest dreams did I think I would sit in an aircraft for the first time in order

to leave a cursed part of Europe which was sinking in the blood of our people and other peoples. I must say that the Italian authorities allowed all Jewish immigrants to exchange Italian liras for American dollars at the National Bank at the official exchange rate, which was several times cheaper than on the black market. Every person was allowed to buy 1,500 dollars under this privilege, and that was quite a sum at the time. We no longer had enough liras to buy all the dollars we were entitled to.

TRANSIT IN MADRID

And so we arrived in Madrid, which was both geographically and diplomatically our transit point on the way to South America. Our plan certainly wasn't to go to Paraguay. The important thing was to get out of the region controlled by the Fascist powers. My elder sister Ela and her Zagreb husband, Albert Flajšman, whom she had met in the Ferramonti camp, decided to go to Canada with their newborn son, Juan, now Johnny. My aunt, Rea Talvi, also went to Canada with her husband Moreno, an exporter, and so did Samuilo Davičo, his wife Luiza and their son Leon, who later became a journalist for *Politika*. My other aunt, Sara, her husband Nisim Ruso, also an exporter, and their two adult children opted for Argentina. Urological surgeon Dr Soloman Davidović obtained entry visas for Britain for his family after being invited there by the Yugoslav government-in-exile. There were a few more Belgrade families in Madrid who scattered everywhere. Moric Demajo, who had been the director of an Italian insurance company in Belgrade, also went to Argentina with his wife and son. His daughter Bonka went with her daughter, Svetlana, and her husband, Jaša Davičo, a doctor of law, to London because Jaša had got permission to enter Britain as a former activist of Dragoljub Jovanović's Agricultural Party. In Belgrade we had once been a harmonious and, I would even go so far as to say, an idyllic community of more than twelve thousand Jews, and it was there, in Madrid, that I was a witness to the final breaking up of this. Hitler had thrown a heavy bomb at us, killed almost everyone, and those who escaped with their lives scattered all over the world. After the Madrid group, many of those who survived the capitulation of Italy and the German occupation moved out to various countries.

Almost all the Belgraders stayed in Madrid for about a year, living in modest hotels while they decided where they would go and obtained the necessary documents. Franco's regime had already hinted at who would win the war and didn't put any limit on the time Jews could remain in exile in Spain. My sister, Šeka, and I didn't want to emigrate any further and we looked for a way to get closer to home. Together with our mother we joined a convoy of about seven thousand Jews who had fled to Spain and Portugal and which was heading for Palestine, still under the British mandate at the time. The British gave us permission to enter the country. They took us from the Spanish port of Cadiz to Haifa on a passenger ship from neutral Portugal. There were some fears as we sailed south of the Greek islands from which the Germans had not yet withdrawn. In Palestine I found a temporary job in a small experimental chemical plant in the village of Kfar Saba, which was surrounded by orange orchards, but three months later moved to Egypt in the uniform of a lieutenant of the National Liberation Army. Pavle Melamed helped me with this; he was one of the few Belgrade Jewish playboys and was then a technical officer in the First Partisan Tank Brigade, which had been equipped and trained by the British in the Egyptian desert. Pavle had come to visit someone in Palestine, heard I was there and invited me to come with him to Egypt. He lent me his reserve uniform, had National Liberation Army identification documents printed, forged an identity for me as an officer and took me on a train to Cairo with him. The British were already hot on our heels because their suspicions had been aroused by the printing of army identification documents. Pavle joined the Partisans because he had previously, in Egypt, been in the Royal Army and he talked a whole battalion of coastal Slovenians into crossing over to the National Liberation Army. Pavle didn't last long in the new Yugoslavia. He moved to the United States, where he died.

IN THE PARTISANS

With Pavle's help I joined the tank brigade on May 1, 1944, in the Egyptian desert. With them I travelled to liberated southern Italy. They continued their journey and I was sent to the island of Vis. There I worked on propaganda in the headquarters of the Second Dalmatian Brigade, of which my university friend Mirko Novović was deputy commissar, Party leader, of the 26th Division. Then I asked to be sent

to Serbia. I arrived on a Russian transport plane and landed at the Partisan airport at Bojnik in Pusta Reka on August 25, 1944, my 26th birthday. It's difficult to describe my excitement at getting out of this plane, on which I had travelled sitting on sacks full of ammunition. The first thing I noticed was the familiar smell of the land, the soil and the vegetation of Serbia which I had never forgotten, which was different from everything in the past three years.

I was in the Army until the end of the war. I had to start from the beginning, first as a fighter, then as a sergeant in the Eleventh Serbian Brigade which was somewhere around Leskovac, trying to impede the evacuation of German troops from Greece by rail to the north. Later, when I was in Aranđelovac conducting guards around the Main Headquarters for Serbia, it occurred to me that I should go to the front line, so I went to the headquarters to speak to Koča Popović who was the headquarters commander for Serbia. He was really pleased to see me and said "Well, where have you been? We received a memo a while ago asking for you to report to the Propaganda Division of the Supreme Headquarters."

I arrived in Belgrade in December 1944 and, for some months, worked on the publication of propaganda brochures under chief Stefan Mitrović, a tragic figure of the Yugoslav Communist movement (later, after being on Goli Otok, he went mad). I was transferred from the Propaganda Division to the division for liaison with foreign military missions and then, in September 1945, to the news agency Tanjug. And so, under orders, I became a journalist. I soon learnt to love my vocation, it helped me exorcise the technology I had studied fairly unenthusiastically before the war. I also know that I was sent to the Supreme Headquarters Propaganda Division, to Tanjug, and on my first major assignment as a special Tanjug correspondent at the peace conference in Paris in 1946 by Agitprop. Milovan Đilas was at the helm of Agitprop and he had known me from before the war. During my career I was a correspondent in Latin America, in Rio De Janeiro, and correspondent in Washington in the USA, but my favourite period was when I was foreign political commentator for *Borba* at the end of the 1950s, when the paper played an important role and had a high circulation.

Leon DAVIČO

FROM BELGRADE TO CANADA AND BACK

Leon Davičo was born in Belgrade in 1926, the son of Samuilo and Luiza Davičo, née Flores. He began his education at the Kralj Petar Primary School and the State Comprehensive School in Belgrade. He completed his university studies in Montreal, Canada. After postgraduate study in Paris, he was awarded an honorary doctorate by Britain's Durham University at the beginning of the 1990s.

His brother, Edi, was executed in 1941. His father died in 1958 and his mother in 1984. He married his Berlin-born wife Gaby 44 years ago and they had two sons: Slobodan-Bobby and Saša.

He was for many years a correspondent for Politika *in London, Paris, Berlin, Istanbul and Rome; he was founder of* Politika Ekspres *and spent twenty years in the United Nations as director and spokesman for UNICEF, UNESCO and the UNHCR. He is president of the Association of Foreign Journalists in Switzerland and the Swiss Press Club in Geneva.*

I was fifteen years old when the Stukas destroyed thousands of lives and cut short many an infancy and adolescence. I had the ideas of a fifth form student at the Belgrade Comprehensive School, a wonderful family and a good life. I wasn't conscious of either what had

happened or what was to follow. I was a member of SKOJ, the Communist youth organisation, and was caught by the first bombs exploding in Hadži-Prodanova Street where, as a good boy scout, I was delivering mobilisation notices. I took shelter in the cellar at my close friend and schoolmate Milivoje Popović's place, and returned home to Uzun-Mirkova Street at about noon. Twenty-four hours later, Joca Almuli, in his officer's uniform, visited us in the shelter at the Stock Exchange and advised us to leave Belgrade as soon as possible. We followed his advice and, travelling by train or bus, arrived in Valjevo the next day. There we called on Dr Isak Eškenazi who was head of a local hospital. He gave us the same advice: get as far away from Belgrade as possible.

In Valjevo, my nineteen-year-old brother Edi reported to the local military authorities, was given a uniform and left with his unit. We met him again in Belgrade ten days later. As for us, my father and mother and I, together with my Uncle Hajnrih, an old defender of Belgrade, continued on our way towards Sarajevo. We stopped along the way several times because of the danger of aerial attacks. At one point we had to jump from the bus into the forest, from which the Chetniks, hidden behind the dense growth, were shooting high in the air, presumably in the hope of bringing down a German plane. One aircraft was hit but, unfortunately it was not German but ours! We slept at Vlasenica with a very hospitable Muslim host and, after a number of unexpected turns, arrived safe in Sarajevo where we discovered in the very first hotel that German troops were about to enter the city. After a sleepless night we went to the railway station and boarded the train for Belgrade. There were no seats available and we had to stand all the way.

When we returned to our apartment, my mother began to weep. Two rooms had been taken over by German officers and the others had been stripped. The Wehrmacht had done their job well, leaving only the piano where it stood. We lived on the fourth floor and the lift was only big enough for a violin. The only happy moment was when Edi arrived. His unit had surrendered and been taken captive. If only he had gone with them!

Edi was immediately sent to forced labour at Smederevo, my father was arrested together with his brother Josif, and I was assigned to forced labour in the German veterinary regiment command, in the Royal Guard building. My father and Josif were detained after being

denounced by the janitor, Mornau, at 45 King Petar Street, where my father had an office. He was accused of having financed the March 27 coup, which was of course preposterous. He was released two months later. At the end of June we were at Tašmajdan, where the notorious Egon[1] presided over a meeting where about a hundred Jews were arrested and executed in retaliation after some German military trucks were set on fire.

It's of interest to note that about fifty years later I was invited to Graz and faced this same Egon who was finally to be brought to justice. What a miserable wretch! "I was only a dentist and in Belgrade I was an interpreter for the officer in charge of the Jews," he whined. Justice had eventually caught up with him, but painlessly: he died a natural death a few weeks later.

In any case Tašmajdan was the signal for us to run for our lives. Edi decided to join the Kosmaj detachment together with a group of Jewish Communists including Bora Baruh, an outstanding painter, and Maki Štern (Dr Maksim Štern), one of the few Jewish survivors from this detachment. Edi, who was a member of the SKOJ City Committee in Belgrade, joined the Partisans on August 2, 1941. My father, my mother, my school friend Žak Semo and I travelled to Split seven days later with forged papers. We saw Edi for the last time two days before his departure. Edi embraced them, saying "Listen, we have a total of 140 years between us and we've lived happily together for many years. Now we have to face hard times. For three or four years we won't be happy. After that we'll all be happy together again."

During a skirmish at Venčane in September, 1941, Edi, operating a machine-gun despite his severe nearsightedness, was wounded in the head and taken prisoner. He was tortured in Banjica, but did not betray anyone, and in the early days of October was executed at Jajinci. His happy life ended in his nineteenth year. Subconsciously he was ready for it, because he was always in a hurry to learn something new. He read a great deal, learned to speak perfect German, French and English; he was a born writer, a wonderful friend and brother. If, after the war ended, I returned to Belgrade, I did it, consciously or

[1] It was established many years later, in 1990, that the surname of this "Commissar for Jews" was Sabukoschek. The retaliation followed an attack by Elija-Guta Almoslino on a German soldier riding a motorbike.

subconsciously, to honour the memory of my brother. May he rest in eternal peace.

Documents for my father, my mother and myself were made out in the names of Emilio, Luisa and Leonardo Davini, born in Split. They cost my father a packet. I have never seen so many counterfeit stamps on an identity document. Signor Siciliani, who sold us these papers, obviously had good connections. My nanny, Sister Anna, a German from Wuppertal, took our luggage to the railway station, put it into a compartment and waited for us to arrive and board the train. There wasn't much sleep to be had and, while we were in Zagreb, Žak and I went into the city but rushed back quarter of an hour later, horrified by the sight of the Ustasha hordes.

We arrived safely in Split and moved in with a family who had a son in the Partisans. We established contact with a local SKOJ group whose leader was a young man who later became Yugoslavia's ambassador in Helsinki. His name was Zlatko Sinobad. With my new comrades I joined demonstrations against the introduction of Italian language in schools in Split and was arrested. A few days later I was interned, along with my parents, at Borgotaro in the province of Parma. There were about twenty of us on the ship to Trieste and later in the train on the way to our internment. The men were manacled but the women and children were not. The Italians classified me as a child.

Leon Davičo during his school days

The year in Italy passed rather quickly. We would go to the municipal offices in this pretty town each morning and afternoon to report. The authorities treated us very correctly and the locals, who had never seen a live Jew before, gradually opened up to us. Although

contact with the locals was strictly banned, within a month we were going to somebody's apartment every night after curfew to listen to the broadcasts from London and Moscow and passing the news on to the other internees.

The only villain in Borgotaro was the secretary of the Fascist Party, Signor Molinari. Not long after we arrived he called us to his office to tell us that we were not permitted to fraternise with the Italians or to go outside the boundaries of the town. He threatened us with heavy penalties if he discovered that we had been listening to the radio or been out after curfew and so on. "If we catch someone contravening these rules," he said, pointing his finger ominously at a litre bottle on his desk, "the penalty is this castor oil, which you will drink until you are dead!"

Our consolation was to go and listen to the prohibited radio stations in the home of his first assistant, Frigieri, and in the fact that Signora Molinari, a licentious blonde, found the young Jewish boys rather attractive. This applied mostly to Daki, Buba and me. Daki was David Levi, now living in America, Buba was Demajo, Bonka's brother, and among the internees were Bonka and Jaša Davičo; Oskar and Ruta with their son Kolja (who were moved there from the Ferramonti camp); Dr Amar and his family; Dr Solomon Davidović, his wife and daughter; Dr Žarko Almuli; the composer Enriko Josif, who could walk all day humming or whistling Ravel's *Bolero*; my father, my mother and my Uncle Josif with his wife Cecilija. Moric Demajo was also there with his wife. In the beginning we were all together in the Appennino Hotel, but when families of Italian refugees from the Allied bombing began to arrive we were allowed to take private accommodation in the village.

In Borgotaro we made many friends with whom we have remained in contact to this day.

Thanks to his connections with the director of the French glass company St Gobain, my father managed to obtain a Canadian immigrant visa and a Spanish transit visa, so a year after the beginning of our internment we were able to leave Italy. In Rome we boarded a hydroplane with blacked-out windows and, after a rather unpleasant flight, we reached a country where the lights were not turned off every night and where, despite its Fascist regime, there was no curfew. The very first evening in the Marineda, our Madrid guest house, an ominous incident occurred. A stranger passed our table and said

Dobro veče, "Good evening" in Serbo-Croatian. We fell silent and retreated to our rooms. The next day, during breakfast, I made enquiries about who this spy might be. The waiter swore that there were no other Yugoslavs in the guest house and then our spy appeared at the door. Passing by our table, he again said *Dobro veče*. The waiter then explained that what we had heard was "*Que aproveche*!" – Spanish for "bon appetit".

Edi Davičo, Leon's brother, killed in his nineteenth year in Jajince in 1941

In Madrid, after a scandalous beginning, I resumed my education at the French lycee. In order to pass the admission test I went to the lycee, sat at the desk and began drawing triangles, because the question given was "What is the classical height? Give examples." For a whole hour I struggled to invent all the possible and impossible situations involving the height of a triangle or square until the examiner, passing my desk, stopped me.

"What are you doing on this paper," he asked.

"I'm drawing triangles and marking the height... "

The examiner interrupted me with the logical explanation that this was a test of the French language, not mathematics. The problem was that my grasp of French was very poor and I had confused the words *hauteur* (height) and *auteur* (author)

"We had better send you to the first grade instead of the second, so that you will have time to learn the French language," said the cruel examiner as he conducted me to the door.

So I spent the next six months in the first grade, learning to distinguish between mathematics and French literature and acquiring

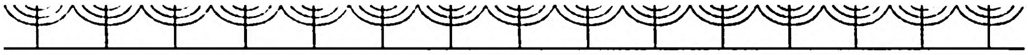
new friends and new experiences. At my first bullfight, when General Franco was in attendance, I refused to raise my arm in the Fascist salute. I was arrested but released after explaining that I had come from a country which was occupied by troops which used the same salute.

In May, 1944, my father, my mother, Albert Flajšman and his wife Ela Almuli, Moreno and Rea Talvi and I boarded the Portuguese ship Serpa Pinto at Porto, bound for Philadelphia. The ocean was calm and the voyage was very pleasant. At last we were on our own ground! From the clothes hangers in the cabin cupboards we learned that we were on board the former Yugoslav ship Princess Olga, which the Portuguese had somehow acquired and renamed Serpa Pinto.

Two days before we docked in Philadelphia, we had an encounter with the Germans, our first since we had escaped Belgrade. A German submarine stopped us. A score of bearded sailors in black uniforms climbed aboard and examined the passengers and their papers. Having established that all the passengers were of Allied nationalities and that, in addition, most of them had Jewish names, they decided to sink the ship. They gave us twenty minutes to take to the lifeboats. I was obviously not quite aware of the danger because I first went to my cabin to fetch the new suit I had bought in Madrid. But this suit saved our lives because we used it to stuff the hole in our lifeboat, which was damaged as it was lowered into the sea. My mother, who could not swim, had fallen into the sea and my father and I held her by the arms for hours, while a shark circled around her and the boat. Presumably these sharks, which were found there in large numbers, had selected juicier victims because, after nearly three hours, and with the help of the sailors from other boats, my mother was hauled aboard. Since that day she has never again suffered from sea-sickness. The whole incident had a happy ending. The submarine surfaced again and the captain of the Portuguese ship informed us over a loudspeaker that we could return to the ship because the submarine commander had received orders not to sink us. Back on board our ship there was a roll call and it was discovered that the ship's doctor, the cook and a Polish baby were missing, presumed taken by the sharks.

In Philadelphia and, later, in Montreal, we were targeted by journalists. This was the beginning of a four-year sojourn in Canada as immigrants. It was there that I began and completed my university

study (economy and political sciences) before returning to Yugoslavia in 1946. There my friend Vule Mićunović, invited me to a lunch at which the two of us were served an omelette made of thirty eggs. The following year I brought a Canadian student brigade to do voluntary work on the Šamac-Sarajevo railway line. I am still in contact with some of those volunteers. I finally returned to Belgrade to live in 1948, a few weeks after the Cominform Resolution.



IX

SPANISH CITIZENS

Rašela NOAH-KONFINO

SAVED BY OUR SPANISH CITIZENSHIP

Rašela Noah-Konfino was born in Skopje on April 23, 1925, to Esterina, née Amariljo, and Mois Noah. She had a brother, Haim Noah. All the members of her immediate family survived the Holocaust thanks to the fact that they had Spanish citizenship, but fifteen of their relatives perished.

After the second world war, she finished secondary school and a degree in civil engineering, living in the Jewish student hostel at 19 Kosmajska Street in Belgrade. She began working for Energoprojekt in Belgrade while still a student and remained with the company until her retirement.

She was married to Lazar Konfino and has two daughters, Irina (born 1955) and Vesna (born 1961) and one grandson, David.

Rašela Noah was interviewed by Jaša Almuli for the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University in the US. The interview was supplemented for this publication with information provided by Rašela Noah at a later date.

There were about four thousand Jews living in Skopje up until the second world war. Much as in all other cities and communities, there was diversity in all spheres of life. I'm thinking here about education and assets, because there were both rich and poor. I lived in Skopje

until the liberation, until the end of the second world war. I'm one of a few, a very small number of Jews in Macedonia who stayed alive thanks to the circumstance that I was a Spanish citizen. I attended primary and secondary school in Skopje. When the war began I was in the fifth grade of secondary school and they granted me, along with all the other students, a pass for the year because the war began in April, two months before the school year was due to finish.

Rašela's mother and father in Skopje, before the war

Most Macedonian Jews were Sephardic, but there were also some Ashkenazi who had come from other regions.

In Skopje, Ladino was spoken in Jewish homes. This was also my mother tongue because I began learning Serbian only when I started school, which was a big problem for children in their schooling. My parents also spoke Macedonian while my brother and I, because we socialised with Serbian children, later spoke mainly Serbian.

The customs were Sephardic. My father wasn't an orthodox Jew. At home we didn't observe the holidays much, but we would go for

each of them to my grandfather, my mother's father. Because this was a large family he would gather his sons and daughters with their families and we all celebrated the holidays there. The customs were very nice and we children really enjoyed it all. We also had a beautiful and large synagogue in Skopje.

My father was a tradesman. He had a knitwear workshop from 1930. Until the war began we lived a pleasant middle-class life. Mother and father worked in the workshop, which was right next door to the house, so my brother and I were not neglected. My brother finished textile school in Leskovac and joined the business. Once a year, the family went on vacation to a spa.

The Jewish community was very harmonious: people got along well and helped one another. There were also some Jewish organisations such as Hashomer Hatzair for young people My brother was a member of Hashomer. I didn't belong to any organisations, due to a combination of circumstances, because we were practically the only Jewish family in the area of Skopje where we lived. I was the only Jew in my school and I didn't have Jewish religious classes in primary school, but Orthodox, right through to high school.

The Germans entered Skopje immediately after the attack on Yugoslavia in April 1941. They were followed by the Bulgarians. The Germans made concessions to the Bulgarians because they were their allies. The Germans broke up the country and annexed Macedonia, or South Serbia as it was called in the then Yugoslavia, to Bulgaria. Anyone who wanted could get Bulgarian citizenship. Only those who declared themselves as Serbs had to leave Macedonia, within a very short time and under very rigid conditions. Macedonian Jews were not allowed to take Bulgarian citizenship. This was so that they could confiscate their assets, ban them from working, and limit their movements. We were forced to wear the Star of David. We wore the yellow star as a brooch, like a button. I had to start wearing it in 1941, as soon as the Germans came, and I also wore it during the Bulgarian occupation. Jews were also barred from living in apartments in the new part of Skopje and had to move out of this part of the city. Because of this my uncle, my mother's youngest brother, and my aunt moved in with us, because they were evicted from their apartment.

During the occupation my father lost his right to work. But he was a very resourceful and wise man. One room in our house was used as a store for the larger quantities of merchandise father needed in his business. Before the Germans arrived he sold this stock – because there were still people who wanted to buy these goods. He then changed all the money into gold coins and gave them to a close friend – a Macedonian called Rista. I don't remember his surname. With this money, Rista bought us food and anything else we needed. The money was used to support our refugees: Aunt Berta and Uncle Avram Koen, my father's sister and her husband, and their two little daughters, Rita and Mati. They all fled Belgrade and came to us, just as my mother's brother and his wife had done, because they had nothing to support themselves with. They were later taken to Treblinka where they perished.

Rašela Noah as a bridesmaid at the wedding of her uncle, Menteš Noah. Only eleven members of her large family survived the atrocities of the war

My parents usually learnt about measures imposed on the Jews through the Jewish Community or through public announcements. There wasn't any real change in the attitude of the neighbours, most of them Turks, in our area although our Macedonian neighbours dis-

tanced themselves somewhat and there were no Serbs because they had all left Macedonia when the Germans arrived.

Jews were subject to many restrictions. However, compared to those in Serbia, Germany, Austria and other countries, even with all these restrictions, Jews lived under relatively tolerable conditions until March 11, 1943.

Same face, different situations in life: Rašela in 1941 and, a year later, in occupied Skopje

Up to this time, the Bulgarians didn't force anyone to enter concentration camps. There were many Jewish refugees from Serbia who had heard that conditions were much better for them in Skopje and in Macedonia in general. However in 1941 the Bulgarian authorities proclaimed that anyone who came from other countries had to report. Some Jews from Belgrade took the bait. They were arrested when they reported to the authorities and were immediately returned to Belgrade. Later, after the war, we heard that they had been killed soon after that.

I have already mentioned that, like all Jews, my father did not have the right to work. The German and Bulgarian occupying forces had stripped Jews of their citizenship so they were able to deprive them of the right to work and seize their assets, all under the pretence of legality.

And so we lived on a razor's edge, from one day to the next, until March 11, 1943. At dawn on that day, virtually without warning, they rounded up all the Jews in Skopje. This was done thoroughly and "successfully", demonstrating that there was a register of all Jews and they knew where everyone lived. At first we had no idea what would happen to us. In most cases the Bulgarian police came into our apartments, forced us to prepare quickly and pack some clothes. We were allowed to take blankets and food. I remember the long line of horse-drawn carts in which we could put our belongings. We walked beside the carts as the column headed for Monopol. This was the name of the tobacco warehouses on the outskirts of Skopje, which had their own railway siding. As far as I remember there were four buildings of four storeys each. They put all the people from Skopje in there and then, during the day, we were joined by Jews who had been arrested in Bitolj, Štip, Veles and other places throughout Macedonia.

CONVOYS

At the time we had no idea who had given the orders for this, but we learnt later that it had been the Bulgarians, under pressure from the Germans. In Bulgaria, the Bulgarian authorities were protecting their Jews. Czar Boris and the patriarch of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church stood up to the German request to round up and hand over Bulgarian Jews. Their position was that they were Bulgarian citizens and they wouldn't hand them over. However they soon paid recompense for this concession by conducting a thorough deportation of Jews from Macedonia. We remained in Monopol for twenty days or so. There were more than seven thousand Jews assembled there. For a few days we received no food: we ate what we had brought from home. The accommodation was the worst. Each family was allotted a patch of floor. There we laid out what we had brought with us from home. There was no water in the Monopol compound, except in the yard. They only let us out in groups, whether to relieve ourselves, wash our faces or fetch water. However very little time was allowed for each of these needs, so we had to do everything at breakneck speed. Because of this there were soon lice, mange and contagious diseases, all in the short period we spent in Monopol. Of course we had nothing in the camp – we had no beds nor did they give us blankets. There was only the wooden floor and, because the ceiling was so high, lofts

where tobacco was dried. People were also accommodated on these lofts. We were living in these terrible conditions when the convoys began. The Jews were taken away from Monopol in three convoys. The first left on March 22 and the last on March 29. We later discovered from documents we had access to after the war, that there were supposed to be four convoys. However they squeezed many more people into the wagons than would properly fit so that everyone was taken in just three convoys. We were never told where they were taking us, although there was a rumour, but it was only guessing, that we were going to forced labour somewhere in Bulgaria. When we saw German guards beside the wagons we began to be suspicious.

Rašela's mother Esterina with her son Haim, Rašela's brother

And this is the point to tell the story of how my immediate family and I survived.

While we were in Monopol, the Italian consul made an attempt to save some of the Jews at any cost. He was opposed to this extremely inhumane transport of Jews. Because he was unable to do anything else, he tried to save at least those Jews who were Italian citizens and succeeded in doing this. Several families of Skopje Jews were released while we were in Monopol. They were rescued as Italian citizens. In addition a Bulgarian, Dr Kostov, tried to have physicians, pharmacists and veterinary surgeons released from Monopol saying that he needed them to do skilled work for which people were in short supply in remote parts of Macedonia, where epidemics had broken out, and for other health protection projects. He succeeded. There were about sixty of these. He first asked for pharmacists and physicians, but they refused to leave the camp without their families. Then he went to the Bulgarian authorities with the request that their families be released with them. He succeeded again and so a second group of Jews was released. However the veterinary surgeons were not allowed to leave the camp.

In this situation my brother Haim Noah began to agitate for the release of Jews. He had an idea that perhaps we could also try to save ourselves as Spanish citizens from the time when Jews were expelled from Spain. Most Spanish citizens in Skopje had never renewed their documents, because it was very difficult for Spanish citizens to get jobs in Yugoslavia, so a number of people who had had Spanish citizenship took Yugoslav citizenship and allowed their Spanish citizenship to lapse.

By tradition, my father's entire family had Spanish citizenship and we had documents at home proving this. My brother, who was ten years older than me, had graduated from a specialist secondary textile school in 1937. As a Spanish citizen he had problems finding a job, so my parents then applied for Yugoslav citizenship for the whole family. We got it. My brother even did military service, but my parents didn't throw away the documents which proved we had Spanish nationality, but kept them as a souvenir. Because we didn't have these documents with us, my brother was taken under guard to our house in Skopje and brought back some old passports. I don't even know when exactly we acquired Spanish citizenship, I suppose it was passed down from one generation to another. He brought all these documents to

the camp and gave them to the Bulgarian authorities who, it seems, were willing to take this into consideration. We learnt later that the Spanish ambassador in Sofia and the Spanish consul in Skopje had pushed this case very hard. Once the whole issue was raised, they insisted that Spanish citizens be released from the camp. So we, too, were released, along with about 25 families of Spanish citizens, a total of about seventy people. A family friend, a Bulgarian woman married

Three brothers and two sisters of Rašela's mother Esterina perished. Of the people in this photograph, only two (sitting in the first row) died of natural causes

to a Polish Jew who had converted to Christianity, helped us do all this quickly and successfully. We got a note to her telling her that we had submitted the papers, and she interceded with the police, insisting that everything be sent to the Spanish ambassador in Bulgaria. For us, this meant that things were virtually taken care of because the ambassador really wanted to help, without raising the question of the documents being renewed. We were given new Spanish passports. The whole operation took more than twenty days, so we saw all the transports leave Monopol. They wouldn't allow us to leave the camp, as the Ital-

ian citizens had done, and the doctors and pharmacists, they released us only once the convoys had left. And so until the very last day, or to be exact the very last minute, we didn't know whether or not we would be released. Leaving the camp was completely shattering for me because everyone I loved had left! From the detached room in which we were accommodated, I watched them board the wagons. It was especially difficult for me to watch Nina, my best friend, drag her bundle and not be able to help her.

It was terrible in Monopol when the transports were leaving. There were many elderly people, there were also children; people were beside themselves in chaos and panic, they were carrying bags and were simply shoved into cattle wagons. When they'd crammed in as many people as they thought could fit, they would close them. The wagons had barred windows for ventilation. All of this, happening before our very eyes, could only be described as horrendous. While we were in the camp, wagons taking Jews from Thessalonica to execution sites passed by. I had an aunt in Thessalonica, my mother's sister, who perished in Treblinka together with her husband and two children. My father's brothers were, like us, Spanish citizens, so they too were released from the camp with their families. On the other hand, the plan to wipe out an entire people cost the lives of many of my mother's family.

We weren't allowed to speak to the people who were leaving Monopol, most of them on their last journey. The local Fascist collaborators, who had rounded up the Jews and their families, tortured them in the camps and from there delivered them to the masters of death, allocated a building to those who had been selected for transport, while they locked the rest of us up and made it impossible for us to get out and get anywhere near the wagons. Our view was limited to what we could see through the window: those on the transport left without saying goodbye and without any messages for anyone anywhere.

THE EVIL FATE OF THE SERBIAN JEWS

At the time all of this was happening, in March 1943, we knew nothing of the persecution of Jews and other peoples. Nor did we know about Auschwitz and the other camps. The only thing we Jews from Macedonia knew was what we heard from Jewish refugees com-

ing in from Austria, or those who had fled Serbia. No one even suspected the existence of death camps, liquidation camps, such as Auschwitz, Treblinka and the others. We expected to see our relatives after the war.

Of the more than seven thousand Jews interned in Monopol, not one survived. Of the Macedonian Jews, no one returned.

They released us from Monopol, on a Sunday evening if I'm not mistaken, during the curfew, so we had to get home fast. However we were unable to get into the house because it was locked and everything from inside had been stolen and taken away. But we had good neighbours, Turks, and when they heard us ring, when they saw we were trying to get into our house, they immediately came out of their homes and took us in. We were their guests for three days, until we managed to get the keys to our house. In the rooms stripped of everything we lived as though we were under some kind of house arrest, aware that there were very few Jews left and that we were still required to wear the Star of David and report to the Bulgarian authorities. On top of that there were also quite a few Germans in Skopje. We assumed that we would attract attention out on the streets, so we lived in isolation; our neighbours kept us supplied with food and took care of us. Legally speaking we were protected, but we were afraid that all kinds of things might happen to us.

At the time the British had several times bombed Ploešti in Romania, a place with oil wells and refineries, so there were air raid alerts in Skopje every evening. A permit was needed to leave the city and so our Turkish neighbours applied for permission to evacuate to a village in order to avoid these frequent alerts. We did the same – applied for permission and received it. We went with our Turkish neighbours to an Albanian village near Tetovo – I can't remember what it was called. Because it was summer and the school was in recess, the locals put us up in the school building. Here we lived as best we could, slept and battled the shortages. The important thing was that we stayed alive. Our Turkish neighbours' Albanian friends took as much care of us as they could. But one morning we faced an unpleasant surprise when we wanted to go out. Some Albanians we didn't know blocked our way; they were standing in front of the school as guards, with guns. We were astonished – we hoped to get through and now we were unable to get out! But because our Turkish friends were there and they were allowed out, they went to Skopje, reported

everything to the Bulgarian authorities and the Bulgarians came and freed us. Later we learnt that these people had been Balists who knew that we were Jews and that people had hidden us there. They were counting on getting a bounty for us. The Balists were Albanian Fascists who collaborated with the Germans during the war. This incident was a warning to us that we weren't safe, even here, so we returned to Skopje. We went to the outskirts of the city, to Rista, the man I mentioned earlier who had worked in my father's shop in 1928 and 1929 and who had remained a true friend of our family. Because he had a very large family and very little space, he couldn't take us into his apartment, but he allowed us to use a shed in his yard. We stayed there until October 1944, and were there when the liberation happened. I should mention that my father really trusted this man, so he gave him the coins and all the money he had raised by selling the stock from his workshop which he had before the war and which he was forced to get rid of under pressure. He left all the money with his friend who supplied us with everything necessary.

Even though Rista had not had any work for the whole four years, he spent all the money, to the last dinar, on us and didn't keep anything for himself.

And so the liberation came. I then completed the sixth grade, because I had not attended school during the war. Then I moved to Belgrade and finished seventh and eighth grades in one year at a school for students whose education had been interrupted by the war. Then I enrolled in the Belgrade University Faculty of Civil Engineering and, after graduating, worked as an engineer until my retirement.

My parents moved to Israel right after the war, in 1948. I have never been back to Skopje since they left the city. I had neither the will nor the strength – the memories were far too painful. I have some very nice memories from the war period but, despite the fact that my family survived, the tragedy of war laid a dark pall over everything with the senseless crimes which cause people to lose faith and hope. Skopje is a city which has the worst possible memories for me, a city in which I no longer have any family, in which I no longer know anyone, so there is no reason, no motive for me to go there.

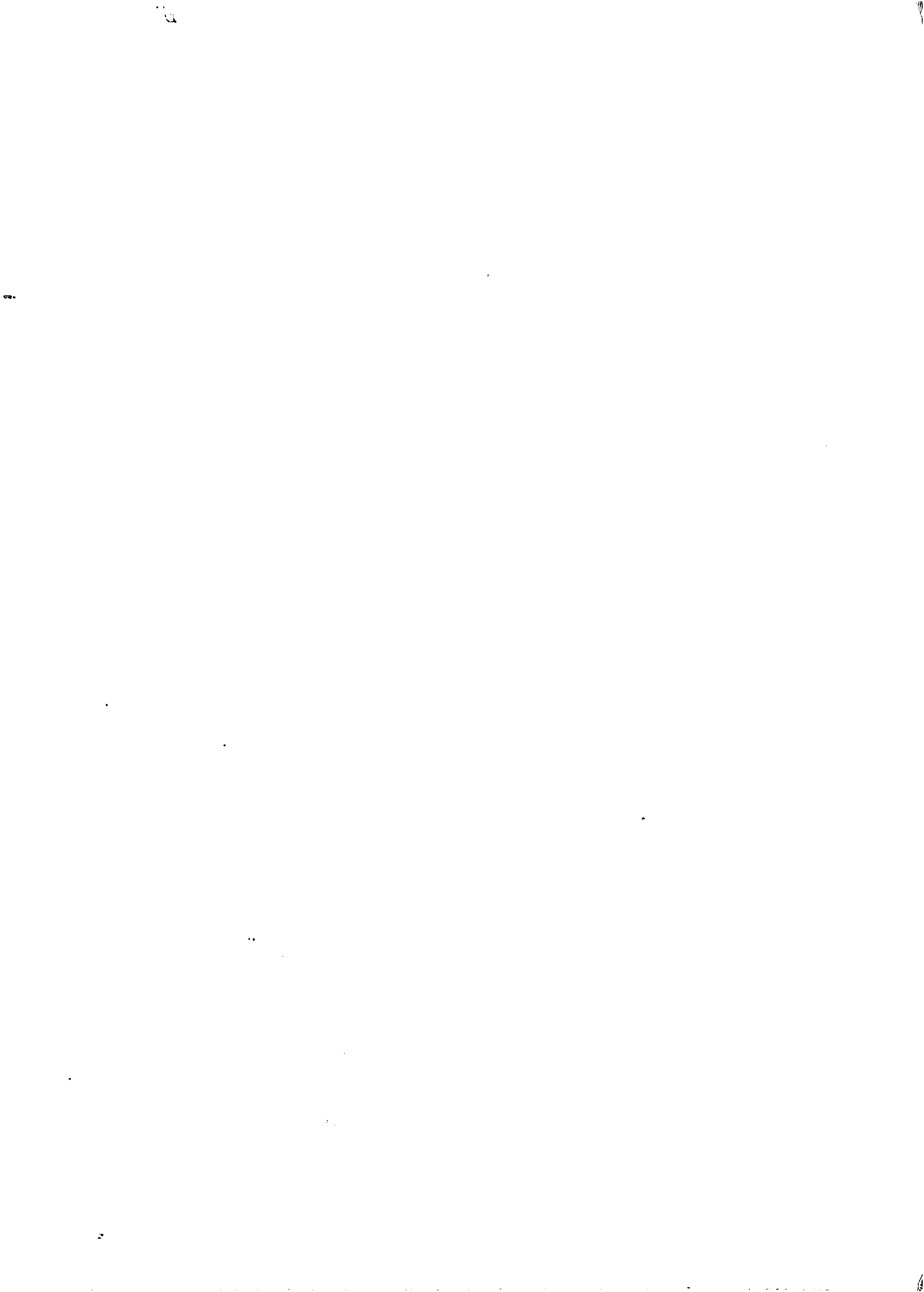
In one of my moments of facing the past and the horrors, I once calculated that fifteen members of my immediate and extended family perished in the war. My mother's brothers and sisters all died, with their families, all of them in Treblinka.

X

*ALIYAT HANOAR**

– Department of Jewish Agency. This was founded by Henrietta Szold in 1934 and continued after World War II in Israel, to save Jewish children and especially orphans from difficulties and danger abroad, to educate them and bring them to safety.

– Name given to the activities of this department.



Armando MORENO

SAVING MYSELF BY SAVING THE CHILDREN

Armando Moreno was born in Vienna in 1920 to Julijus Moreno, a Sephard from Belgrade, and Sabina Silberman, an Ashkenazi from Vienna. His grandfather, Jakov Moreno, was born in Belgrade where he had a tailor's shop in Knez Mihailova Street. He was married to Sabina Ruso from Timisoara. He maintained business contacts with Austria, so the Moreno family often spent time in Vienna. One of Jakov Moreno's sons, Salomon Moreno, was the general secretary of the Rothschild Foundation in Vienna until the Germans entered Austria in 1938. Armando Moreno's great-grandfather was from Trieste (under Austrian rule at the time) and, as a young tailor, he was brought to the Serbian court after Belgrade's liberation from the Turks. His family was large, on both his mother's and his father's sides, and perished in the Holocaust.

After the second world war, Armando Moreno worked in the Legal Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, from 1945 to 1947, then from 1947 until 1949 he was secretary of the Ministry's Diplomatic School. He was head of the UNICEF mission in Yugoslavia until 1953 when he moved to the Secretariat for Tourism. Then, until his retirement, he worked as an advisor with the Tourist Association of Split. He has a daughter and a son and lives today in Los Angeles.

I lived with my parents in Vienna, where I completed primary school. When anti-Semitism began to spread, the family of Julijus Moreno moved to Belgrade where we joined the family of Samuilo Kon, the husband of my mother's sister Berta. Samuilo and Julijus had been inseparable since their childhood in Belgrade.

I enrolled in the First Boys' Secondary School and became a member of Hashomer Hatzair, along with my cousins, Pajki, Erih and Zaki. Because I wanted to go to Erez Israel, I left school and began working in the Elka factory in Dušanova Street in Dorćol. There I worked with Josif Majer, known as Tarzan, who was hanged in Valjevo as a detachment commissar, and with Rašela Baruh, the older sister of the Baruh brothers who was killed together with her husband by the Germans in 1941 in the Banjica camp.

In 1938 Hashomer Hatzair asked me to go to the *hasharah* in Galenić, near Podravska Slatina. There I met many comrades from Hashomer Hatzair from the whole of Yugoslavia. Among them were my cousins: Valter (Pajki), Erih (Era), Milan Klajn (now in Belgrade), Aca-Šlomo Gutman from Novi Sad (and still living there), Geri Vajs from Zagreb (now living in the Gat kibbutz), Stela Sam from Skopje who married Geri Vajs and also lives in the kibbutz, Mila Koen, now living in Brazil, Mina Rajs, now in Australia, Josif Majer (Tarzan), Lule-Hajim Haravon (killed in 1941 as a Partisan courier), Bibi from Zagreb, now in Israel and many others. I became *sadran ha avoda*, work manager, together with Tarzan. We Yugoslavs were joined by refugees from Lithuania and Germany. At Golenić we learned to be *halutzim*, pioneers, villagers.

In 1941, by arrangement with the Jewish Communities of Belgrade and Zagreb, the Alliance of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia invited me to go to Zagreb and be the *madrih*, the counsellor for Jewish refugee children from Germany and Austria who were being brought illegally to Yugoslavia, still not under occupation at the time, to await permits to enter Palestine which was still under the English mandate. One of the reasons I was selected was my excellent command of German (having attended school in Austria) and I also spoke Serbo-Croatian, because I was also educated in Belgrade.

I arrived in Zagreb from the *hasharah* and found *haver* Josif Indig from Osijek who, during the summer of 1940, had been at the *hasharah* as a seasonal worker. He was three years older than me. As a *madrih*, he was in charge of these children together with his comrade

haver Zlata (Zehava) Vajner from Vukovar. She was twenty, like me, and had studied singing in Zagreb. The two of them had some command of German.

The children were transferred illegally from Austria to Yugoslavia across the border at Maribor in Slovenia. The Jugendaliyah (Youth Immigration) organisation was founded by Recha Freier from Berlin, in collaboration with Henrietta Szold, a member of the Jewish Congress.

Recha Freier crossed the border with her twelve-year-old daughter Maayan and came to Zagreb when about 250 children between the ages of seven and fourteen had already been transferred, accompanied by just a handful of adults. Their fathers were in the camps of Germany and Austria. Recha Freier got an entry visa for Palestine for her daughter and herself and, at the end of 1940, arrived in Jerusalem.

In Zagreb, we three *madrihim* organised work so that Joško, as the eldest, would be the main contact with the Jewish Community of Zagreb and I, as a Belgrader, would be in charge of contacts with Belgrade and take care of the practical issues of the children's accommodation with Zagreb Jewish families who took the children in. We organised social activities for the children in the premises of the Zagreb Jewish Community, (in the basement of 16 Palmotićeva Street), where we also opened a canteen where the children were given three meals a day. It was difficult for us to find accommodation for children who had been raised strictly kosher, because there weren't many strictly kosher Jewish families in Yugoslavia. I organised outings to areas around Zagreb, took them to the cinema and to *sicha* classes, where the children learnt Hebrew in preparation for their departure for Palestine. Through the Zagreb Jewish Community they had teachers who spoke German, teachers of mathematics, history, geography, religious instruction and other subjects, depending on their age.

ON THE ROAD WITH THE CHILDREN

During the summer of 1940-41, the children began getting used to living in Yugoslavia. In fact it was from the children that we learnt what the German Fascists, and the Fascists in general were preparing and so we too made our preparations for what was to come. In the autumn of 1940, a group of children was caught at the border and detained in Maribor but, after the intervention of the Jewish Com-

munity, they were released and brought to Zagreb where they joined our group.

When the Tripartite Pact was signed with the Axis powers on March 25, 1941, the German national anthem was sung publicly in the streets of Zagreb and the Fascist salute, the raising of the right arm was used. The Jewish Community called the *madrihim* to say that we should divide the group in two and that I, as a Belgrader, should immediately take the first group to Belgrade by train. The Jewish Community of Belgrade and the Alliance of Jewish Communities, led by its president, Dr Fridrih Pops, and secretary, Šime Špicer, would work as fast as possible on getting permission from the British for the first group's departure for Palestine. The best thing was for them to head immediately to Istanbul and wait there, where it was safer, to get their visas for Palestine. The problem was obtaining transit visas for Bulgaria, Greece or Romania, because these countries were already members of the Axis.

I set off on the evening of March 25 with about seventy children, mainly older ones, and arrived in Belgrade on the morning of March 26. From the station I took the children up Balkanska Street, through Terazije towards Dorćol and the new home of the Jewish Women's Society, where I had been told the children would be accommodated. My parents lived in Dobračina Street and, on the way to Dorćol with the children, I met my mother who was on her way to buy bread. I kissed her hurriedly, told her I didn't have time to talk and continued on with the children towards the home, which was on the corner of Tadeuša Košćuška and Visokog Stevana streets. Along the way I ran into a close friend, Rudi Abravanel (now living in the Shaar Haamakim kibbutz in Israel) and briefly exchanged information with him on what was happening. The children were moved in and went to bed after a breakfast especially prepared for them. At noon they were given lunch. I spent the whole day with them and only after supper went home, where I found my mother, my father and my sister Frida. I told them about the children and about what they had gone through in Austria and Germany. They listened to me in disbelief, especially my father who felt like a Yugoslav and always found it strange that I wanted to go to Palestine.

Early in the morning on March 27 we were awoken by an uproar coming from the Knez Mihailo monument in what is now called Republic Square. When I got to the square I saw the army in trucks

shouting "Better war than the Pact". I came home and happily told my family that it was now obvious that we wouldn't be occupied and that I had to go to my children in Dorćol, to take them to the demonstrations so that they could see for themselves that Fascism wouldn't rule the whole world. I arrived at the Jewish home. The children had already gathered for the breakfast that the Jewish Community had arranged for them. I told them to tidy up their straw mattresses quickly so that we could leave for the square. The children couldn't believe what they were seeing. Nor could I. The children saw Germany and Austria as Fascist powers and here they felt , for the first time, that the people had the strength to fight them. In the afternoon I ran to the Federation of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia. There the secretary-general, Šime Špicer, told me that we would get wagons to take the children to Greece via Skopje and that, because the wagons would be sealed, we needed to provide food and water for the children. I was also told that they would be accompanied on the trip by two comrades from Hashomer Hatzair. These would be Merica Papo from Split (now living in the Maabarot kibbutz in Israel with her husband, Haim Aškenazi) and Mirijam-Mirkica Svečenski from Osijek (who died in Israel in 1981. Her younger sister, a Partisan from the beginning of the war, still lives in Zagreb). Both Merica Papo and Mircika Svečenski had been with me at the *hasharah* in Golenić.

The children set off from Belgrade on April 3, 1941. I was told at the Alliance to get some rest for two or three days and, if necessary, to return to Zagreb for the second group of children. It was believed that Yugoslavia which, under Simić, had declared itself neutral, would be spared from the attacks of the Fascists. And so I remained in Belgrade on April 4 and 5, in the belief that I would return to Zagreb.

AS FAR AS POSSIBLE FROM THE BURNING CITY

On April 6 we were awoken at six in the morning by the sound of aircraft and bombs exploding very close to the house in which we lived. I immediately took my parents and sister to the Tel Aviv tavern at 7 Zmaja od Noćaja Street, which was run by the Moreno and Koen families, my mother's cousins. We arrived under a shower of bombs and all of us together – my father, mother and sister, my aunt and her husband, my cousins Pajki-Valter, Erih and Zaki, ten of us altogether, carrying just a little food, set off that Sunday, April 6, with the bombs

raining down, along Kralja Aleksandra Street planning to get as far away from Belgrade as we could. Kralja Aleksandra Street was in flames. There was a strong easterly wind blowing that day which fanned the flames, spreading them faster. Through the chaos and smoke, I saw a man on the third floor of a building whose façade had been demolished. He was sitting at a piano, playing something. His playing could not be heard at all above the general confusion and the fire, but I've carried this image with me all my life. Everyone was fleeing in the same direction, towards Smederevo, leaving the city which was once so lovely but had now been transformed into hell.

We reached the Smederevo road, very tired, thirsty, hungry and freezing. The east wind had dropped when we arrived in a field at about two in the morning. On the horizon we could see flames in the sky over Belgrade. We lay down, right in the middle of the field, huddling together to warm ourselves.

At first light on April 7, we were awakened by the snow which had begun to fall.

The meadows were soon covered in snow as it began to fall more and more heavily.

It was not until dawn that, frozen as we were, we saw that we had spent the night in the middle of a yard. When the farmer saw us, he offered us his stable to sleep in, asking for quite a large sum of money in return. We agreed, because we didn't know where we would get to and we younger ones went to inspect the area. We came across columns of soldiers who were coming from all directions across the countryside towards Belgrade. They had boxes full of canned food which they were selling.

We returned to the stable with the cans we had bought. Erih and I decided to return to Belgrade and bring food from the tavern in Zmaja od Noćaja Street. We walked three hours to Belgrade, went to the tavern and filled our bags with cooking oil, bread and other items from the refrigerator, as much as we could carry. On our was back to Smederevo, as we were going down Kralja Aleksandra Street, Stukas suddenly roared above our heads. We were in front of the post office, near the Parliament. We went down into a shelter full of people grumbling among the chaos and confusion. When the attack was over we continued our journey and saw the National Guard on patrol, armed but in civilian clothes, defending the city against looting. Late in the evening we arrived back in our stable, which become our second home.

The following day, April 8, Pajki decided to head to Sarajevo to see his girlfriend and join the army, because he was a reserve officer. The weather improved and spring returned over the melting snow. Everyone except Pajki, who had left for Sarajevo a day earlier, stayed in the stable. We didn't go to Belgrade again, fearing a new German air raid.

FORCED LABOUR

At dawn on April 12, as we were washing our faces at the well in the yard, we saw on the road a fleet of cars coming our way, with swastikas and heavy machine guns. We quickly prepared and, without Pajki, set off for the city, for the Tel Aviv tavern, thinking we'd be safer there. We arrived in the centre of the city in the evening. Notices about the surrender of weapons and Yugoslavia's capitulation had already been posted on the trees in Kralja Aleksandra Street. There were German tanks in the street, one after another. People stood looking at the posters and weeping.

The single-story house in Dobračina Street in which we lived had been damaged by bombs, so we decided that we, the Moreno family, should live in a room behind the main tavern and that the Koens should stay in their apartment in Čubrina Street. We thought it was safer this way.

Armando mowing at the hahschara in Golenić, 1939

Not long after, on April 18, Pajki returned from Sarajevo, exhausted. He hadn't managed to join the Yugoslav units. He was just outside Sarajevo when the Ustashas seized power and German troops were preparing to enter the city. So he didn't see his girlfriend but instead returned home, to Belgrade. He joined us on April 19, when the Germans ordered all Jews to assemble in Tašmajdan, in front of the fire station, early in the morning. There they gave us yellow bands for our sleeves and, later, *Magen David* signs for our front and back.

At the same time, men between the ages of 16 and 65 were assigned to forced labour. I was put in the same group as Lazar Lotvin (he was in the Partisans during the war and later was secretary-general of the Automobile Association of Yugoslavia; he died in 1984). Bora Baruh, the painter, and others were in the same group. We were taken to the ruins of a bombed four-story building in Grobljanska Street which had been reduced to rubble down to the ground floor and in which there had been many victims. We dug it up, floor by floor, lifted the huge slabs of concrete. We worked with no protection from infection. The days were hot so the bodies we were digging up were already decomposing. Bora Baruh and his brothers all wore very thick spectacles. Because the Belgrade police knew the Baruh brothers well, Bora didn't dare wear his glasses, so that the notorious police officer, Kosmajac, who had been persecuting Communists, wouldn't recognise him. A few of us were always somewhere around him so that the Germans would notice he could hardly see. He just jabbed the ground with a mattock, not daring to swing it in case he hurt someone. One day they took us to Tašmajdan, where we spent the night sleeping on concrete.

When we had dug all the bodies out of Grobljanska Street, they moved us to the old Royal Court building, the dome of which had been destroyed in the bombing. There we were locked up for a night on the suspicion that one of us Jews had stolen something.

When a cache of munitions exploded in the Smederevo fortress, before the attack on the Soviet Union, all Jewish men between the ages of 15 and 55 were again summoned to Tašmajdan, from where they were taken to the camp for Jews at Smederevo. While I had been at the *hasharah* in Golenić, I had caught tropical malaria and every summer I continued to have attacks of malaria with a high fever. I had one of these attacks one day at noon when I was at Tašmajdan, so my friends took me to the infirmary. Egon, the commissioner for Belgrade Jews, was in charge of rounding up, identifying and harassing Jews. He had studied in Belgrade before the war and knew very well who was anti-German, anti-Fascist that is, in orientation. He spoke our language really well. The infirmary was set up under his management and the Margulis brothers worked there. They were medical students and now live in the US. They were on duty that day and confirmed that I had malaria. After giving me quinine they allowed me to leave Tašmajdan and go home, so I never went to Smederevo. Germans with machine-guns and rifles stood guard around Tašmajdan and

the people watched the Jews inside the barbed-wire fence from behind the army cordons. All the young people were dancing the *hora* as though it were summer holidays. I collapsed with my high fever.

While I was still in forced labour, on June 22, the Germans attacked the Soviet Union. A German came up to me and told me that Germany would lose the war because Russia was on the side of the Allies. I sneaked away from my work place, removed my armband and the Star of David from my chest and back and, breathless and excited, ran to the former Court building, to Dorćol, to Oneg Šabat, which was where the Jewish infirmary was and where the Margulis brothers, the medical students mentioned earlier, worked. Because we had no radio, this was real news for everyone. We believed that the war would now soon be over and that the Germans would soon fall. Of course I had to sneak back again to forced labour because otherwise they would have started looking for me and, if they didn't find me they would have arrested my parents.

WARNING FROM THE RADIO

One day Ika Kapon from Hashomer Hatzair came to me and told me he'd already travelled to Split three times. The city was occupied by the Italians and, most importantly, they were not persecuting the Jews. He said that he'd added an "i" to his surname in his First Boys' Secondary School student identification so that he was now "Kaponi" and he was from Split. He told me to give him two photographs of myself so that he could also get me a student identification which would say that I was being supported by my parents from Split, and on the basis of that I would get a travel pass as he had done. He told me that because I had a pure Italian name – Armando Moreno – no one would know who I was. The next day, as promised, Ika brought me the student identification. With this document I went to the Italian Consulate in Birčaninova Street, stood in line for half a day and was given a permit allowing me to "return" to Split and confirming that my train ticket had been paid for by the Italian Consulate because I was of Italian origin. Ika came again the following day and asked me to give him back the student identification because they had realised that I had never attended the secondary school before the war. I returned it to him and was left without the document I needed,

because the permit read that it was valid only when presented with my student identification with the number quoted.

I no longer worried about going to Split because I had a permit which proved that I wasn't a Jew. And so I stayed in Belgrade. I met up with Tarzan, with whom I had worked at the Elka factory and with Hajim Haravon, both of whom had connections with SKOJ.

We listened to Radio London and the news at Ruža Poljokan's place. She was a twenty-year-old Jew from Banja Luka who lived with her young Serb husband in Kosmajska Street, over the road from the Ashkenazi temple. Ruža's husband was a technician at the German station Radio Danube and would bring the news from there. Ruža and her husband were members of SKOJ. However someone denounced him and one day German SS agents came for him. In order to escape falling into their hands he jumped to his death from the fourth floor window. They arrested Ruža, who was pregnant, and tortured and killed her in Jajinci. Her sister Paula, a pianist who had been in Hashomer Hatzair, joined the Partisans but was caught by the Chetniks and taken to the Sajmište camp where she was killed.

Armando Moreno in Split, 1941, a photograph for his travel pass issued by the Italians

Radio London warned repeatedly that there would be mass executions in Belgrade on July 14, the day of the French national holiday. Because of this I decided to leave Belgrade with the pass which I had kept in my pocket, unused, for a month. On July 13, I went to the railway station, to which Jews had no access. There I met Sommer, a member of Hashomer Hatzair from Vinkovci whom we called "Compa" because he had one leg shorter than the other and had to wear orthopaedic shoes. He told me that he was going into the Serbian countryside and that he had a false sole in his shoe in which he kept leaflets and other propaganda material. We parted when the train set

off for Zagreb. I was planning to be in Zagreb only until the evening train left from there for Split, and also because I didn't know what had happened to Joško Indig, Zehava and the other group of children from the Youth Alija, I wanted to find them and see what we should do next.

I arrived in Zagreb at the time when Otokar Keršovani and other Communist leaders were being executed. The station was covered with posters of people who had been shot. I found Zehava at the Jewish Girls' Home. She told me that Joško Indig had managed to take the children to Slovenia, which was already occupied by the Italians. She hadn't gone with him because her friend was in prison and she didn't want to leave him.

I took Zehava's advice and left for Split by train that evening. She said she couldn't hide me anywhere, that there were frequent and dangerous raids and that the safest thing for me was to take the train and relocate to Split. I suggested she come with me but she refused. On the way, in Zagreb, I also ran into Erih Gostl, known as "Guzl" (from the Zagreb Hashomer Hatzair). He was preparing to go to Jasenovac with his family and he and his whole family were killed. All he took with him to Jasenovac was his guitar.

FINALLY UNDER THE ITALIANS

When I arrived in Split I made contact with the Jewish Community. They put me in the Jarden Jewish Home, where I found many of my acquaintances from Hashomer Hatzair who were there as refugees from all over occupied Yugoslavia. Among them were my friends Miša Štajner (from Belgrade, died in Israel), Benko Demajorović (Belgrade, killed as a Partisan in 1944), Kreso Najman (Zagreb, now living in Australia), Rozina Tolentino (Trieste and Sarajevo) and others. We formed a kind of community and helped one another. We could sleep in the Jarden, which was in the centre of old Split, but we had to find our own food.

My brother Ernest Moreno was six years older than me (he died in Tel Aviv in 1973). He had been caught in Zagreb by the attack on Yugoslavia, but managed to reach Split and found me at the Jarden. He rented a room above the Jewish Community, so we were together until the Partisan operation in National Square in November 1941, when the Black Shirts arrested us and interned us in Canova in north-

ern Italy (Casa Isolata in the Dolomites). My brother was punished in 1942 by being transferred to a completely different part of Italy. There were another fifty people interned with us in the Casa Isolata, mostly from Yugoslavia, but there were also some from Austria and Poland. They included Dr Vagman (a Pole, later a Yugoslav Partisan, colonel and head of the Military Hospital in Sarajevo where he now lives in retirement), Dr Mermelstajn (Polish, later a colonel in the Yugoslav National Army, died in Belgrade), Altaras (from Split, where he died) and others.

WITH THE CHILDREN IN NONANTOLA

The Jewish organisation Delasem took over the care of the children who stayed in Zagreb and who reached Nonantola via Slovenia. This was after the first group, which I had taken to Belgrade in 1941, had arrived, via Istanbul, in Palestine in April of that year. This second group of children were accommodated in the Villa Emma in Nonantola. This group in Nonantola, led by my friend Joško Indig, sought me and discovered, through the Red Cross, that I was in Canova. They asked for me to be transferred to Nonantola, so I was taken there under guard and joined the group in the Villa Emma in April, 1943.

In Nonantola, together with Joška and the others, I made sure that the children were aware of the possibility of going to Erez Israel after the war. I also organised their social life, especially musical and sporting activities. These included the *Yom Sport*, the Sports Day, which was particularly attractive for the older children, who could get the younger ones interested in sport. Also with us in Nonantola were Dr Aleksandar Liht (president of the Association of Yugoslav Zionists) and his family and many other internees from Germany, Austria and Poland. In 1943 a group of children from Split also arrived, together with refugees from Bosnia. They immediately joined the children who had come to Yugoslavia earlier with the Jugendaliyah from Austria and Germany.

We were still in Nonantola when Italy capitulated in September 1943. German troops occupied the country while Allied units landed in the south and began advancing towards Rome. Joško Indig and I, entrusted by Hashomer Hatzair with the care of the group, paid visits to certain people who had connections with the senior officials of the Fascist administration in Nonantola – Dr Giuseppe Moreali and

Father Arrigo Baccari from the San Silvestro Monastery. Through them we were all given identity cards from the Nonantola municipality, proving we were residents of Nonantola rather than refugees.

Comune di Nonantola — CARTA D'IDENTITA' N. 10.023/34

Cognome MORENO — Nome ARMANDO
Padre fu Giulio — Madre Sabina Silbermann
nato il 21 Giugno 1920 — a Vienna
Stato Civile celibe — Nazionalità ex jugoslava
Professione studente — Residenza Nonantola
Via Mavora Villa Emma

Connotati e contrassegni salienti
Statura m.1.71
Capelli castani
occhi idem
corp. reg
ss. pp.
N.N.

Impronta del dito indice sinistro

Data 18 AGO 1943 — FIRMA DEL TITOLARE

IL PODESTÀ

Identity card issued in Nonantola in 1943 and used by Armando Moreno when he took the first group of children to Switzerland

In the meantime, with the help of Delasem, the people of Nonantola and Father Baccari and Dr Moreali, all of us from Villa Emma, about two hundred in all, were hidden in the monastery and in the homes of people from Nonantola and the surrounding area, because the SS men had discovered that there were Jewish children and refugees there and had moved in across the road from Villa Emma. They began raids. Almost everyone knew that we were hidden somewhere, but not one of the Nonantola people betrayed us. Contacts were being maintained through me and Joška and through Italians who Father Baccari and Dr Moreali said could be trusted. (Dr Moreali has since died, but Father Baccari is still alive. I last saw him at the monastery in 2001). After we all fled Nonantola, with the help of the Italians, he was arrested by the Germans and interned in a camp.

In September we decided to head towards the Allied forces, but it turned out to be difficult to get through the front line, so we began to consider crossing illegally into Switzerland. After quite some thought, we sent the first group of five rather older children, telling them to reach the Swiss border by going from Nonantola, via Modena and Milan, through routes that we'd established with Delasem and Jewish organisations from Geneva. This group returned from the border having been unable to cross because they hadn't established a connection at the border crossing. After their return, it was decided that the second group should leave, in October 1943. I led this group, because I spoke German, Italian, Serbo-Croatian and French. The group included Edgar Ašer (from Zagreb, now in Switzerland), with his mother and sister Alisa, and Arnold Viniger from Germany (now in the US). We managed to establish the border connection, and sent word to the people in Nonantola, so everyone came to the border and we crossed in October 1943. One boy committed suicide at the border because the Swiss border guards wanted to send the group back to the Germans.

We crossed the border and managed to get as far as Zurich, where the Swiss police arrested us. There we split up, because the Ašer family had a connection in Switzerland while Viniger and I were put into a private camp, Laufen. From there I was sent to various labour camps.

I spent time in the Champery camp at Dent du Midi, where I was the commissioner for the National Liberation Movement and worked with a group of Yugoslav refugees collecting signatures on a petition for the movement to be recognised. I decided to join the Resistance Movement in France when there was talk of the Allied forces landing, because I thought that I would meet up with comrades who had stayed behind in Yugoslavia and fought as Partisans. And that's what I did, with the result that the Swiss authorities moved me to the penal camp at Zermatt, immediately opposite the Italian border. The Swiss authorities did not permit refugees to be politically active. After my five-day stay there, with the help of some connections, I crossed the border at Lausanne and joined the FTP liberation units in the north of France. From there I got in touch with Laza Latinović (who was the Yugoslav ambassador after the war), so that we could gather a group

of Yugoslav prisoners in France and cross over to Naples on an Allied ship, from there to Bari and the Partisan camp in Gravina. From there we transferred to Yugoslavia and I was assigned to the Eighth Corps of the Second Dalmatian Brigade.

In liberated Dubrovnik I was assigned to work on organising the Military Hospital of the Eighth Corps of the Second Dalmatian Brigade in May 1945. Dr Jakov Altaras from Sarajevo was appointed head of the hospital and his wife, Blanka, also worked with him.

Catriel FUCHS

JOURNEY OF A REFUGEE CHILD

Catriel (Karl) Fuchs was born on December 19, 1925, in the small village of Landsee in the Austrian province of Burgenland, to Aron and Helena, née Gruner. He had a younger sister, Ruth, born in 1928, who was killed together with their mother in Minsk in 1944.

Many of his close relatives, uncles and aunts and their children, as well as his paternal and maternal grandparents were killed in the Holocaust.

In 1943 he joined the British Royal Navy as a volunteer and was demobilised in 1946. He then took various jobs, mostly as a mason, a truck driver and a heavy equipment operator, as well as working on oil wells, in a chemical factory and many other jobs. During those difficult times he did not have much choice. At the same time he was a correspondent for the English-language Jerusalem Post.

As a member of the secret organisation Hagana, he took part in the battle for Haifa in 1947 and was then mobilised into the new Israeli Army, serving from 1948 to 1950. As a reserve member he served again in the Sinai campaign of 1956 and in the Six-Day War in 1967.

From 1962 to 1987 he worked for the National Navigation Agency ZIM, where his positions included agency representative in Paris, Frankfurt and Taiwan. He ended his career in 1998, at the age of 73, in the Austrian company R. Fuchs & Co.

For the past 59 years he has been married to Hilde, who was born in Vienna and is one of the survivors from the Kladovo transport. By coincidence they travelled on the same train to Palestine, the last to leave Yugoslavia via Turkey in 1941, but did not know each other at the time. They met when both living in the same kibbutz. They have a son, Josef (born 1948) and a daughter, Ruth Helen (1952) and four grandchildren.

I shall start with a barn in Graz, Austria, where a small group of teenagers lay huddled on the floor, waiting for the proper timing for the dash across the border into the Karawanken mountains, straddling the Austria-Yugoslavia border. The barn belonged to a man later known as the "Styrian Schindler" for his tireless endeavours to hide and smuggle Jews out of the Great German Reich, of which Austria had recently become a part. His name was Josef Schleich; for his efforts he was imprisoned several times by the Gestapo, and later drafted into a mine-clearing outfit as punishment.

Being bilingual (German and Slovenian), he bribed both the German and Slovenian border guards to look the other way when we raced across the clearing in no man's land. He then hired locals to guide us through the woods and across the River Sava to a pre-arranged meeting point. From there we were taken at midnight to a point along the railway line to Zagreb, where a generously remunerated locomotive driver would stop his train for a few moments, enabling us to scramble on board a specified freight wagon. Once we arrived in Zagreb, we would be met by representatives of the local Jewish Community.

For the entire group all proceeded well according to plan, except for myself, who slept soundly throughout the whole action. My absence was not noted as it was pitch dark – and the train chugged off into the night without me. The reason from me sleeping peacefully was the amount of strong country wine I had imbibed at the inn, where we had awaited the right time for our rail journey. Thus I awoke at dawn, utterly alone beside the tracks, without the slightest idea of where I was or what to do next. This uncertainty was soon dispelled by the appearance of a huge, uniformed person who spoke to me in a language I had never heard before. The short of it was that I was escorted to a Gendarmerie post, where it was quickly established that I had

no papers, no money and no official reason to be where I was. The country officialdom decided that, as an *Austrijanac*, I was to be expelled without further ado. I was taken on an escorted march on foot to the border, where the kindly guard waved me over to the opposite sandbagged bunker, over which the German flag fluttered in the wind. The walk across the tank-defence obstacles in no man's land took no more than a few minutes, but seemed to me to last hours. A bored SS guard was duly surprised by my appearance, and all I managed to say was "Well, here I am, back again... " At the international railway border station of Spielfeld, I was kept for a day or two, during which the guards put me to work piling up logs and, when the job was done, demolished it with a few kicks of their boots, making me start all over again.

The devil must have been riding me when I made the decision to board the train to Vienna, when no one was paying any attention to me, and thus I was on my way on the wrong train, in the wrong direction, to the very place I had started out to escape from, only a few days ago. The train was full of soldiers in their wartime gear and panic gripped me as the ticket collector made his way through the carriage. All I had were the ten Reichsmarks we were allowed to take out of the country, way below the price of a ticket. My apprehension must have been apparent to a young woman in the opposite seat – without a word she paid the man – I shall forever be beholden to this blonde angel, who didn't say a single word, but only smiled knowingly now and then. I never saw her again, I do not know her name – I shall always cherish the memory of her selfless, humane help, and wish I could have been given the chance to thank her – these many years later. She was surely aware of the terrible danger to herself if found to be giving succour to a "Jew boy".

I arrived in blacked-out Vienna at midnight, way past the Jewish curfew, but no one challenged me as I made my way through the deserted streets. Where to? My poor mother almost fainted as she heard my knocking on the door – who could this be if not the Gestapo, at this hour, yanking Jews out of their beds! It was only me, her only son, whom she assumed to be safe in Yugoslavia. When I was really safe, a few months later, the feared knock came indeed, and she and my sister were rounded up for deportation. I never saw them again.

For a few months I lived a strange underground existence – as far as the authorities were concerned I was no longer to be counted

as present, I was illegally in the country, no address, no food stamps etc., but it felt sort of adventurous. Anyway, for reasons beyond my understanding, the Vienna Jewish community and the Youth Aliyah organisation once more made it possible to enjoy the rough hospitality of Mr Josef Schleich, but this time in freezing winter temperatures. Again – the same routine, rushing into the shelter of the snow-laden trees of Slovenia, and the long trek over icy trails, over ravines and through deep gullies, at one point lying motionless in metre-deep snow, hoping to escape the notice of Yugoslav border patrols.

Katriel Fuchs, from the period when people grew up as much in one day as they normally would in several years of peace

I was clad only in shorts, a shirt and a light jacket, the sweat on my body immediately turning to ice: besides a small backpack, I also carried a small boy, as his mother was hardly strong enough to struggle on by herself. An older man, who had refused to part with the belongings in his suitcase, despite having been warned not to carry heavy baggage, lost his balance over a narrow ledge and fell screaming to his death hundreds of metres into a gorge. Our smuggler-guides just hurried us on, and we stolidly struggled forward. Finally we arrived on the bank of the Sava river, near a highway where we were picked up by a few waiting cars. Three of us were bundled into the boot of an automobile, which took off at breakneck speed towards the – for me – unknown destination. When I woke up from delirious dreams, I found myself in a hos-

pital bed with, as explained to me in beautifully accented German, a severe case of pneumonia.

What worried me more than my illness, was the possibility of another forced return to the German Reich, from which there would not be another deliverance. Somewhat naively I tried to obscure my identity by hiding my *laissez-passer* – which was useless anyway – under the pillow, but I was finally released into ephemeral, Zagreb freedom. I rejoined all my friends and comrades from the youth movement, the Jewish Community assigned me to two families: Mrs Boros and her daughter Lidija for sleeping arrangements, and the Kronfeld family for meals and company with their son Saša, who gave me lessons in the Serbo-Croat language. At the Boros household I found two earlier arrivals, who slept in a double bed, forcing me, the latecomer, to try to get a decent night's sleep between the two of them, who were alternately snoring and making other strange noises. Besides, it was impossible to lie in the free space in the middle, thus I found myself snuggling up to one or other of my bedfellows, who did not particularly appreciate my encroachment into their space. But it was quite some innocent fun. My – admittedly limited – language skills enabled me to buy cinema and bus tickets, as well as the occasional bite of *ćevapčići*, which I much later encountered in their metamorphosis as kebabs.

One day we had a rather scary encounter with a group of obviously Hitler-oriented youths, who overheard us speaking German and evidently believed us to be a sort of fifth column, *Volksdeutsche* like them. We managed to get rid of them, by playing a mysterious and secret undercover assignment. This encounter jolted us out of our newly-won complacency and made clear our precarious situation in an increasingly nervous Yugoslavia, fearful and suspicious of practically every political and national grouping: Banat Germans, Serbs, Nazis, Communists – whoever. And indeed, late one evening I was caught in one of the occasional *racija*, a police dragnet in which a street was hermetically closed off from all sides and anyone without papers clapped into jail. Thus I found myself with another 25 involuntary jailbirds in a cell intended for ten inmates at most. Once again I became the *Austrijanac*, and an object of desire for some of the more fearful characters. It was probably the dense multitude and extreme crowding that saved me from a "fate worse than death". One thieving "specialist", however, managed to strip my beloved new sweater off my sleeping body without my becoming aware of it. Upon awakening in the chilly

morning, I saw another captive nonchalantly wearing it. There wasn't much I could do about it.

After a week or so, the Jewish Community managed to locate me and at first sent packages of food into my cell, half which, however, was eaten by the various jailers, the other half by my fellow inmates, while I was generously allowed to sign the receipt. But all's well that ends well, against the payment of an agreeable ransom I was let loose again, minus a sweater, and host to a fellowship of fleas and lice – but still free.

Katriel Fuchs today

Throughout those few months in Zagreb we were under the care and supervision of our devoted youth leaders, known as *madrihim* – Joško, and Armando Moreno, who saw to our spiritual and material needs and continued to give us guidance and hope in the world we found ourselves in – between the loss of families, friends and our familiar surroundings, on the one hand, and our intended destination, Palestine-Israel, on the other.

Of course we were totally unaware of the forces, deals and machinations at work which had direct bearing on our future. In any case, finally we were able to move on, as it turned out in the nick of time. Those of us lucky enough to leave boarded a train to Belgrade for the second step of our Odyssey. During the one or two day stopover in Belgrade I again managed to get myself arrested, having wandered off following my ever-curious nose, and once more fate, in the shape of Armando, rescued me from the clutches of the police. I don't believe that all the carriages were sealed off in order to prevent me from straying away from the herd, but this was in fact done – the last train out of free Yugoslavia finally rolled across the border into Greece, just as the German army assaulted this country in the north. We, the lucky few, were on our way to our new homeland, while most

of those left behind did not survive. Much later I located Joško at a kibbutz in the Negev, and only in 2001 did I manage to re-establish contact with Armando, now living in Los Angeles, who has his own adventurous survival story to tell.

By an odd coincidence, my future wife Hilde happened to be on the same train, her group having joined us from their internment in Kladovo. We had no idea of each other's existence and we only met a year later, and married after another two years.

Micha PAZ

TO EREZ, TO FREEDOM

Micha Paz (Fass) was born in Berlin on July 7, 1924, to Sender Alexander Fass and Ida Fass, née Spiro. His father was tortured to death in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp in 1940.

His mother came illegally to Yugoslavia in 1941 with her son, Sami. They were put in a private camp in Šabac with many other refugees. When the Germans occupied Yugoslavia the camp fell under German control and, from that moment on, Micha never heard anything about them again, despite all his efforts to learn at least something about their fate.

He also had a sister, Ruth, who fell ill in Berlin and died during the cold and harsh winter of 1940 because, like all Jews, she was denied the right to use the shelters for protection from British air raids.

In the course of his career Micha Pas did various kinds of work. During the war years, from 1943, to 1946, he served in the British Army in Egypt, Italy, Belgium and Holland, part of the time in the Jewish Brigade from its foundation. Then, for a year, he worked for a Jewish agency and for Hagana in Europe. He helped survivors of the Holocaust rebuild their lives and arranged their emigration to Palestine. He was then a teacher in British camps for internees who were trying to reach the Palestine coast but were denied official permits.

He worked for a number of years in the military service of the Israeli Air Force with the rank of major and then, from 1952 to 1975,

held a number of positions in the Israeli Defence Ministry and Foreign Service. He was the first secretary of the Israeli Embassy in Monrovia-Liberia and counsellor at the Israeli Embassy in Vienna as well as permanent representative to the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation. He was then director of the Jewish National Foundation in Switzerland and the manager of KKL (the Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael Jewish National Fund), Treuhand A.G. Zurich, director of the Division for Economic Projects at the KKL Administration in Jerusalem, director of the marketing and public relations service of the American Israel Corporation, Ampal, in Israel, director and vice-president of Ampal in Canada and director of the Jewish National Foundation in Germany.

He has been married to Miriam (Mira) since 1950. They have three sons, Nadav, Alexander and Atsmon, and five grandchildren.

BERLIN, 1939

In September 1939, a few days after Germany invaded Poland, my father was taken, because of his Polish citizenship, from our apartment in Berlin to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp where he was tortured to death. The Gestapo sent us his ashes and even charged us for this. He was buried in the Adas Yisroel cemetery in Berlin-Wessensee.

Mrs Recha Freier, the leading figure in the Zionist movement in Germany and the founder of the Jugendaliyah was very active in helping the families of those who were taken to Sachsenhausen. She organised financial assistance and tried to obtain visas for those who were still alive so they would be liberated and allowed to leave Germany. Most of her efforts were in vain. But she promised the widowed mothers that she would do all in her power to save their children from Nazi Germany.

By the summer of 1940 the German Army had completed the occupation of the Benelux countries and France. The British Royal Air Force began bombing German cities including Berlin heavily, almost every night, which I observed with satisfaction, even when some bombs fell in our neighbourhood, causing great damage.

At that time Jews were still allowed to take refuge in the shelters of residential buildings during the bombing, but later were barred from them. I was still going to the special Youth Aliyah school with my

friends from the Maccabi Hatzair[2], in which I had been active from the age of ten or eleven. The school was founded after the Nazis dismantled the formal Jewish school system.

Recha Freier actively sought ways to keep her promise to use any means possible to get children who had lost their fathers in concentration camps out of Germany.

I was already at an age where there was a danger of being taken to a concentration camp and she chose me to travel with three men so that they could smuggle me over the Hungarian border and I could get to Budapest. We travelled to Vienna and, with the help of the local Zionist movement, were taken to the border area. I was never told what went wrong, but after a few days we had to return to Berlin.

BERLIN, AUTUMN OF 1940

In Berlin I again met up with my friends at the aliyah school. A few weeks later my mother told me that Recha Freier had left Germany for Yugoslavia where she would organise transport for children who would join her there. I was to leave with the first group of fifteen boys. I still remember the conversation with my mother when I told her that I didn't want to go, after my experience with the Hungarian border, that I didn't want to leave my sister, my younger brother and my closest friends.

Finally I set off with the group that was to be a pilot project for the journey of salvation to Yugoslavia, a test for the many groups which Recha Freier had planned to bring to Yugoslavia.

We left Berlin for Vienna at the beginning of September 1940, organised like children on a school excursion, with rucksacks on our backs. In Vienna we were met by a local Zionist activist who organised places for us to spend the night. The next day we boarded a train for Graz and from there continued to the border region, to a place called Spielfeld. We knew nothing of the arrangements for crossing the border with the help of smugglers, nor about any other agreements. I was the eldest in the group and, because of my earlier experience at the Hungarian border, I had some doubts, although I hoped it would succeed this time.

[2] Youth branch of the Maccabees

The Germans checked our documents while we waited. When darkness fell the local guide took us, on foot, to a nearby wooded area. For some time we walked through the woods, over hilly terrain, uphill and down, over small water paths until we came to a cabin where we stopped for food and rest. I don't recall now, after so many years, whether we crossed the border that night or waited until the following night. In any case, from there we continued walking through the woods to a place where there was a sawmill, in front of which logs were piled up high in a "V" shape, which was a perfect place for us to hide. Our guide told us to scatter in small groups and hide behind the huge stacks of logs. We were already on Yugoslav soil, in the Maribor region, and were to wait here to be picked up by cars from Zagreb. A few hours passed then the cars arrived and drove us safely to Zagreb. This time we had managed to reach our destination.

Micha Paz in his youth

It was the early morning hours when we arrived in Zagreb. I was accommodated with a group of boys in the Jewish old people's home for a few days. From there we were each placed individually in the homes of Jewish families.

ZAGREB, 1940–1941

I was assigned to the family of Sandor and Lili Dojč, who lived in a nice cottage near a large business area on the outskirts of Zagreb.

They put me in a room with their son Feliks, who was a year or so older than me.

I shall never forget the warmth they gave me for the whole six months I stayed with them, as though I were part of the family. I was happy to find out after the war that the whole family had survived the wartime, although they endured great suffering. My Zagreb hosts moved to Israel and, after I found them, in a modest apartment in Ramat Gan, I stayed in touch with them for many years I also maintained contact with their son Feliks, who became a scientist.

After my time in this family's home, I returned to Zagreb. Soon after I found accommodation they took me to the Jewish Community building. This was in the centre of Zagreb and, in the basement, the Community organised a gathering and meeting place for the boys who had come with me from Berlin and for those who were yet to come. There I again met Recha Freier, who gave us a warm welcome. She told us that now we had arrived successfully she would continue her mission of taking groups of boys and girls from Germany to Palestine.

There we got to know our mentors and youth leaders, the activists from the Yugoslav Hashomer Hatzair who had been involved in the whole operation from the very beginning of our illegal border crossing and our safe transfer to Zagreb.

Now they were trying to organise a daily program of classes in Hebrew and other subjects for us. They talked to us about our future in Erez Israel and arranged various activities. Because we were living in Zagreb illegally and didn't know the local language, they advised us not to go out in groups for fear of arousing the suspicions of the local authorities.

From the very beginning, Joško Indig of the Zagreb Hashomer Hatzair was in charge of our group which gradually increased from fifteen to about ninety boys and girls by the time we were ready to move on. Joško was eventually joined by Armando Moreno and Zehava, who were very devoted to our group and who organised some pleasant activities for us in these difficult circumstance by keeping us safe from the outside world.

Time passed and we were already in the first months of 1941. As far as I remember now, the increased German pressure on Yugoslavia could be felt in the air, especially in Zagreb, and the fear of the invasion that was to come.

One day, in March 1941, Mr Dojč, the head of my new family, told me that I had to prepare to leave for Belgrade in just a few hours

with the whole group of boys because it was dangerous for us to stay in Zagreb. He brought me a suitcase fully packed with clothing and told me that this would come in handy on my journey to Palestine and when I arrived. Then he drove me in his car to the railway station. I was given a warm farewell by Mr Dojč. I thanked him for his wonderful hospitality and for the warm relationship with all the members of his family. Unfortunately I was unable to say goodbye to Mrs Dojč, to Feliks whose room I had shared or his sister Ester.

BELGRADE, MARCH 1941

We arrived in Belgrade by night. All that I remember is that we were organised in a marching group, like boy scouts. I think that we were led by Armando Moreno, marching us through the dark, empty streets of Belgrade like children on a school excursion. We stayed somewhere in the city for the night and then hurried back to the station the next day to catch the train for Istanbul.

At the time we knew very little about all the strings that were being pulled or the efforts made by the local people like Joško and Armando to make it possible for us to get seats on this train which, as we later discovered, was the last train to leave Yugoslavia in this direction before the Germans attacked.

MY MOTHER AND BROTHER REMAIN IN YUGOSLAVIA

Here I should note that my mother, Ida Fass, and my seven-year-old brother, Sami Fass, had also arrived in Zagreb a few weeks earlier via the same illegal route as I had. Our meeting in the home of the Dojč family was full of joy. After they were told by people from Jewish Welfare that they should not stay in Zagreb, they went to Serbia and settled in Šabac, where many refugees from Germany had gathered. Neither of them, not even my little brother, were able to join us on our journey to Palestine, because the permits for Palestine, which were issued by the British, were limited to our group of ninety people.

The meeting with my mother and brother in Zagreb was the last time I saw them. All my efforts, over all these years, to find out what happened to them have been in vain. The last I heard of them was in

1942, when I received a short form letter from the Red Cross, sent from a camp in Yugoslavia with a German censor's stamp on it.

ON THE TRAIN FOR ISTANBUL

During our trip to Turkey by train I still felt that my mother and brother were safe in Yugoslavia. It was only when we were very close to Istanbul that they told us about the German invasion of Yugoslavia.

The train trip itself was very interesting and not without surprises and questions. Once the train stopped unexpectedly near the border between Albania and Greece because of the danger of an air raid. In northern Greece, British troops were engaged in military operations against the Italian forces which had occupied Albania. All the passengers jumped out to take shelter in the ditches beside the railway tracks. After a short time we returned to the train and continued our journey. When we got to Salonica, we walked around the train and, for the first time, saw British soldiers and, among them, soldiers from Palestine who spoke Hebrew. They told us about the military operations in the region and we only hoped that our train journey would lead us to our final destination – Palestine and Erez Israel.

Finally, after a number of interruptions here and there, after losing a wagon with all our luggage and our personal belongings somewhere along the way, we arrived in Istanbul.

We were accommodated for a few days in a villa on a small island in the Bosporus Strait. There we were told about the German occupation of Yugoslavia. Now we understood the dedication of the Jewish Communities, of the people from Hashomer Hatzair like Joško and Armando, of the families who took us in and others who got us out of Yugoslavia at the very last moment but who had themselves remained to face an uncertain fate at the hands of the Germans.

I shall never forget the boundless efforts of all these people and I shall continue to tell my children and grandchildren about them.

ARRIVAL IN PALESTINE

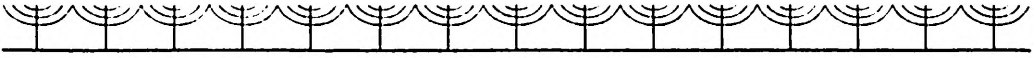
From Istanbul we continued by train to Beirut and from there by bus to the border crossing at Rosh Hanikra and on to Haifa. From Rosh Hanikra we could see the coast all the way to the port of Haifa

and to the southern part of the country, and we felt that part of our dreams had become reality.

With another three boys from my group I was sent to the Mishmar Hasharon kibbutz, part of the Maccabi Hatzair movement in which I had grown up in Germany. There we formed a new group from the Youth Aliyah, the Olim[3] group with other boys and girls who had arrived at the same time as us, but from Sweden and other countries.

A new life had begun here, with a great vision to be fulfilled in the years ahead.

[3] *Olim* plural of *ole*, an immigrant to Israel.



XI

ROOSEVELT'S THOUSAND GUESTS

Irena DANON

FROM SAJMIŠTE TO FORT ONTARIO

Irena Danon was born in Belgrade in 1929 to Simon and Rašela, née Varon. She had two younger brothers, Ika and Majkl-Srećko. They all survived the Holocaust.

She attended secondary school in Belgrade until 1941 and later studied literature in the US. She was married to Leon Danon from Belgrade, who died in 1962. They had three daughters.

The turbulent waves of the Atlantic Ocean matched the emotions of the passengers of the Henry Gibbons as the boat headed for America. It was August 1944, when President Roosevelt invited a thousand refugees as his guests, to come to the US and escape the atrocities of war. These were the only people allowed to come to the United States during World War Two.

Nobody cared or wanted to save Jews from the inferno. One person did, one young woman, a journalist with the *Herald Tribune*, a newspaper in New York. Dr Ruth Gruber cared enough to risk her own life and save a handful of Jews. She went to Europe in the middle of the war so she could personally bring and escort them to the safety of the United States.

I was fifteen years old and I was one of the passengers on the ship. My two brothers, Ika Danon who was eleven years old and Michael who was two months old, and I, especially, were very seasick and stayed close to my parents, Sima and Rašela Danon.

Before World War Two we lived in Belgrade, in an area called Profesorska Kolonija. My father had a leather goods store and a factory in Terazije. I started my schooling in a brand new, all female school, a secondary school, where we had to change shoes not to mark the floors and had to sit straight in our seats with our arms crossed across our chests. There I studied French, German and all other required subjects. But when Yugoslavia broke the pact with Germany, all the Jewish children, including me, were thrown out of the school.

In March of 1941, we had dinner at a sidewalk restaurant, watched the gypsies dance, listened to the soulful sounds of the violins and watched the youth of Yugoslavia marching in their beautiful SOKOL uniforms, supporting King Petar, who himself was about fifteen years old. Up to 1941, life was good and love was all around. But that evening the air smelled of war. On April 6, 1941, when the Nazis dropped the first bomb on the city of Belgrade, the Post Office building seemed like the safest place to hide, so everyone frantically pushed and shoved to get to the basement for safety.

When we descended to what seemed like the pits of Hell, the basement was already full of clusters of families huddled on the cold, damp, cement floor of the Post Office building. The air was foul and full of dust. Children were screaming with fright and adults prayed. Some softly, and some screaming at God. They each called upon their personal God. Each person reached across their own bridge of faith to the depth of their belief in God. "Shema Yisrael!", "Jesus Christ!", "Shema Yisrael!" were some of the sounds that emanated from the mass of bodies on the floor.

In the basement we connected with my father's brother Rafo Danon, the pastry man as he was known, and his wife Erna, and my father's sister Laura and her little baby. Laura's husband, Josef, was in the army so Laura found herself alone with the baby until she connected with the rest of the family.

As soon as the bombing eased up, my father took his whole family to our milkman's farm, to escape the German Stukas and bombs. From the little village on the hill, just outside Belgrade, the family watched, through tears of terror, their beloved city burn to destruction.

After seven days of bombing, all the families returned to their homes, the ones that the Germans had not destroyed with bombs. Except for broken windows, our house remained standing. And it soon

filled up with friends and family who were not fortunate enough to still have a home.

Shortly after the Nazis marched into the city, all the Jews were ordered to wear yellow armbands with the Star of David. Jews were being picked up from all areas of the city and held in jail cells as *taoci*, hostages, and if a German soldier had been killed during that period, two or three hundred Jewish hostages were taken from the cell and shot on the streets of Belgrade.

One month later, my father was nabbed in the street and placed in a cell as a hostage. During that period of time, I slept in my father's pyjama tops, which totally dragged on the floor. And each night I rubbed the magic mother-of-pearl button which I knew would deliver my father back to me alive. Two weeks later we were hugging my dad and spilling tears of joy.

But that joy was not long-lasting. For shortly after, my dad was picked up again by the Nazis, but this time no one knew where he was taken or if he was even alive. My mom and I were running every day all over the city inquiring about Jews who were picked up on that date. One day, as we approached the German consulate in Belgrade, my mother saw a young man, a Croat who used to work for the family. He was standing guard. A tall, slender, handsome young man dressed in the black SS uniform, with high gloss black marching boots. On his shoulder he had a large gun with a bayonet at the end. With a sigh of relief my mom approached him. She walked straight to him but, as she opened her mouth to ask about my dad, the young Croat, who seemed to enjoy the power of the uniform, took the gun off his shoulder and started shooting at us. The mother and child, terrified, turned around and, dodging the bullets, ran for their lives. The agony of not knowing where my dad was made life unbearable for me. He was my hero. He was kind to everyone and he was my dad.

After about six months of searching we heard of a group of men who had just been brought to Sajmište. Immediately we directed our energy to the concentration camp at Sajmište.

There were German soldiers everywhere. The skies were grey and pregnant with rain. The air was heavy as the chill October air enveloped the surroundings. The camp was filled with older Jewish men, or at least they seemed old, as they sat on the damp ground, reading their prayer books. Some had ragged blue and white shawls around their necks and just torn shirts without jackets or sweaters.

They must be freezing, I thought. Nobody talked to anybody, yet the whole place seemed like a bee hive, teeming with activities, as my mother and I frantically flew from one person to another asking if anyone had seen or heard of my father. Most people just sped by us, without responding. They moved away as fast as they were approached.

Finally a man, without looking at us, made a motion with his hand and ran away. Two women, mother and daughter, frightened and hoping, followed his sign and came in front of a large barn with holes in the roof and wet straw on the ground. The stench was horrendous.

We entered the barn, holding our breath, while continuing to ask for Sima Danon. An old man told us to follow him. "Here," he pointed to a skeleton-like figure curled up in a foetal position, shivering. He was almost naked and covered with black and blue marks all over. Both of us bent down to look at this creature which looked like a bunch of bones covered with human membrane.

The face looked up. The eyes were sunken into the skull. The hair was dirty, matted and cropped. The beard was long, filthy, red with some grey in it. The image looked over a hundred years in age. This couldn't be my dad, I thought. My dad is only 41 years old. And why was he almost naked? The skeletal figure started to get up with difficulty. A grimace resembling a smile appeared on the skull. I backed off. I was frightened. I could hear my mother's silent screams as she moved closer to the image of a man and reached out. He managed to stand up, draping himself over her body. I felt paralysed. I opened my mouth to speak but no voice came out. I wasn't even sure that I could, or wanted to touch him. My insides were screaming in confusion, with anger and with pain. I wanted my handsome, loving father back.

I couldn't understand what they had done to my dad and why. My father always helped everyone in need. He was such a good man. Why did God let this happen?

I remembered when I took Hebrew classes, that they taught us that God was all powerful and He took care of good people. Then why didn't God stop them from hurting my daddy? Did God take a nap while the Nazis did all this? They must have lied to me. There is no God. If there were a God, He could never let the Nazis hurt us like this.

Yet the reality was that this was my father. They had taken a young, handsome, healthy man and turned him into an old skeleton. I watched my mom kiss his sunken eyes, his dirty beard, his smelly body.

She took off her coat and swung it over his bare shoulders. They both cried, as they held on to each other and onto the precious gift of life while hoping for a miracle.

I decided that there may be a God after all because a miracle did occur. My mom and I were able to bring him clothing and food which, of course, he shared with others, and was able to replace some of the muscle he had lost. One month later, after seeing all his relatives and friends being slaughtered, my dad decided to escape. He said to my mom, while she tenderly caressed his stubbly face "I am a dead man, no matter how you look at it. There is no choice. I have to try for freedom. Remember," he smiled, "God helps those who help themselves." Those words were firmly inscribed into my brain.

In the next few days my dad and my mom and my Aunt Laura formulated the plans and made arrangements for his escape. With bribes of her diamonds, my mom obtained false passports and falsified identities. She arranged for a fiacre to arrive near the camp at five on a certain morning.

At 4.30 on the morning of the escape we, my mom and my brother Ike, sat in the fiacre. The two children shaking with fright and cold, did not speak. The mother, with a glazed look in her eyes, prayed. The rain seemed to come down in sheets, concealing the clarity of any and all movements within the camp. As my dad had worked his way up to a camp garbage collector, he availed himself of the luxury of the smelly truck which moved freely within the camp. It was 3.30 a.m. My dad went from one German cabin to another collecting garbage. His heart was beating fast. He had to stop a few times to catch his breath. The garbage truck made its way to the kitchens. Sima was soaking wet as he ran alongside the truck. From the kitchens he took out large metal cans with smelly rotten food leftovers from the Nazis. One by one, my dad emptied the cans into the truck. The stench was unbearable. He was sure that there were human body parts in those cans. When all the garbage was collected, with the rain furiously beating everything in its path, the truck started for the gate. Sima looked around. This was the moment of truth. There were very few guards out, and the ones that were there had their collars up to their ears and hats pulled down almost covering their eyes.

As the truck proceeded towards the gate, my dad dived into the truck bed and covered himself with slimy, smelly refuse which had already begun to decompose. As the truck arrived at the gate of the

camp, Sima peered through the garbage, only to notice a guard at each side of the gate. They stopped the truck. Each guard looked and inspected every car and truck that exited through the gate. Sima dug himself deeper into the slime, which by now was floating in the rain, and held his breath. The slime entered his nostrils, his ears and eyes. The truck reached and stood between the gates. The heavy downpour made it difficult for the Nazis to see. The two guards pulled their coat collars over their ears and faces, looked in the truck where the driver was sitting and motioned to the truck to exit.

The rain, like God's tears, protected and shielded my dad as he took his life to safety and freedom.

When the truck was a few feet away from the gate, Sima jumped out, totally covered with slime, and made his way to the waiting fiacre. The fiacre and its occupants anxiously awaited their visitor, the head of their family. When my dad entered the fiacre, the driver let the sides of the cloth down, protecting his passengers from rain as well as giving cover to the escapee. I threw myself into my dad's arms. Never did I smell anything sweet that smelled so foul.

As soon as the Nazis detected my father's absence, they immediately went directly to my Aunt Laura's home, shot her and her little baby girl and left them to bleed to death on the kitchen floor.

For a month we hid in a Serbian home, while constantly being on guard. Every time we heard a car or a truck, we hid in the basement where the sewer was, while our host closed a trap door over us, threw a rug on it and replaced some firewood over that. My mother was doling out her jewellery continuously, which kept our host quiet for a while, but the fear for his own family eventually won and we had to move on. Serbs were not anti-Semitic like Croats.

Svetislav Spasojević, Ana, Ljiljana and Ilija. We became Christians overnight. But, like Jews during the Inquisition, we crossed ourselves on the outside and cried for Judaism on the inside.

For two years we hid and ran. Always one step ahead of the Nazis. And sometimes, when the people around us started asking questions, we waited for the shelter of the dark night, picked up the few things we had and moved on until we got to Split. There we reconnected with my Uncle Rafo Danon and his wife Erna. Being a baker, Uncle Rafo and my father started making cookies, which they sold to some coffee shops in Split. One time the butter and eggs they bought for the cookies were rotten and rancid. As they cracked the eggs, my father and

uncle looked at each other, smelled the eggs again, stopped for a moment and then proceeded to make the cookies anyway. A few months later, someone reported us for black marketeering. The *Carabinieri* came into our apartment and went directly to a hidden box where we kept the flour and sugar. They took everything, including my dad and my uncle, and carted them to jail where they spent seven months. When my father came out of jail my mother got pregnant.

Somewhere in the distance we could hear the Nazi artillery approaching Split. Italy was weakening, which turned the Nazis into Crusaders. Killing and burning everything in front of them. With what little jewellery my mother had left, we were able to get on a small fishing boat and make our way to Korčula. There we stayed for a few weeks until it became unsafe and from there, with the last of my mother's jewellery, we got another fishing vessel to take us across the Adriatic to Bari in Italy.

There we met up with my Uncle Rafo and his wife again. And of course the cookie dough started rolling again. We found a villa in a small town called Carbonara where we felt safe, at least for a while, and life became bearable again. But while my mother was in the maternity ward in Bari, having her baby, Italy capitulated and the Nazis made their presence known again. The Allies marched into Bari and the Nazis started disseminating their favourite toys, bombs.

I remember being in the hospital room. It was night and it was dark. Suddenly the skies lit up. It appeared that daylight had returned in the middle of the night. The bombs followed. The explosions, the detonations, devastation and death. In my mind it was 1941 all over again, when the Nazis first bombed Belgrade. There was no place to run. No place to hide. Everyone just stood frozen in time and space. My mother held her baby, who was born prematurely, so close, almost suffocating him. I held onto the railing of the brown metal bed with both hands and held my breath. It was chaos everywhere. Cries, screams and dust filled the entire hospital. Then the light faded and the bombing stopped, but only for a few minutes. Then it started again with a vengeance. I prayed it would stop while we were still alive. Bari was on fire. Flames were everywhere. Part of the hospital was hit and was destroyed. The maternity ward remained intact. One more time we were protected by His light. It was like God let down a white curtain encompassing us within and protecting us from all evil.

Two months later we hear that President Roosevelt was going to accept a thousand refugees into the United States as his guests. Once again God was with us. We signed up and were accepted.

In Bari we entered a displaced persons camp. From there, the American army trucks drove a thousand refugees, mostly Jewish, who came from all over Europe, to Naples. There we boarded the Henry Gibbons, an American Red Cross ship which was full of American wounded soldiers.

So, under the watchful eye of Dr Ruth Gruber (she was a mother to all of us, even to people who were twice her age), we arrived in America, in August 1944.

First we had to go through a hospital where they sprayed all parts of our bodies to kill the lice.

America, land of milk and honey, we thought, only to realise to our horror that they were placing us into another camp with barbed wire around it. Our minds and bodies were spent and worn. We had no energy to fight or tears left to shed. Some gave up and some were crying and wouldn't go into the camp surrounded by wire. My father looked at me, held me tight and said "The fence works both ways. It will keep us safe in here." I did not understand what he meant but it sounded good, so I got happy. My father could make the most horrible things appear wonderful.

The title page of Ruth Gruber's book about the thousand refugees

We stayed in the camp for eighteen months and it was great. We had medical care, we had food, we had education, music. American schools and ice cream in the winter as we watched the little pink and chocolate droplets fall onto the pure white snow.

There we lived in army barracks where most families had two or three rooms. We decorated the rooms with wallpaper and other things that many people brought into the camp for us. As usual, my father got very involved and decided to take care of the heating in our barracks. The weather was ferociously cold and the wind factor bit into our face and fingers. My father fed the furnace every few hours so that all the families living in that barracks had heat all the time. He also became director of our kitchen. There were a few different kitchens in the camp, including a kosher one, and my Uncle Rafo and my Aunt Erna became the chefs. We had the best food in the world. Besides the regular delicious food, we had pastries from all over the world. France, Hungary, Germany etc. Many people from different kitchens came for coffee and dessert to our kitchen.

After a while the townspeople accepted and befriended us. But when the war was over, the United States Government wanted to send us back to our countries of origin. Again, like Superman, Dr Ruth Gruber came to our aid. She went to Washington, saw President Truman and, after many days and weeks of pleading, was able to arrange for us to go to Canada and re-enter the United States immediately. Five years later, to the day, I became a citizen of the United States.

When the camp was being emptied of its visitors, the Americans asked each family where they wanted to go. We hardly understood the question so, when someone in front of us said "Cleveland," we also said Cleveland. All of a sudden we were being put on a train for Cleveland.

"Where the hell is Cleveland, and what is it?" my eleven-year-old brother Ike asked. We all laughed and were very happy to be in the United States. One year later we left Cleveland and went to New York, where we joined many of the people who were in Fort Ontario, Oswego, New York, with us.

Both my parents died at the age of 62 and my brother Ike died at about 60. My brother Michael (Srećko, is married to the greatest lady and has three super sons. I live in Los Angeles, California, and have three wonderful daughters. I was married to Leon Danon from Belgrade, who had a shoe store called Boston and had one of the first motor cars in Belgrade. The one you had to crank to get it started. My husband died in 1962. I studied writing in college and at the same time I became a real estate broker and had my own office. Now I am retiring from real estate and have just finished writing my first book, and hope there will be many more to come.

Ela IZRAEL-DELOVSKA

FROM CAMPS TO AMERICA

Ela Izrael was born in Sarajevo on August 12, 1927, to Avran Izrael and Blanka, née Altarac. She had three sisters, Sonja, Nina and Vilma, and a brother, Jozef. Both of her parents, together with her elder sister, Sonja, and more than fifty members of her immediate and extended family perished in the Holocaust. Her sister Sonja was married to Salamon Atijas and they had a six-year-old son, Eli, who died together with his mother.

Ela and her sister Vilma survived the war, after which she worked in Belgrade for a number of foreign trade companies and other organisations and completed her education while working. From her marriage to Dr Dimitrije Delovski she has a son, Nenad, a graduate in economy, and a daughter, Silvana, a law graduate. She has four grandchildren.

At the beginning I would like to say that I owe eternal gratitude for staying alive to my dear, late sister Vilma and her husband, Nikola Market.

Up to the time I left Sarajevo in 1941, I had managed to complete three years of secondary school. Although I was still very young, I was a member of Hashomer Hatzair.

We lived well in my home town. We weren't very religious, but we celebrated all the Jewish holidays, especially Friday evenings and

Saturdays, when we always had candles on the table and the table would be nicely decorated. Of all the holidays I particularly remember Hamisha Asar and Purim. On these occasions the whole family would gather together and we children would dress up and recite and be given fruit and money as prizes.

This kind of life was abruptly interrupted in 1941. First came March 27 when, although I was still a child, I took part in the demonstrations. On the first day of Pesah as we were preparing to eat that wonderful soup with *matzah* dumplings, the Germans began bombing us and the sirens began wailing. We went down and stood in front of the gate, all the other tenants were already there. As soon as the bombing stopped, we went to our aunt who lived on the outskirts of the city, no longer thinking about soup and *matzah* dumplings.

Two days later the Ustashas and the Germans arrived and immediately introduced the curfew, confiscations, the wearing of yellow armbands (which I didn't wear because in Sarajevo they were only compulsory from the age of 16), forced labour and various kinds of harassment. We children were banned from school.

Opposite our house there was a Catholic theological college, a preparatory seminary where future priests were educated. They were very disciplined. Whenever a woman appeared at a window when they happened to be at the window of the seminary, they would immediately step away from it. However, as soon as the state of war began, they somehow let themselves go, they became more curious. Not only would they stay at the window whether there was a woman there or not, but they also began "talking" with girls, for instance with hand gestures. So one day they arranged a meeting with one of the girls from the building. She went out and we couldn't wait for her to return and hear the vital news. (Of course this girl was a Jew, a secondary school student, but the seminarian didn't know that). He told her that his parents had forced him to attend the divinity school in order to become a priest but that it wasn't what he wanted; now that the war had begun he would go and join the Ustashas like all his friends.

A few months later the first executions began. First well-known Communists, prominent Serbs, Jews, hostages and others, and then came the first cases of people being taken away to camps. In our family we'd already prepared rucksacks with the essentials in case this should happen to us. One night they took away all men over sixteen. They also took my father. I never saw him again. They took one of my

uncles, my mother's brother, who was very old and couldn't walk, in a carriage. They were assembled in the former King Aleksandar Barracks. From there they took them to Jasenovac. I think that this was in the late autumn. After this came a period of calm and then, not long afterwards, they began taking women and children.

Among the neighbours in our building was the Taubman family, whose daughter (a member of the Pravaš, the Croatian Right) worked for the Ustasha police, so we had privileged status because they stayed clear of our building for a while. Later this girl was also taken to Jasenovac with her family and killed there.

Nonetheless they came for us one evening. There were four floors in our building and all the tenants were Jews (apart from the superintendent, who was an Ustasha, and his wife Verica, but they didn't treat us badly). First we were taken to the same barracks where they had rounded up the men earlier and, two days later, loaded us into cattle wagons which had only tiny barred windows. We travelled for eight days without being allowed out for fresh air. We were given no food or water and relieved ourselves in the wagons. Once we asked them politely for some water and they replied "Drop dead!" We didn't get the water, of course. On the eighth day they let us out into a meadow near a place called Zlatar in the vicinity of Zagreb. One Ustasha went to Loborgrad, an assembly camp which was to be our final destination to inform them that we had arrived. We waited for some time and were then told that there was no room in Loborgrad and that they were sending us back to Sarajevo where the keys to our apartments would be returned to us. At the time we were overjoyed with this information. Again we travelled for a week with no water or food. When we arrived in Sarajevo they put us up in a school. Almost all of us were on the ground floor of the building. I was completely exhausted but, as soon as I got an opportunity, I escaped through the window with some of the others. Many naive and gullible women believed they would get the keys to their apartments back so they stayed behind to wait for them. A few days later they were taken to Đakovo and then, in 1942 and 1943, those who had survived were moved to Jasenovac where they were killed. Many of these women could have escaped from the school, but...

When I escaped I hid with my sister and brother-in-law. My brother-in-law was Dalmatian and he had an Italian passport so my sister had some degree of protection. I had nowhere to hide so I went

to their place. All the same, I had to sleep with different friends every night. In the meantime, a woman we knew came from Mt Romanija (we had known her in the *ken* but had never been close. She lived at the other end of the city and we didn't ever ask her who recommended that she came to us and who knew about it). Her name was Mirjanica Abinum. She was with the Partisans on Mt Romanija and, after some time, she returned to them. Once the war had ended she moved to Israel with her two sons. I never saw her again.

Smiling faces in the Sarajevo suburb of Ilidža in 1937, before there was any hint of the horrors of the pogrom awaiting the Jews. (Sonja, Salomon, Eli, Nina, Giga and others)

At that time life in Sarajevo was very dangerous, especially for Jews. There were raids every day. Nonetheless the Jewish Community was still functioning in the city. My best friend Gerda Druker-Kožemjakin sent me from Mostar a pass in the name of Ana Mihić, a seamstress travelling from Bijeljina to Mostar to find a job.

On the train I sat with a group of nuns and arrived safely. When I reached Mostar, my friend and her sister fell ill from typhus. I was lucky not to catch it. I was at their place during the day and at night I slept somewhere else. I moved on after two or three months so as not to overstay my welcome. One day I received a letter from my sister asking me to come to Dubrovnik. In the meantime my brother-in-law was having a lot of problems with the Ustasha because his wife was a

Jew so they, too, had to flee. I travelled to Dubrovnik without documents because I had had to return my false pass for some other unfortunate girl to use.

My brother-in-law met me in Dubrovnik and we boarded a boat for the island of Mljet. When we reached the shore my brother-in-law took his time looking for his documents and those of my sister and their son who was just a few months old. He was hoping for the boat to leave, because I was in danger of being sent back to Dubrovnik because I had no documents. As the boat was pulling away my brother-in-law admitted to the *Carabinieri* that I was a Jew and had no papers. They wanted to send me immediately to Rab where there was some kind of camp for Jews, but gave up on the idea because I was under age.

I was then told to report to their command, the *Questura* every day and was also obliged to go to the Catholic priest for religious instruction every day. I was also told that I was not to leave the place. I was practically in a ghetto. The priest was young and modern and didn't insist too much on the instruction. Later I heard that he had emigrated to Italy after the war with his brother and that he had left the priesthood.

Ela's mother, Blanka Altarac, with her housekeeper

For a while we lived with my brother-in-law's parents. However this was wartime and they didn't even have enough food for themselves, so we moved away into an abandoned little house. We had to find food somehow. What kind of work could I, delicate and sickly as I was, do in the countryside? However I had to find something and I did. First I picked olives and helped with the crushing, tended sheep, collected firewood and did any other kind of work I

could. At the time there was only one Jew living on Mljet, a German doctor. Because he lived in another village we never met. We heard later that he had left the island with the Partisans. We lived this way until Italy capitulated. The locals were good people and I believe they liked us. They didn't even know what anti-Semitism was.

When the Partisans arrived on the island I joined in with the social work, mainly with young people. Despite everything we felt comfortable during this period, safe to some degree, but this didn't last long. As the Germans were advancing strongly, the Partisans withdrew one night, taking all men of military age with them. My brother-in-law also joined them. This was the beginning of a period of hiding and starvation for me and my sister with her little son,. As I have already mentioned, the people were good to us, no one betrayed us and we had a different place to sleep every night. One night, I remember, I slept in a pigsty with another girl. We lived from day to day in uncertainty. Two days before the Germans left and the Partisans came we called into our little house – no one locked their doors on the island – and found on the floor a small gold *Magen David*, with dark blue in the centre and *Zion* in gold Hebrew letters on the blue. We were really surprised and looked at each other in puzzlement. I picket it up but, unfortunately, lost it many years later. I'm not superstitious, but this did seem to have some significance.

Life was very difficult in those days. I remember we once ate meat from a horse which had died. Fortunately we had no ill effects. Because of the poor hygiene conditions we were infested with lice which we couldn't get rid of.

Because of the state of war we could do nothing but fight for our very survival, while the Germans were pouring in from the other side of the island. They were arriving as a proper SS penal expedition. They began bombing the island. We were there on the beach at the time. There were some people wounded but luckily the three of us were not hurt. People on Mljet were not very involved: they didn't support the Partisans and they weren't interested in politics. They Italians killed two of the locals.

As soon as night fell, we boarded small fishing boats and, in the morning, arrived on Lastovo. I remember this was a beautiful island. Compared to Mljet it looked like a metropolis. The streets were paved, while what few roads there were on Mljet were all rutted. I simply didn't know how to walk on such even terrain. I had a great deal of

difficulty with footwear, my feet had grown a lot and I couldn't find suitable shoes anywhere.

Most of the people with us were the women and children of Partisan fighters. These were refugees from the whole of Dalmatia. On Lastovo we were given food and a place to sleep. I had a wonderful door, which was, for me a "French four-poster"! After so long I was finally sleeping comfortably and peacefully. A few days after our arrival we were transported to the island of Vis. There was an assembly camp there for all refugees from Dalmatia. There was also an army base which was why we couldn't stay long. I wanted to stay on Vis and apply to do a nursing course, but I was so weak that they turned me down. Our friend, Lala Altarac, who worked on Vis as a translator, was also against this. Soon after this they again put us in small boats and took us towards the liberated part of Italy, then in Bari they told us we were to go to El Shat in northern Africa where there was a camp for all the women and children of Partisan fighters. Just as we were getting into the train at Bari station, we ran into Moric Kabiljo, my sister's friend from Sarajevo, who now lives in Sao Paulo. When he heard we were going to El Shat he wouldn't let us go and took us to the Jewish colony in Santa Croce.

The whole town, which was not very large, had small houses, villas with gardens and greenery. It had once been a summer resort for Fascist officers. Not far from Santa Croce was the summer resort of Santa Maria del Bagno. Jews were also accommodated there. This was an even nicer place because there was a beach near the town. It was there that my sister and I finally got new dresses from the Red Cross, mine was pink with white spots and my sister's blue with white spots. We also got shoes. They had low heels, but still they were new shoes, made from some kind of fabric. Finally, after so many years, something new! Our happiness knew no bounds.

They immediately took us to the house they had arranged for us. It had two small rooms and a garden. There was no water so we had to carry it all the way from Santa Maria Del Bagno. We soon made ourselves at home in this environment, and met many acquaintances and friends. This part of Italy had been liberated earlier by the English, but now in 1944 Italy still wasn't completely liberated. We were given food by the English. Among other things we used to get wonderful white bread, macaroni, rice, meat and other food. We even got chocolate. We traded rice for eggs with locals. When we offered

chocolate to my little nephew he threw it away because he'd never tasted chocolate before, but he did take the bread. There were also English and Italian language courses held there. They were taught by Fredi Baum, who later went to America. I jumped at these because I was hungry for learning. In the afternoons we went to the beach, swam, sunbathed and enjoyed ourselves. We quickly forgot about the evil we had recently encountered, or at least I did.

Ela's sisters, Vilma (left) and Sonja, in Sarajevo wearing yellow armbands, 1941

At that time President Roosevelt issued a proclamation saying that he would accept a thousand refugees, people from camps or in refuge in Europe. The priority was women, children and the elderly. My sister, her little son and I applied to go, although the war was still raging. Personally I was sorry that we signed up for America because we were having a wonderful time in Santa Croce. We were living a true peacetime life.

After a couple of painful vaccination shots, we set off by train for Naples where there was a large ship waiting for us. We boarded the ship, which was full of military pilots and the wounded returning home. We were all on the same deck, but kept separate. During the day we were outdoors and sunbathed, at night we slept in the bowels of the boat. We had double bunks. There were several ships sailing

along with us to America, one of them was carrying German prisoners of war. We were very unhappy to be travelling together with German prisoners, but on the other hand they gave us a feeling of security because the Germans certainly wouldn't torpedo their own soldiers.

We were at sea for fifteen days. At the beginning of our voyage almost all of us were seasick. The American pilots didn't like us much. When we were off Gibraltar, we were twice attacked by German submarines. Our engines were shut down, as were the ventilators and we all had to go inside. They asked us to stay dead silent. All of this happened at night. Since then I have never liked the sea. When I remember this it still makes my skin crawl; the darkness, the silence. The Germans must certainly have discovered that their soldiers were also with us in the fleet, so they didn't touch us. Once we even heard aircraft but, fortunately, they were from the Allied forces.

After our fifteen-day voyage we arrived in the New York harbour and the first thing we saw was the Statue of Liberty. I remember being fascinated by seeing cars of various colours because, up to then, I had seen only black ones. Not to mention the skyscrapers! As soon as we docked we were again washed and disinfected. Then we boarded a smaller boat and sailed up the Hudson River to a small place called Oswego on Lake Ontario. Canada lay on the other side of the lake. There was an army camp there where we spent a year. The camp was surrounded by a wire fence. We had come to free America to live in a camp with a wire fence! We complained, but to no avail. They put us in military barracks. This was the New World? In barracks inside a wire fence! We were all given rooms in which there was an iron bed, an iron cupboard and a wash basin. Despite the fact that Lake Ontario was right beside the camp, we never swam in it.

By the second day we were there, people began to gather around the fence, most of them women. They asked where we were from and we told them we were from Yugoslavia. They'd probably never heard of the country and thought it was somewhere in Africa. They asked us if we'd ever seen cars before, where we came from, whether there was radio, electricity and so on. When they realised that some of the newcomers spoke several languages and that they had university educations, they calmed down. Then they started bringing us old and new clothes, irons and other things. Many of them looked at us in astonishment and were hostile to us, especially those whose sons had gone to war in Europe. In time they grew used to us and we to them.

There were about a thousand of us in the camp of whom 343 were Yugoslavs, according to the statistics of Ruth Gruber, who had organised the operation. Of these, 322 were Jews and 21 of other nationalities. They wouldn't let us go out into the town. We had arrived in the summer, and in the autumn, all children were permitted to attend schools in the town, depending on their age and knowledge of English. We could choose our subjects. I chose English as a compulsory subject, typing and shorthand, because I wanted to be qualified for something professional and practical, something that would be useful in life, and also history and geography. The teachers behaved decently towards us and the American students gradually became used to us. We had passes and went to school every morning. There were classes from nine in the morning to five in the afternoon, with a lunch break. After five we would return to the camp. Sometimes we went for a walk through the town, but we didn't find it interesting. We did our homework at school and when we returned to the camp we would go to our youth club where we entertained ourselves and then we'd go to dinner.

There were also various activities around the camp. There were a lot of workshops set up in which the immigrants had the opportunity to train themselves for life in both the Old and the New world. Hairdressing, carpentry, photography and other clubs were formed. Later all the residents in the camp were given passes and could spend a few hours at a time outside the camp. Everyone was given eight dollars a month for spending money and some who worked in the camp, driving garbage trucks, cooking in the canteen and doing similar jobs were paid more. We had an improvised hospital-infirmary in which our doctors worked.

We were also witness to some tragic events. One young woman, a mother of two, committed suicide. This was probably because she felt guilty about having divorced her husband and abandoned her children to marry her husband's assistant.

We also had actors in the camp, both amateur and professional, and opera singers. Once a week we had performances. Leo Mirković, a famous Zagreb singer, would often treat us with arias from various operas. Violinist Zlatko Baloković, famous both at home and in America, once gave us a concert. We also had movies and once we even had a visit from Eleanor Roosevelt. In the meantime the war ended, and the Americans expressed their happiness by sitting in their cars and blowing their horns. Although things were going smoothly, it

was out of the question for us to stay permanently in America. They wanted to send us back to Europe after the war at any cost. Residence in the country wasn't guaranteed even for those who had sons, daughters, even parents in America. Many of us were thinking about going home, hoping that we might perhaps find some of our nearest and dearest alive. My sister wanted to return because her husband was calling her all the time and I didn't want to stay there by myself.

Daughter Silva with her mother and father at the end of 1998

About twenty of us Yugoslavs opted to return to Europe. And so, one sunny day, we went to New York and spent the whole day there. We visited Radio City, the Empire State Building, the Astoria Hotel and went sight-seeing. In the evening we boarded the Swedish ship Gripsholm and, after eight days, arrived in Bari and from there went to the shelter in Trogir. Once we were in Trogir we cooled off. But there was no going back. We envied those who had stayed in America because they had finally got permanent residence permits. We were all disappointed. A few people went to Belgrade, the lawyer Dr Grin with his family, the Margulis brothers, who were medical students, and us.

A number of people went to Zagreb and Sarajevo. A short time later Dr Grin managed to emigrate to Canada. The Margulis brothers asked the late Moša Pijade to allow them to return to America because their elderly parents, Dr Margulis and his wife, had stayed there and also to complete the studies they had begun. They were also lucky, so they travelled first to Canada and then to the United States. Mr Frajdenfeld also went to Canada. Only my sister, her son and I remained in Yugoslavia. We soon met up with my brother-in-law and, in the meantime, my brother also returned from German captivity. No one else came back.

We had to start again from scratch. When we arrived in Belgrade they called me to come to the UNRRA mission and offered me a job because, at the time, there weren't many people who spoke English. Of course I accepted. As far as I can remember, among the Jews who worked there were Dr Hendel, the son-in-law of the late Chief Rabbi Dr Alkalaj, Enriko Josif's mother Mrs Soka Josif and engineer Andrija Alpar. My superior was Mr Benson Aschenbach, an American Jew. I also worked on organising a number of international congresses, such as the War Veterans Congress.

After I left UNRRA, I worked for foreign trade companies. At that time people were assigned to jobs according to plan and you would have to work wherever you were assigned.

In the meantime I met my husband, Dr Dimitrije Delovski, who was specialising in cardiology at the time. Despite having had two children, I resumed my education, at my husband's urging, although I had come to the conclusion myself that I had to do this. In a large company in the business of foreign and domestic trade and representation, business was going really well, but very few people spoke foreign languages. Practically no one spoke German. The company encouraged me to take a course in English and Italian correspondence. I had been taught German as a small girl by my Aunt Ela from Vienna, after whom I had been named, and my parents also spoke German to her, so I simply always had the language in my ears. When the company discovered that I also spoke German, I did a course in German correspondence as well. Much later I also completed a technical school for foreign trade. For a short time I also worked for the Alliance of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia, where I received a *Megillah*, a scroll of appreciation. I also sang in the Jewish Baruh Brothers choir. In the

meantime, the children finished their studies, my son Nenad graduating in economics and my daughter Silvana in law.

My husband and I have been retired now for quite some time. We have four grandchildren. I remained optimistic during the most difficult days, and that's what kept me alive. However now, when I think about what I went through, it makes my hair stand on end. And although so many years have passed since the second world war, I still sometimes dream about Ustashas. They are chasing me! The scars in my soul remain. I feel as though there is part of me missing, as though I am not a complete person, a spiritual invalid. And I often ask myself why I should have been the one to survive.

XII

WORKING IN AUSTRIA

Vilhelm-Vili VAJS[1]

SERBIAN NAMES – A TICKET FOR LIFE

Vilhelm-Vili Vajs was born in Niš in 1925, to Rudolf and Luna, née Albahari. His father was an agronomist with the Kingdom of Yugoslavia Railways, in charge of arranging flowers and greenery at railway stations and along railway lines.

Before the war he attended schools in Čačak and Niš. After the liberation of the country he completed electrical engineering school in Zagreb.

He moved to Israel with his parents in 1948 and now lives in Haifa.

Because of my father's work I finished primary school in Čačak. My teacher, Dragoljub Jevtić, didn't want me to be singled out by the other children in a class where I was the only Jew, so he called me Vilotije Belić. He translated my surname from German to Serbian so that I would be the same as the other children. Because I was very fidgety, my teacher declared me a *harambaša* a chief *hajduk* or brigand. and, again so that I would be no different from the other children, told me I should celebrate St George's Day as in the epic poem *Đurđev danak, hajdučki sastank* (The brigands gather on St George's Day). So from that time to this day I, Vilhelm-Vili Vajs, the little *harambaša* Vilotije Belić, celebrate St George's Day.

[1] Vili Vajs' testimony was recorded by Jasna Ćirić.

In the 1940-41 school year I enrolled in the first grade of junior technical secondary school in Niš, but was expelled the same year because of the *Numerus Clausus*, the limit on enrolment of Jewish students in schools and universities. After that I enrolled in the Ninth Boys' Secondary School in Belgrade, just before the second world war began. During classes, history teacher Miodrag Milošević explained the political situation in the world and Hitler's intentions. He once told me "Listen, Vajs, you'd better know that Hitler's not joking with the things he's saying; he's going to kill you all!"

Vili Vajs with journalists in the offices of the Niš Narodne Novine during his visit to Niš in 1995

And then, on April 6, 1941, the war and the German occupation began. I returned to Niš. The hunting down and mass persecution of Jews began soon afterwards. They began implementing the plan for "the final solution for the Jewish question". We had to wear the Star of David on yellow armbands and on our back and chest. This was the beginning of hell for my family which, up to then, had lived a peaceful and untroubled life.

The Germans summoned all Jewish men over the age of fourteen to work at the barracks near the Pantaleja Church in Niš. We also had to attend roll calls at the Park Cinema. In the beginning we worked all day long and went home in the evening, we even received salaries for the first two weeks. And then the Germans no longer allowed us to go

home! Every day after the work was over they'd line us up, take every fifth man out of the line and kick and whip them. I remember they beat Nisim, a well-known Niš trader, until he collapsed, because they were annoyed by the expression on his face. They didn't know whether he was smiling ironically at them or his face was contorted with pain.

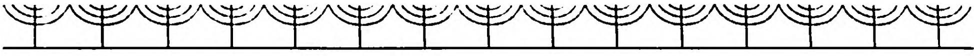
Facsimile of two of a number of false documents: Vili Vajs' employment record and his mother's identification document, issued in 1941 and 1942 in Leskovac in other people's names

One day at the Velosipedska Barracks in Crveni Krst, while we were loading cannons into wagons, it was my turn for a beating. I was beaten brutally. It was then that I decided to escape and no longer attend the roll calls. I hid in a wagon between two cannons and, when the train started and left the barracks, I jumped off and headed through the field towards my parents' house in the King Petar II Colony. Battered and bruised as I was, I managed to get to the Pantaleja cemetery. I hid there all night. In the morning, exhausted, I refreshed myself with food that had been left on the graves after memorial services.

Vajs in Niš in 1995, sightseeing in the city

I finally arrived home where my parents greeted me with great concern. And then came the order that we all had to have identity cards. I went, with five dinars in my pocket, to the Matejevačka tavern, where the son of the village chief was writing and issuing personal identity cards. So I got an identity card in the name of Dragoljub Radojičić (I used the name of a friend of mine from Čačak). My mother and father also got identity cards in this tavern in the names of Aleksandar and Marija Vojisov. According to the names in these false documents, I wasn't their son.

Then our flight from the Fascist terror began. The first stop was Leskovac. We registered at the Employment Office and applied for work, as Serbs, in Germany. We were placed with the family of the coppersmith, Cakić. Not long after that, my father and I left for Maribor and then I continued on by train towards Germany. Mother stayed behind in Leskovac. In the train, near Maribor, a girl recognised me and said "There's a Jew with us." We immediately jumped off the train and somehow managed to get to Maribor. Then we went to Graz in Austria where we got jobs as Dragoljub Radojičić, an electrical fitter, and Aleksandar Vojisov, a gardener. Shortly after that we called mother to come and work. She joined us in Graz and we were there until the war ended.



XIII

PRISONERS OF WAR

Ivan BRANDAJS

PRISONER OF WAR NO. 6708 (KGF 6708)

Ivan Brandajs was born on July 27, 1913, the son of Zemun lawyer Dr Lav Brandajs and Hana, née Binder.

When he returned from captivity to Zemun, he worked as a law clerk in his father's office. At the end of 1948, when his father moved to Israel with his wife, his brother Pavle, with his wife Nada and son Jovica, Ivan took a job at the Yugoslav League of Physical Education where he worked as secretary of the Rowing Association and, from 1952, as secretary of the Yugoslav Olympic Committee.

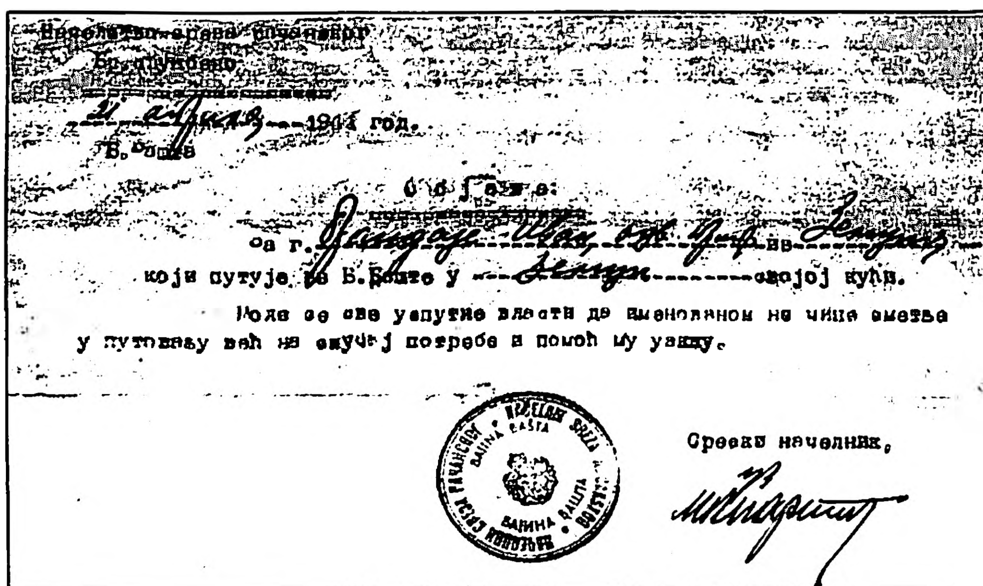
He then moved to the Yugoslav Foreign Trade Bank in 1957 and, after that, transferred to the Yugoslav Bank for International Economic Cooperation, where he worked until his retirement.

Before the war began in 1941 he had not been particularly active in the work of the Zemun Jewish Community. When, in 1948, Aleksandar Frank was elected president of the Community, a post earlier held by his father, Ivan Brandajs became vice-president and later was himself president of the Community. From 1952 he was a member of the Executive Committee of the Alliance of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia and remains active to this day as an honorary member.

Within days of March 27, 1941, it was obvious to everyone that Hitler would not calmly ignore the military coup which overturned the Kingdom of Yugoslavia's membership of the Tripartite Pact. The mobilisation of reserve troops began immediately. And so, on April 1, I too was summoned, as a reserve army officer Class IV (rank of second lieutenant) to report for duty at Suhoputna station in Ljubovija.

The station's task was to supply the army units which were crossing the Drina River from Serbia into Bosnia and back with the food needed for the men, for the draft animals (horses and oxen), vehicles, clothing and footwear and anything else that was needed.

When I arrived in Ljubovija there was only a station officer there, no warehouse for food, uniforms, footwear and other materials. Only the station commander, an elderly reserve captain, had arrived before me.



1941 год.
Б. Башта

Објава:

за г. ... из ...

који путује из Б. Баште у ... својој кући.

Моле се све упутне власти да именованом не чине сметње у путовању већ на случај потребе и помоћ му укажу.

Срески начелник,

Facsimile of travel documents allowing Ivan Brandajs to travel freely from Bajina Bašta to his native Zemun

In order to have at least something to give to the army units coming our way, we received permission from the division command which, if I'm not mistaken, was in Valjevo, to take bread from the town bakeries and give them a receipt with the Suhoputna station stamp instead of money. We got food from the local stores.

We also had some unexpected problems in carrying out the tasks with which we had been entrusted. So within a few days a cavalry unit

arrived from the north, from Vojvodina. Because the spring ploughing season had begun in Vojvodina, the horses were taken straight from the fields, unshod. In return for receipts, we had to collect from the town, along with the stores, the number of horseshoes and nails needed and mobilise ten or so blacksmiths from the area to shoe the horses, so the unit could continue its journey the following day.

In the meantime the Kingdom of Yugoslavia had capitulated and had virtually lost the war already. So we headed towards Sarajevo, hoping that we would reach the sea and leave for Egypt, England, France or some other Allied country.

However we got only as far as Bajina Bašta, where we learned we couldn't go any further, so we had to return to our homes. We were given adequate notice for this from the head office of the Rača County, dated April 21, 1941.

Somehow we managed to get to Obrenovac and because the Germans were already there they put us in some building and the following day transferred us to Pančevo, via Belgrade, and put us in a barracks.

Two days later we were sent through Vršac to Timisoara and then by train to Hungary and on to Trier, in the area where the borders of France, Germany and Luxembourg meet. Here officers were separated from the non-commissioned soldiers and the other ranks. After a few days the officers were transferred again, this time from west to east and, after two days' ride, to the officer camp Oflag IV-D, in a place called Hoyerswerda.

We knew that we had arrived in Saxony, but we didn't know that we were in the Lausitz province. Various tradesmen came to the camp from nearby places every day. We and they were surprised to discover that we could communicate and understand one another so well and soon we realised that they were Lusatian Sorbs[1]. So, for example, when we asked them where they were from they would reply "*Tam prez horou je naša vaš*," which we could understand as meaning "There, beyond the woods, is our village." The German guards had no idea what we were talking about.

[1] The Sorbs are a relatively small west Slavic people, living as a minority in the region known as Lusatia in the German states of Saxony and Brandenburg (in former GDR territory). They are also known as Lusatians, Wends, Lusatian Serbs or Serbs of Luzice

We stayed in the camp for almost three months and were then transferred to the Hohenfels camp, where we remained only a short time. At the beginning of the winter we were transferred to Oflag VIII-B in Nuremberg which, before the war, had been used for accommodation for members of the Nationalist Socialist party when they came to attend Party assemblies.

There we met up with comrades who had been in other camps, so there were about two hundred of us Jewish officers there. They included the following members of the Zemun Jewish Community: Zlatko Band, Srećko Bihali, Oto Bihali-Merin, Ivan Binder, Ivan Brandajs, Fric Farhi, Bertold Hercl, Leopold Hercog, Leo Klopfer, Herman Kon, Teodor Rozenberg, Rihard Semnic, as well as brothers Dragutin and Oto Šilinger and Dr Albert Vajs, who had moved from Zemun to Belgrade earlier. In addition to the Jews, we also found a number of non-Jews from Zemun: Nikola Blažon, Ozren Karamata, Sava Šujica and Živko Vujnović.

This came in very handy in the second half of 1942 when almost the entire Jewish population of Zemun had been taken by the Ustashas to Jasenovac and Gradiška. It was only through our non-Jewish friends that we were able to obtain any information about the fate of our families.

In February 1942, the Germans ordered all Jews to wear yellow stars with the word *Jude* (Jew) on their uniform. This order was withdrawn after a short time, but we Jews were separated from the others and put into separate barracks. At the end of 1942 we were moved from Nuremberg to Oflag VI-C in Osnabrik.

There were another two hundred or so captured Jews there, bringing our total to about four hundred. At the demand of General Milan Nedić, more non-Jewish officers, suspected of being leftists, were separated and a special camp, Camp D, was set up with four barracks.

In the autumn of 1941, we began receiving special letter forms which we could use to contact our families. In this way I kept in touch with my parents until the summer of 1942, when I received a letter written by my father. The letter came from Karlovac, and the name of my school friend from the Zemun Secondary School, Đuro Bajer, who was director of a bank in Karlovac at the time, was on it as sender.

My correspondence with Đuro lasted until the end of 1944 and then stopped. When I returned home at the end of August, 1945, I found my parents in Zemun and learnt that, after the Zemun Jews

were taken to Jasenovac and Gradiška, the Catholic parish priest in Zemun, Monsignor Prohaska, gave my father the identification documents of a couple from Split. With these, my parents set off by train to Split, which was in the Italian occupation zone. When they reached Karlovac they learnt that traffic with Split was cut off because there were battles being fought on the part of the railway line going through Lika and northern Dalmatia.

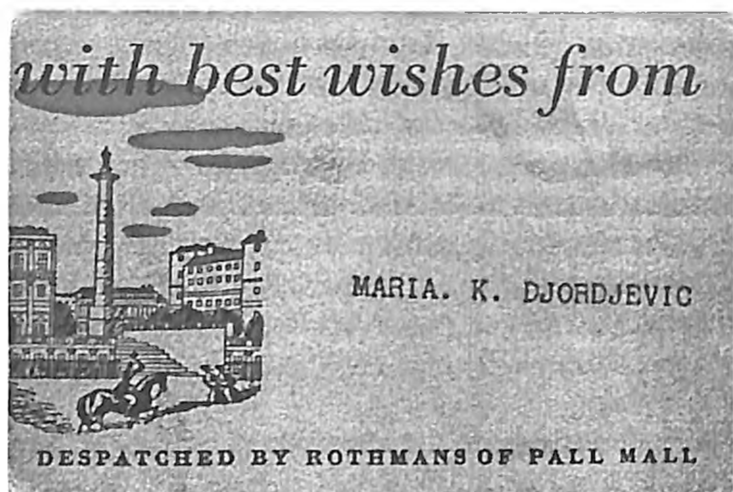
As they stood on the railway line trying to find a solution, Đuro Bajer walked up to them. He knew them because until we finished school in 1941 he would often come to our apartment. He immediately found an apartment for them in Karlovac and got them new identification documents. They stayed in Karlovac until the end of 1944 and then returned to Zemun. During their time in Karlovac, Đuro helped them with everything.

When he learnt that the Ustashas were arresting Jews, my brother Pavle crossed over the balcony on the back of the building into the apartment of our neighbour, a naval officer called Draksler, who gave him a uniform, accompanied him to his official car and drove him to Belgrade, to his brother-in-law's apartment. He stayed there until he managed to get new documents from the Commissariat for Refugees. These described him as a refugee from Croatia. With the help of friends he managed to get to Mokra Gora, near Užice and was there when the war ended. My sister Hedviga managed to move in with a friend of hers, the daughter of an Orthodox priest in Veliki Bečkerek, where she remained until the liberation. Towards the end of 1941, we began receiving food parcels from our family and friends on the *Paketschein* system of a coupon for each parcel. We also received parcels from the International Red Cross and other donors.

For us the most valuable parcels were those from England containing cigarettes from Rothmans of Pall Mall, on which the donors were named as "Peter K. Djordjevic" or "Marija K. Djordjevic" (King Petar II and Queen Marija).

At that time in the German Reich, only soldiers on the front line received cigarettes, while civilians and soldiers in the rear, even guards in the camps, got them only on special occasions and in very small quantities. And so, with the help of just a small portion of the cigarettes we received, we managed to obtain parts for a radio receiver which our experts made (and which could be quickly assembled and taken apart) so that the captives in charge of gathering international

news could listen to broadcasts from Radio London, the Voice of America and others and put together a new bulletin which was distributed in all the camp barracks.



A parcel coupon (paketschein), which entitled the inmates to receive food parcels

We soon organised a cultural life in Camp D. The best experts held lectures in their own fields. The lectures of Dr Albert Vajs were particularly interesting.

Language classes were also organised. Rabbi Herman Helfgot held a course in Hebrew, Maks Vajs, Lav Zaharov and Ženka Kozinski gave Russian lessons. Oto Gros gave classes in English and Ivo Doran in Italian. People also learnt German, because correspondence with our families was allowed only in German.

A theatre was also set up, mainly organised by Milan Goldšmit Zlatarić. We got some musical instruments from the Red Cross so an orchestra was assembled, led by Rafajlo Blam and Minja Balog.

In August 1944, after the Allied forces had landed in France, we were transferred to the Strasbourg camp, into underground fortifications inside the Maginot Line. We stayed there for only about a month and were then taken east by train, because the Americans and the English were approaching from the west. After four days of travel we arrived in Oflag 65 at Barkenbrugge near Danzig.

We stayed there until January 1945, when the Red Army advanced through the east and from the south, through Poland. It was obvious the Reich was collapsing, so the Germans sent us back to the

west, to Stetin on foot and from there further west by train, to the Dutch border, to the Alexisdorf camp, one of the first concentration camps in Germany. When we arrived the camp had been empty for quite some time. We stayed there for about a month and a half and were then sent back east. In mid-April 1945, we arrived in the city of Nuremberg where we crossed the bridge to the east side. We weren't more than a kilometre past it when the Germans blew up the bridge, which we took as a sign that the English were on their way.

At that time the Germans didn't dare take us anywhere inhabited. The orders were for us to sleep in the woods. It was obvious to us that the Allied forces were close, so about a hundred of us continued on further from the direction the column was moving, at a right angle from our previous course. At dawn we saw German Army columns hurrying towards the north. We came across a few captured French soldiers who were working for German farmers. They gave us food and let us sleep in their barracks, while they prepared for their trip home because it was obvious that the road was not open for them.

A caricature of Brandajs by a friend from captivity, 1941

The next day an English unit appeared so we too were freed and could move around in the area between Lenzburg and Hamburg.

We soon established contact with officers from the Yugoslav People's Army who arrived with the Russian Army to organise the return of our prisoners and internees to Yugoslavia. Because there was no possibility of travelling by train or car at the time, late May and June 1945, we had to wait for about a month until they had replaced the

demolished bridges with pontoons and until enough returnees were assembled. Thus it was not until the end of July that we reached the Austria-Yugoslavia border. We arrived in Zagreb by train. In the Jewish Community there we were given information on who had contacted them so far to report having survived. My uncle, Ivan Binder, and I discovered that our families were in Zemun, while Herman Kon was told that his parents had perished in Jasenovac.

Not all our comrades returned to Yugoslavia. Those who learnt that their relatives had found salvation in other, non-Communist countries immediately went to join them, while others went to Palestine.

A group of about three hundred reserve officers who returned to the country made a strong contribution to the revival of Jewish life in the communities and in the Alliance of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia. I shall name here only those who, as far as I remember, agreed to work in the Alliance and its institutions: David "Dača" Alkalaj, engineer Herman Ast, Dr Nikola Balog, Ivan Brandajs, Dr Andrija Gams, Naftali Bata Gedalja, Dr Milan Goldšmit Zlatarić, Dr Ladislav "Laci" Kadelburg, Aleksandar Levi, engineer Stevan Levi, Moša Mašijah, Ruben Rubenović, Dr Emil Sarafić, engineer Ervin Šalamon, Drago Šilinger, Aleksandar Dov Štajner, Slavko Štern Zvezdić, Maks Vajs and Dr Albert Vajs.

When, in mid-August 1945, at the break of dawn, we found ourselves at the Zemun railway station, Herman Kon, my uncle Ivan Binder and I were at a loss because we had no idea where our families lived. Herman Kon went to the apartment of some acquaintances. Of about three hundred members of the Jewish Community in Zemun before the war, including the surrounding areas as far as Pazova, only about thirty people remained. The others were either with the Partisans or in exile. A problem arose in connection with the accommodation of the returnees and resumption of the Community's work. I undertook to act as secretary of the Jewish Community. When my parents, brother and sister moved to Israel in December 1948, Aleksandar Frank took over the duties of president of the Zemun Jewish Community and I became vice-president of the Community and a member of the Main Board. Later I also became a member of the Executive Committee of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia.

Emil KLAJN

HOW I SURVIVED THE HOLOCAUST

Emil Klajn was born in Šid in 1919 to Etel, née Furst, and Leopold Klajn. He had two older brothers, Josip-Jožika and Ladislav-Lacika. Jožika was killed in Sremska Mitrovica in September 1942.

After the war he graduated from the Belgrade University Faculty of Economics. He worked as a clerk from 1950 until 1981 when he retired having spent the longest period with JAT.

He has a daughter, Vesna, whose married name is Beličajević, and a son Ljubomir who lives with his family in Canada. He has one grandson.

I finished primary and junior secondary school in Šid in 1933. I then attended trade academy in Osijek from 1933 to 1937. Immediately after I arrived in Osijek I joined the Zionist youth movement Hashomer Hatzair. This was an important turning point in my life and the seed of future events, especially when it came to making a decision on whether to go to the *hasharah* after I matriculated to prepare for departure to Erez Israel, in what was then Palestine. I was in the city trade *hasharah* in Novi Sad from May 1938 to March 1939 and in the agricultural *hasharah* at Golenić, near Podravska Slatina from April 1939 to March 1940. The *hasharah* readied me for many

kinds of hard physical labour, which came in handy in a later period of my life, in captivity.

In March 1940 I went home to Šid, to prepare for my *Alija*, my departure to Erez and to wait for the call. I received the call to come to Belgrade on March 30, 1940. There were about ten of us from the *hasharah* travelling by ship to Kladovo where we joined emigrants from Austria, about a thousand of them, who had spent the winter there on three passenger ships (the Czar Dušan, the Czar Nikola and the Queen Marija). We were soon to continue our journey towards Palestine. We lived in hope and expectation. However it didn't eventuate. And when, after four and a half months, our hope that we would depart had evaporated, those of us from Yugoslavia returned to our homes.

I mention our stay in Kladovo because living conditions were also rather difficult, even in this period. Apart from that, I had a chance there to brush up my German because I socialised quite a lot with the Austrian émigrés. This knowledge of German, the basics of which I had acquired at home from my father and mother, was to help me a great deal later on, in German captivity.

On my return to Kladovo at the end of October, 1940, I left for regular military service. I served the Army in Sarajevo, at the School for Reserve Infantry Officers. At the very beginning, as a member of an ethnic minority – a Jew, I had to take a written test in Serbo-Croatian, despite having matriculated. In any case, I wasn't the only Jew in the company, there was also Josip Polak-Pepo from Pakrac. (There is a great deal of information about him in Jaša Romano's book *Jews of Yugoslavia, 1941–1945*. He was killed in battle with Italian Fascists and Ustashas near Potravlje on March 9, 1942. He was the commissar of the Svilajnac Partisan Detachment).

The army days passed quickly. March 27 soon arrived. I remember how we cadets goose-stepped through Sarajevo while the people stood in the streets cheering "long live the cadets".

Then came April 6 and a rapid end to the war. I was captured by the Germans on April 18, 1941, in Sarajevo. I spent a few days as a prisoner within the compound of the King Aleksandar barracks. During this time I met two friends, *haverim*, from Hashomer Hatzair and from the *hasharah*: Hajim Rotšild from Zagreb and Jicak "Ervin" Klajn from Varaždin. Their fates were quite different. Hajim Rotšild escaped from a prison camp in Germany and joined the Slovakian

Partisans where he was killed, while Jicak Klajn lived to see the liberation and returned to Varaždin. I saw him in Varaždin in 1972. He was married and had two daughters. He died soon after this meeting.

After a few days in the camp in Sarajevo, one convoy of prisoners set off to Germany via Slavonski Brod, Osijek, Pécs and beyond, towards the destination. The first reception camp was Mosburg, near Munich. There we were registered and given our prisoner numbers and were assigned to a Stalag, a prison camp for other-rank soldiers. When I was being registered, the German sergeant asked me my nationality and I said that I was *Jude*, a Jew. He commented with just one word, *Schade* (pity). Perhaps he was thinking about my ill fate as a Jew.

Klajn on one of the farms on which he worked

After a few days in Mosburg we were moved to Stalag V-B in Baden-Baden. My prisoner number was 64546. This was on May 1, 1941. I remember there were flags flying from many buildings. The National Socialists were celebrating May Day.

It was a camp like many others. In it were wooden barracks with bunk beds and straw mattresses. Wire fences with warnings not to approach the wire. The usual guard posts. Together with us in the camp were French prisoners who greeted us pleasantly and warmly. I had school French so I was able to communicate with them.

After a week in this Baden-Baden Stalag, during a roll call, at which we were lined up like soldiers, prisoners were assigned to labour commands according to need and the requests of the villages. In due order they simply set aside five, ten, fifteen, twenty or more if needed. I fell into a group of 25. We were assigned to the village of Hohenhaslach in the district of Vaingen, about forty kilometres from Stuttgart.

In our group there were three Serbs, one Slovene, one Bosnian Muslim, nineteen Croats and I was the only Jew. The farmers who placed the requests were allotted one prisoner each, two at the very most as an exception. I was assigned to Christian Stalder, a man over sixty who had a small farm. I immediately told him that I was a student and Jewish by nationality. This householder had a wife of about the same age and a daughter a little over thirty.

Very soon, everyone in the village knew that I was a Jew. However I must say that I had no kind of unpleasantness or problem because of this. I spent six months with Mr Stalder and after that two months with another farmer, Helena Meier.

The Croat, Slovenian and Muslim prisoners were called back to the Stalag in December 1941 and then released to return to their homes. The three Serbs and I were the only ones left in the labour command. Because there were too few of us for such a large village, we were moved, in February 1942, to the labour command of the experimental and training farm Versuchsgut und Lehrgut Rastatt. There were seven of us Yugoslav prisoners and also a large group of Polish civilians there. We got on well with them. I still have a keepsake, the gift of a German-Polish dictionary from one of them. From that time on I stopped saying that I was a Jew. Instead I said that I was a Serb from Vojvodina, where there was a mixed population, which explained my first name and surname. Anyway, they called me by my first name, Emil, everywhere. In Hohenhaslach we were given a barracks to live in which had earlier been used as a temporary store for the village tavern. We had bunk beds. The farm people gave us straw mattresses and bed sheets. There we slept and spent Sunday afternoons. There was a guard, a soldier, who took us to the farmers in the morning and then collected us and took us back to sleep in the evening. He regularly locked us in and unlocked us in the morning. Here in Rastatt we worked feeding cows and clearing barns, and sometimes in buildings where seed potatoes were being prepared. Our prison food was tolerable.

We stayed there until the beginning of March 1942, a little over a month. Then they began a large-scale transfer of prisoners from Stalag V-B Baden-Baden to Stalag V-C Villingen-Schwartzwald. We stayed in the Villingen camp for just a few days. There, for the first time, I saw captured Soviet Russian soldiers. They were in a separate area in special barracks.

Again in Villingen the prisoners were separated during the morning roll-call according to command. I was put into a group with five Serbs from the Dalmatian hinterland. They all knew one another while I was the outsider. We were assigned to a village called Indlekofen Kreis Waldshut. They put us in part of the local fire station. Guard duty was performed by a fireman. I was sent to work for the miller, Baumgartner. The mill was about three or four kilometres from the village so I slept at the miller's place in a separate little room. It was the miller's obligation to lock me in in the evening and let me out in the morning. The guard would call in from time to time to check that I was locked in. This family was anti-Hitler, so I could sometimes even listen to Radio London. My boss and his wife also had three children, two daughters and a son. All three were old enough to work. The daughters were over twenty and the son was sixteen. I did mainly farm work. Everyone treated me as though I were a member of the family. I was there with the Baumgartner family at the Aispel mill until December 1, 1942. This was when prisoners from a number of labour commands in the area were recalled to be sent to work at the quarry near Lorach. I think it was called Wolfenschlucht. About thirty of us assembled there. This was very hard work. The German foremen mined the stone and we, the prisoners, had to break up the large rocks with heavy hammers. Then, when it was broken into pieces, we had to load them into small wagons with special pitchforks. We then pushed these little wagons to large transport wagons and loaded the stones into them. The food was poor. There were several non-commissioned officers working on this job, as well as one military academy cadet and I, a student, a future reserve officer. According to the Geneva Convention we could only be given lighter work such as on village labour commands. After fifteen days, six of us refused to work any longer. The army commander in charge sent us, escorted by guards, to Stalag Villingen. We were turned over to the German military investigative officer for investigation. Our camp leader, Pera Davidović, really stood up for us and, after a few interrogations, the sabotage charges were dismissed. I had been afraid that I would be convicted because it was noted in my camp personal information that I was a Jew.

We were again assigned to work in village labour commands. A few days later, on January 7, 1943, I was assigned to the labour command in the village of Altheim, in the Uberlingen district. I arrived in

Altheim escorted by guards. There were twelve of us. The dormitory for the prisoners was a converted carpentry workshop with bunk beds.

First they sent me to work for the miller, where I replaced a prisoner who had fallen ill. He soon recovered, so I was then assigned to work for a farmer who had not had a prisoner working for him before. His name was Jakob Zintzmeier. He had an important party function, he was an *ortsbauernfuhrer* (the leader of the local rural workers). He had a wife and three children aged from ten to fifteen. There was also a girl working for them, a student from their organisation Arbeitsdienst. This was an organisation for young girls who worked in village households. At the time, January and February 1943, the battle for Stalingrad was warming up, so I often talked to her. I don't remember her name. She was obviously a supporter of the Third Reich. Jakob didn't interfere in our conversations.

February 1943 came, the time for spraying the fruit. It was a windy day. The boss didn't give me any cream for my face, either before or after the spraying, and so my face burnt. The next day, when the guard came to take us to work, I sent a message saying I was sick. That day I stayed in the camp and the next day the guard took me to the army doctor in the neighbouring village of Salem. The doctor gave me cream for my face and put me on the sick list for three days so I didn't have to work. During this time the farmer didn't bring me any food, but my friends did, a little something every evening. When the three days were up, I told the guard that they should send me to another farmer, and that I didn't want to work at Zintzmeier place because he didn't take care of his prisoner-worker. I was soon allocated to another farm and then another, with a woman called Sulger. Her husband had been killed at the eastern front. I worked on her farm from March 1943 to July 1944.

In July 1944 they began moving prisoners from the Villingen camp to Stalag V-C Offenburg. From the Altheim labour command we were sent to Villengen and Offenburg. It was at this time that the second front opened in the west so the mood of the prisoners was also improving. At the Offenburg camp we waited about twenty days to be assigned to labour commands. I should mention here that there were quite a few French and English (Indian) prisoners in this camp. I was assigned to the Hugsweir labour command, east of Offenburg. The farmer wasn't happy with my work, so he no longer wanted to have any prisoners. I was sent back to the Offenburg camp. After about ten days

I was assigned to a new labour command to supplement the existing one in the village of Hugelheim, east of Freiburg. There I worked for two different farmers. After two months, work began on digging trenches near the river Rhine. All prisoners had to do this work. In order to avoid digging trenches, I pretended to fall ill. After an examination by the army doctor in Freiburg I was sent to Offenburg, to our prison doctor who sent me to the prisoner hospital in Rastatt. After a thorough examination I was found to be in good health. I then asked Dr Medenica, one of our prisoners, to keep me in the hospital as a nursing assistant and I got a written confirmation of this job from a German doctor. I saved this certificate in my records. It was October. My duty was to dispense medicine to the prisoner patients and, for a while, I also worked at writing up case histories for the Russian prisoner patients.

One of the groups of prisoners with whom Klajn did hard labour

Because the Allied forces were advancing in France, our hospital was preparing for evacuation and on about December 20, 1944, the patients and the hospital staff were evacuated, in cargo wagons, to the Weingarten hospital. There were a number of air raid alerts during the trip, but we reached our destination. Because there was no need for my work in the hospital in Weingarten, I was made redundant at the end of December 1944 and returned to the Villengen camp. There I

was assigned to various jobs, unloading coal in factories, clearing snow on the Villingen-Freiburg railway line and, after the railway station in Villingen was bombed, filling the huge craters in at night. This was in February 1945. In March 1945 I was sent to do various kinds of work, depending on the people who were asking for prison labour.

The poor food in the camp was supplemented with Red Cross parcels. We received these parcels from 1942 until just before the end of the war, when the transport network broke down with the bombing of trains and railway tracks.

On April 3, 1945, I was assigned by the Germans to go to the village labour command in Frickingen. I was called in by the Bosniac commissioner, who had the rank of sergeant. Father Lukić was also there. They told me that they knew I was a Jew but that they wouldn't do anything to stop me going to the labour command. And so, on April 4, I was sent under escort to the labour command in Frickingen, about ten kilometres north of Uberlingen and Lake Constance.

It was a large village and there were more than twenty of us prisoners. The dormitory was set up in the basement of the primary school, with wooden bunk beds. At that time the rural workers had built barriers on the road to prevent French tanks from entering the village. However when the French arrived on April 25, they issued an ultimatum warning that unless the road was cleared for traffic they would bomb the village. The road was cleared and the prisoners were free.

After Germany's final capitulation on May 9, 1945, a large number of prisoners came to Villengen to prepare for their return home. I think it was the second half of May when I arrived there. An anti-Fascist committee was set up and I was a member of it. Various lectures were organised together with lessons in motorbike riding. A choir was also formed and this went to give concerts in all the larger labour commands. There was a special struggle to counteract the influence of a certain number of officers (Yugoslav prisoners of war), who were advocating the idea that prisoners should not return to Yugoslavia.

We waited for some time for the French to make it possible to return to Yugoslavia, to our homes. This finally happened at the end of August 1945. In Villingen we lived in German barracks but we ordered and received food from the French Army command. The cooks were our own people. A company of soldiers was formed to provide us with security. They escorted us on our return trip to Yugoslavia.

We travelled in freight wagons, but with far more comfort and far more relaxation than when we had travelled to Germany. We passed through Salzburg, Jesenice, Ljubljana, Zagreb and Osijek (Josipovac-Kravice). In Josipovac-Kravice we were given individual documents for the remainder of the journey. My final destination was Šid. My family house was there, as were my parents and my elder brother, who had returned from Switzerland. Finally, early in the morning on September 4, 1945, I arrived in Šid. During my captivity it had been extremely important for my mental condition that I had been able to correspond with those closest to me, my parents, my brother Lacika and his wife, my brother Jožika and my uncle in Osijek. My brother Laci had emigrated with his wife, his mother-in-law and our parents to Ljubljana in January 1942 and from there they had been interned in northern Italy, in Bellagio. After Italy capitulated they fled to Switzerland from where they had returned home to Šid. Our eldest brother, Josip-Jožika, remained in Šid. He was killed by the Ustashas in Sremska Mitrovica at the beginning of September 1942. My Uncle Branko remained in Osijek. As the husband of a Catholic Hungarian he was protected from the deportations.

I have managed to save all the correspondence I received while in captivity. Some letters were censored, but I still managed to learn how they were living and where they were moving to, and this was very important to me.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

CAMPS IN YUGOSLAVIA IN WHICH JEWS WERE INTERNED[1]

Place and date of establishment	Type of camp and who established it	Catchment area	Fate of inmates
BANAT			
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
SERBIA			
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

[1] 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 1944. remainder perished in Nazi camps with a very small number of survivors
MACEDONIA			
Skopje, March 11, 1943	assembly– Germans	Macedonia	between March 22 and 29, 1943, transferred to the camp in Treblinka where almost all perished
CROATIA–SLOVENIA–SREM			
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, May1941	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, Šid, Ilok	transferred in July 1942, some to Jasenovac, some to Auschwitz
Loborgrad, 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 (Pag), 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, Camp I, Krapje August 1941	concentration for men – Independent State of Croatia	transferred from the camp in Metajno	vlarge 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 all killed from 1942 to 1945 – a small number managed to escape
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			
Sarajevo, end of 1941	assembly – Independent State of Croatia	prisoners from Sarajevo and surrounding area	men transferred to Jasenovac and women and children to Stara Gradiška and Đakovo
Kruščica, 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	Bihać	in September 1941 transferred to Prijedor from where a small number escaped, while others were transferred to Stara Gradiška and Jasenovac
ZONA 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
ZONA II			
Slano (Pag), June 1941	concentration for men – Independent State of Croatia	transferred from the camp in Gospić (from Bosnia and Herzegovina)	a large number killed, others transferred to Jasenovac in August 1941

Place and date of establishment	Type of camp and who established it	Catchment area	Fate of inmates
Metajno (Pag), June 1941	concentration for women	transferred from the camp in Gospić (from Bosnia and Herzegovina)	a large number killed, survivors transferred to Kruščica 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
BAČKA			
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
KOSOVO AND METOHIJA			
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
MONTENEGRO			
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

Jevrejske opštine u Jugoslaviji

I) U Savezu jevrejskih veroispovednih opština

Mesto	Broj duša	Imena gospode: opštinskog pretsednika	Imena gospode: rabina ili najstarijeg sveštenika
Apatin	62	Bela Schäffer	Samuel Švalb
Bačka Palanka	237	Salamon Štajf	Eugen Gros
Bačka Topola	*303*	*Josif Vig*	Jul. Goldstein
Bajmok	129	Ljud. Šefer	M. Jakobović
Banja Luka, ašk.	*155*	Moric Hercog	Sigmund Kon
Banja Luka, sef.	237	Josef D. Nahmijas	Mihael Atijas
Bela Crkva	58	Josif Gross	Samuel Ungier
Beli Manastir		(u osnivanju)	
Beograd, ešk.	2780	Dr Fridrih Pops	Ighjat Šlang
Beograd, sef.	9000	Dr David Albala	Dr Isak *Alkalaj*
Bezdan	92	Dr N. Popper	H. Grünberger
Bihać	156	Dr Levi	Avram Atijas
Bijeljina	243	Zadik Baruh	Aron Altarac
Bitolj	3180	Povereništvo	Avram Romano
Bjelovar	332	Drag. Grinhut	Dr. D. Ginsberg
Brčko	*130*	*Hajim D. Salom*	Leon Katan
Čakovec	425	Dr. Ljud. Švarc	Dr. I. Grünwald
Čantavir	71	Dr. Simon Lipot	Adolf Kraus
Čonoplja	42	Dr Aleks. Hajdu	Makso Dajč
Čurug	57	Šandor Lampel	V. Birnbaum
Daruvar	169	Leon Gros	Josip Gilman
Debeljača	148	Andor Guttmann	Ignjat Roth
Derventa	121	v. d. Moric Kabiljo	Jakov Papo
Doboj	53	Josef L. Pesah	Avram Finci
Dolnja Lendava	147	Žiga Weiss	Makso Adler
Donji Miholjac	173	Urlik Liebling	
Dubrovnik	87	Josip Mandl	Salamon Baruh
Đakovo	199	Josip Frank	Eugen Mandel
Horgoš	*52*	*Marko Deneš*	*Išak Abraham*
Karlovac	297	Dr Vatr. Reiner	David Meisel
Koprivnica	365	Milan Reich	Dr Izrael Kohn
Kos. Mitrovica	116	Benvenisti Koen	
Kragujevac	89	Dr Moša Eli	
Križevci	118	Vladimir Hiršl (p.p.)	Lav. Buchsbaum

Membership and leaders of Jewish Communities in Yugoslavia in the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities, taken from the Jewish National Calendar, 1940

Mesto	Broj duša	Imena gospode: opštinskog pretsednika	Imena gospode: rabina ili najstarijeg sveštenika
Kula	133	Dr. D. Holender	S. Šlomović
Kutina	132	Albert Singer	Mojsije Trilnik
Leskovac	69	Bokor Mandil	Avram A'halel
Ludbreg	82	Dr L. Šlezinger	J. L. Deutsch
Ljubljana		(u osnivanju)	
Mali Iđoš	39	Šandor Kertes	Lipot Frankl
Mostar	59	Bernhard Širc	David Perera
Murska Sobota	703	Armin Hirschl	Dr. Lazar Roth
Našice	229	Miško Vajs	Jakov Šmelcer
Niš	301	Bora H. Hazan	Albert Daniti
Nova Gradiška	212	Jakov Kohn st.	Andrija Trilnik
Novi Bečej	289	G. Šlezinger	Emanuel Pollak
Novi Kneževac	61	Josif Schiller	Izr. Gelbman
Novi Pazar	292	Leon Bahar	Cadik Konforti
Novi Sad	4185	Dr Ferd. Lustig	Dr. Hinko Kiš
Novi Vrbas	251	Aurel Reich	Josip Klein
Osijek g.g.	2332	Dr. L. Margulies	Dr Ch. Steckel
Osijek d.g.	184	Bela Herman	Dr L. Margulies
Pakrac	107	Josip Mautner	Izak Frajdes
Pančevo	410	O. Fišgrund	Menjhert Klajn
Parabuć	73	Šamu Kelemen	Ernst Špicer
Petrovgrad	1278	Leop. Freischberger	Dr David Finci
Pirot	100	Moša Levi	M. Silberberg
Podr. Slatina	158	Artur Bauer	H. Grinwald
Priština	373	Hajim B. David	Zaharije Levi
Rogatica	45	Mr. Ph. S. Papo	Salamon Pardo
Ruma	250	Dez. Šlezinger	V. Goldstein
Sanski Most	91	Isak Atijas	Isak Papo
Sarajevo, ašk.	1261	Bernardo Klein	Dr Hinko Urbach
Sarajevo, sef.	6465	Dr Samuel Pinto	Dr Moric Levi
Senta	598	Armin Graf	Dr A. Erenfeld
Sisak	263	Dr. Emil Flesch	Dr. Beno Heisz
Skoplje	2414	Dr. Avram Nisim	Moša Behar
Slav. Požega	169	Leo Steiner st.	Mord. Rikov
Slav. Brod	417	Dr J. Abramović	Dr L. Weissberg
Smederevo	83	L. Tajtacak	Benjamin Hazan
Sombor	945	A. Wamoscher	Jakob Špaser
Split	282	Ing. V. Morpurgo	Isak A. Finci

Mesto	Broj duša	Imena gospode opštinskog pretsednika	rabina ili najstarijeg sveštenika
Srem. Mitrovica	116	Dr D. Friderik	Ger. Belogorski
Stanišić	44	Bene Licht	Gerson Slovak
Stara Kanjiža	174	A. Grüner	Herman Weiss
Stara Moravica	61	Al. Šrajer	J. H. Fränkl
Stari Bečej	247	Rudolf Špicer	Sam. Rafael
Stari Sivac	45	V. Lederer	Leo Lifsitz
Subotica	4928	Dr El. Kalmar	Dr J. Geršon
Sušak	202	Vel. Švarc	Oto Dajč
Šabac	90	Dr Haim Ruso	Nisim Adižes
Štip	579	Menahem J. Levi	Meir M. Kasorla
Temerin	64	S. Šosberger	Samuel Stern
Titel	69	Dr Eugen Fischer	Evgen Kraus
Travnik	261	Dr Jak. Konforti	Isak Baruh
Tuzla	232	Dr J. Rozner	A. Fingerhut
Valpovo	140	Ing. L. Huppert	
Varaždin	515	Hermann Herzer	Dr Rud. Glik
Velika Kikinda	504	Maksa Gutman	Dr Vilim Steiner
Vinkovci	579	Dr Ignjat Lang	Dr M. Frankfurter
Virovitica	195	Edo Kaiser	Ad. Springer
Visoko	126	Elias Kabiljo	Majer J. Kasorla
Višegrad	82	Gavriel Papo	Josef Levi
Vlasenica	61	Albert Altarac	Hajim Altarac
Vršac	296	Hajim Sid	Mavro Salzman
Vukovar	213	Hinko Steiner	Dr I. Scheer
Zagreb, ašk.	10500	Dr Marko Horn	Dr Gavro Švarc
Zagreb, sef.	625	Cezar Gaon	
Zavidovići	128	J. Sonnenfeld	Isak Kabiljo
Zemun, ašk.	352	Dr L. Brandeis	Gerson Kačka
Zemun, sef.	96	Jakov K. Levi	Isak Musafija
Zenica	192	Samuel Trinki	Juda Finci
Zvornik	112	Nahman Hajon	
Žabalj	93	Jakov Fischer	Em. Nichtburg
Žepče	60	Mošo Musafija	Nisim Montiljo

II) U Udruženju ortodoksnih jevrejskih veroispovednih opština

Mesto	Broj duša	Imena gospode	
		opštinskog pretsednika	rabina ili najstarijeg sveštenika
Ada	350	David Hubert	David Hoffmann
Bačka Palanka	50	Karl Levi	Jonas Glauber
Bački Petrovac	100	J. Glied	Samuel Silber
B. Petrovoselo	310	J. Sanet	Solomon Prager
Ilok, ašk. aut.	160	Hermann Stern	
Ilok, ort.	150	Lazar Stern	Hilel Steiner
Mol	100	M. Schlesinger	Josif Grün
Senta, sef. ort.	850	Mozes Krajnik	Mozes Lebović
Sombor	70	Šandor Gross	Henrik Weiss
Stara Kanjiža	35	Bernat Menzer	Sal. Berković
Subotica	560	J. Grossberger	Mozes Dajč
Zagreb	130	Leon Hessel	

Membership and leaders of Jewish Communities in Yugoslavia in the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities, taken from the Jewish National Calendar, 1940

Summary:

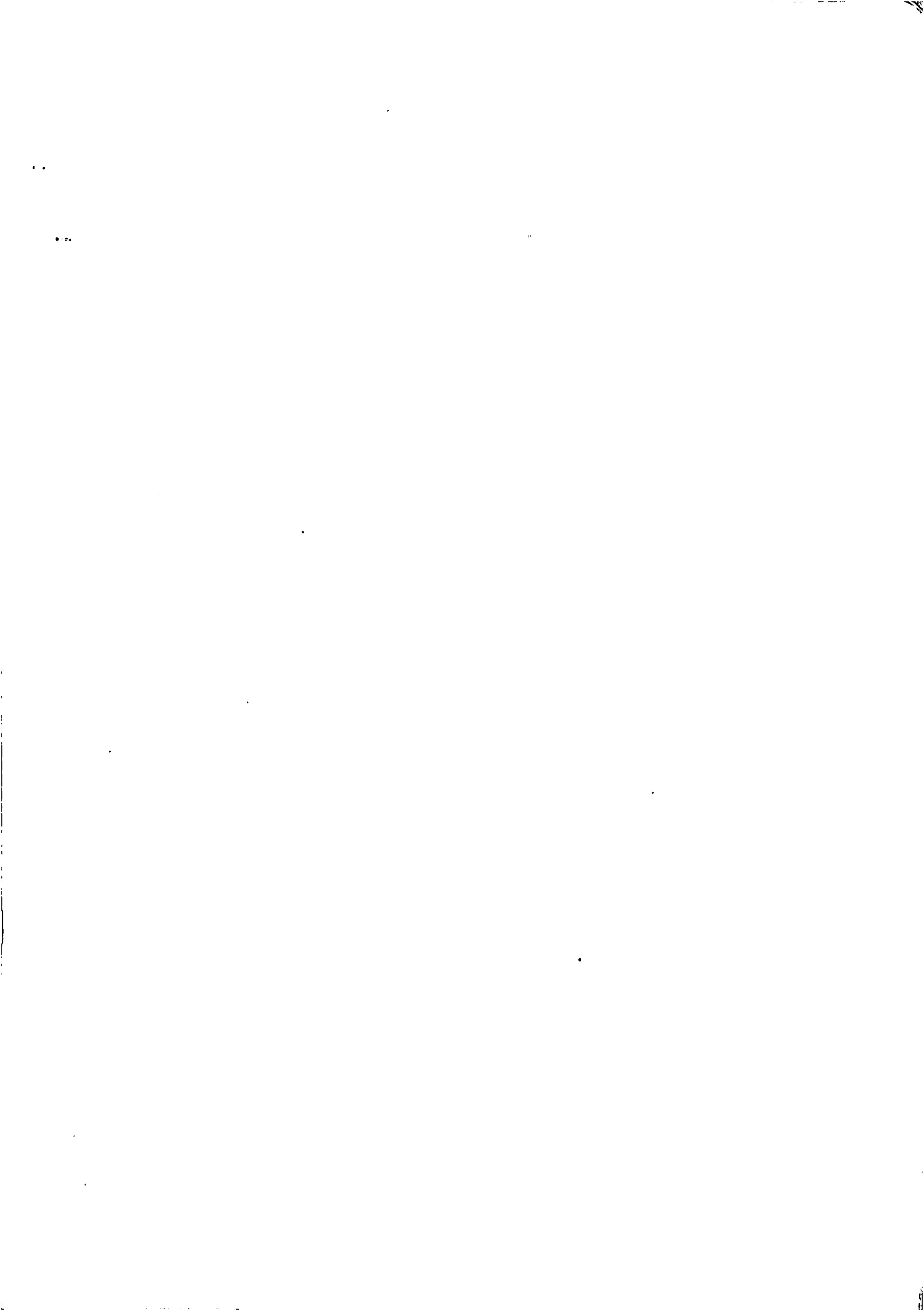
I) In 105 Communities in the Alliance of Jewish Religious Communities	67,119
II) In 12 Communities in the Association of Orthodox Jewish Religious Communities	2,865
Total number of Jews in Yugoslavia in 1940	69,984

APENDIX 3

JEWISH COMMUNITIES RE-ESTABLISHED BY 1947

Place and number of membres		Place and number of membres	
1. Ada	59	21. Rijeka	99
		Rijeka surroundings	75
2. Apatin	25	22. Sarajevo	1557
3. Bač	2	23. Senta	110
4. Bačko Petrovo Selo	26	24. Senta – ortodox	118
5. Banja Luka	46	25. Skoplje	328
surroundings	85		
6. Beograd	2271	26. Sombor	145
		Sombor surroundings	56
7. Bitolj	57	27. Split	163
8. Bugojno	8	28. Sremska Mitrovica	20
		Sr. Mitrovice surroundings	13
9. Dubrovnik	31	29. Subotica – ortodox	88
surroundings	3	Subotica surroundings	186
10. Kikinda	37	30. Subotica	981
11. Kosovska Mitrovica	33	31. Šid	16
12. Mol	11	32. Tuzla	78
		Tuzla surroundings	9
13. Mostar	65	33. Vršac	31
		Vršac surroundings	2
14. Niš	31	34. Zagreb	2080
		Zagreb surroundings	434
15. Novi Pazar	36	35. Zavidovići	25
Prizren	4		
16. Novi Sad	1001	36. Zemun	36
Novi Sad surroundings	220		
17. Osijek	.361	37. Zenica	34
Osijek surroundings	249	Zenica surroundings	9
18. Pančevo	88	38. Zrenjanin	92
Pančevo surroundings	13		
19. Pirot	12	Other places	36
20. Priština	224		

Total: Number of places 38 — Number of membres 11,924



GLOSSARY

Akiba ben Joseph – celebrated teacher from the times 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.

AFZ – the Anti-Fascist Women's Front

Aliyah – (Hebrew) rise, ascent. Moving to 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

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

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)

Blocksperre – (German) ban on leaving the barracks

B'nai B'rith, – an organisation which engages in humanitarian and cultural-educational work. Because of its elitist organisation and lodges, it is often identified with Masonic organisations

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)

Erez – (Hebrew) country; often used as a synonym for Israel

Ghetto – (Italian) a part of town in which Jews lived under the orders of the authorities. Ghettoes were locked up at night and because they were overpopulated life in them was unhealthy. The term was first introduced in Italy.

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.

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 hasharahs in Yugoslavia

Halutz, (plural – halutzim) – (Hebrew) a pioneer who is preparing for the return to Erez Yisrael.

Hanukkah – (Hebrew) feast of light, it is celebrated for eight days beginning the 25th 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.

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)

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).

Häftling – (German) prisoner

Hehalutz – (Hebrew) international organisation of halutzim – all halutzim preparing for the aliyah would became 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 – (Hebr.) 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

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 Commemmoration 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).

Yeshiva – (Hebrew) a high religious school attended after completion of the first religious school (heder – Ashkenazi, meldar – 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).

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

Kosher – (Hebrew) confirming to religious regulations in selecting and preparing food (kasher: clean, permitted).

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

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

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

Matzah – (Hebrew) unleavened bread which is made for Pesah when no food containing any leavening or any product of fermentation is allowed for a period of eight days.

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. (the term also used is Solomon's letter)

Maccabi – (Hebrew) a frequently used name for Jewish sports associations which were named after Judas Maccabaeus, a Jewish hero from the 2nd century BC.

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

Mitzva – (Hebrew) religious command, a good deed

Minyan – (Hebrew) number, the quorum of ten men over the age of 13 required to hold a service in the synagogue

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 its 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 ultra-rightists – 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.

Pesah – (Hebrew) Passover, a holiday celebrated in memory of the exodus from Egypt. It begins on the 15th 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 14th day of the month Adar (February-March).

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

Shoah – (Hebrew) Hebrew word for the Holocaust

Shomer – (Hebrew) guard

Shtetl – (Yiddish) a small town or in Poland and Russia with a majority Jewish population

SKOJ – Communist Youth League of Yugoslavia

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-Hercegovina 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 19th 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 Judaeocentric 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 Ustashas 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.

Wehrmacht – German armed forces

VVN (Vereinigung der Nazi Verfolgten) – Association of the Victims of Nazi Persecution

WIZO – acronym for: Women's International Zionist Organisation

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'

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 10th day of the month of Tishri; a 24-hour long fast

Jugendaliyah – (German) Aliyat hanoar, youth aliyah

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.

Zäblappell – (German) the counting of lined-up prisoners at a certain place (bossic, place as in spot)

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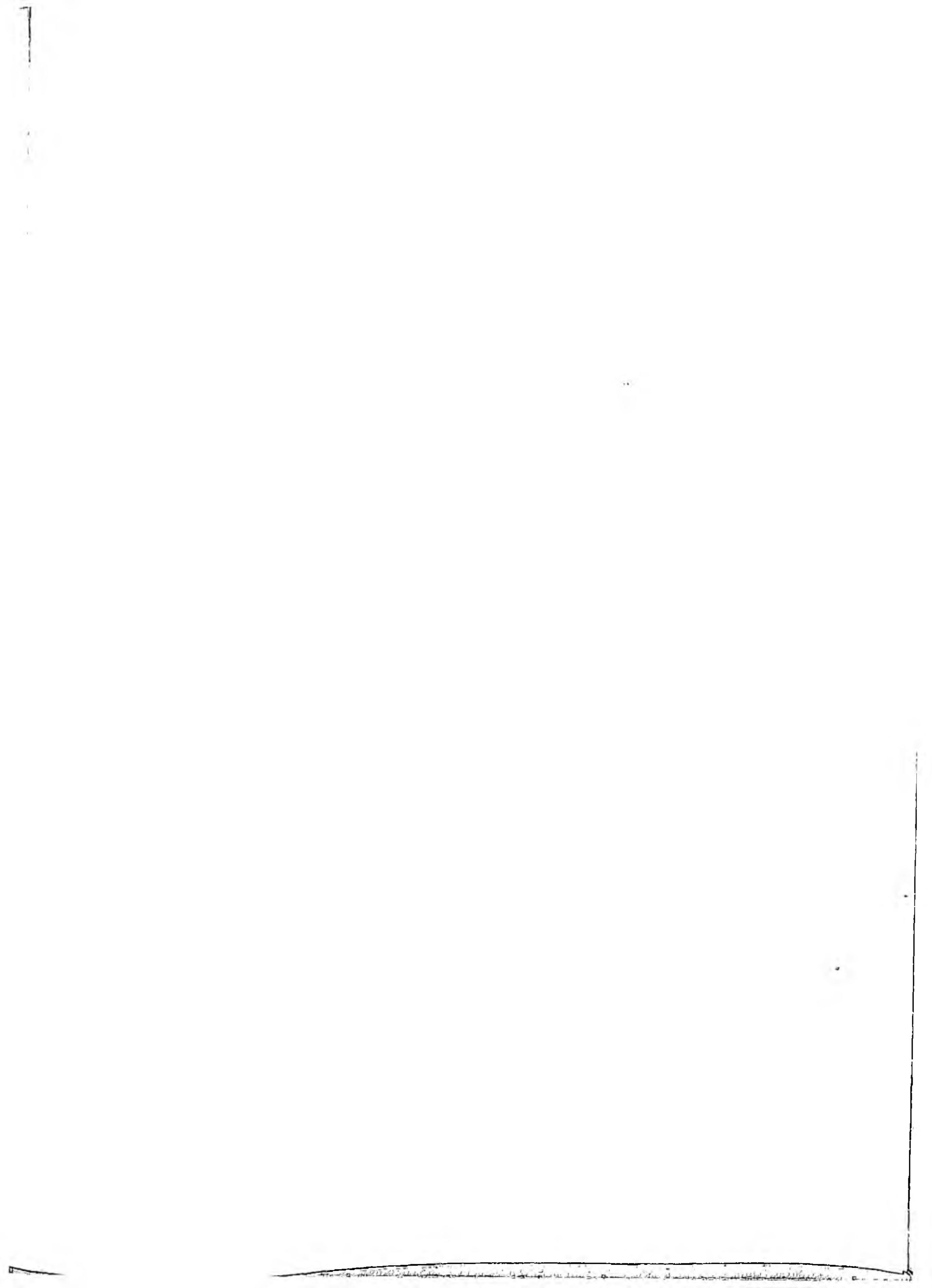

AUSTRIJA
MAĐARSKA
RUMUNIJA
BUGARSKA
ALBANIJA
JADRANSKO MORE

MARIBOR
VARAŽDIN
Danica
Loborgrad
LJUBLJANA
Kerestinec
ZAGREB
Lepoglava
PIRAN
RIJEKA
KRK
PULA
RAB
Slano
Jadovno
PAG
GOSPIĆ
Metajno
Kraljevica
ZADAR
DUGI OTOK
SPLIT
BRAČ
VIS
HVAR
KORČULA
Daruvar
SL. POŽEGA
Jasenovac
Stara Gradiška
SL. BROD
Bosanski Petrovac
BANJA LUKA
ZENICA
Kruščica
SARAJEVO
MOSTAR
DUBROVNIK
Đakovo
VINKOVCI
OSIJEK
Tenje
Vukovar
BRČKO
TUZLA
SUBOTICA
Bačka Topola
SOMBOR
Stari Bečej
Žabalj
Crvenka
Petrovgrad
Čurug
NOVI SAD
Begeč
Sremska Mitrovica
Zasavica
ŠABAC
Sajmište
BEOGRAD
Banjica
Jajinci
Pančevo
Borski rudnik
BOR
KRAGUJEVAC
UŽICE
KRALJEVO
Crveni krst
NIŠ
Bubanj
PIROT
LESKOVAC
KOS. MITROVICA
PRIŠTINA
PODGORICA
Cetinje
KOTOR
BUDVA
Skadarsko J.
PRIZREN
TETOVO
SKOPLJE
ŠTIP
OHRID
Ohridsko J.
BITOLJ
Prespansko

KEY:

● Concentration camp

△ Execution site

▲ Assembly camp

□ Labour camp

■ Ghetto

סנטה SENTA

סומבור
SOMBOR

קיקינדה
KIKINDA

MOL מול

APATIN אפאטין

VRŠAC ורשאץ

אדה ADA

קולה KULA

BAČKI PETROVAC באצ'קי פטרובאץ

צ'אנטאוויר ČANTAVIR

BAČKO PETROVO SELO

אצ'קו פטרובו סלה

BEČEJ בצ'יי

נובי סאד
NOVI SAD

NOVI BEČE

נובי בצ'יי

BAČKA PALANKA

באצ'קה פאלאנקה

ורבאס VRBAS

TEMERIN
טמרין

וליקי בצ'קרק
ZRENJANI

ניק

RUMA רומה

ZVORNIK

PANČEVO פאנצ'בו

ŠABAC שאבאץ

ZEMUN מון

SREMSKA MITROVICA