

---

*Aleksandar NAHMAN*

WAR CHILD

*Aleksandar Nahman was born in Vienna in 1933, the first child of a wealthy merchant from an old Belgrade Sephardic family. His father Marsel (Moša) graduated in civil engineering in Vienna where he met his wife Leopoldina, née Czerny, who was of Czechoslovakian origin. When they married in Belgrade in 1924, his mother converted to Judaism.*

*After the second world war, Aleksandar matriculated from the Sixth Boys' Secondary School in Belgrade, completed the Military Technical Academy in Zagreb in 1959 and, in 1969, graduated as a mechanical engineer in Zagreb. As a member of the armed services he worked in Bosnia-Hercegovina, Slovenia and Croatia. He retired in 1991 with the rank of lieutenant-colonel.*

*Of his immediate family, his father's sister, Pakita, perished in the Holocaust.*

*He is married to Ana Nahman, née Ljepović.*

*His mother, Leopoldina, died in Belgrade in 1988 at the age of 92.*

*Graduate engineer Aleksandar Nahman now lives in retirement in Zagreb, while his brother, three years younger, Professor Jovan Nahman, also an engineer and a doctor of science, is also retired and lives in Belgrade.*

Father always fulfilled my wishes, even the smallest ones. I remember his pride when he took me to school for the first time and to services at the synagogue. I remember the sound of the *shofar* at the

synagogue, the lighting of the candles and the blessing on the Erev Shabbat, the lighting of candles for Hanukkah. I remember the rabbi commending me for writing and reading Hebrew letters very well.

We lived in our own house in the centre of Belgrade. I vividly remember the demonstrations of March 27, 1941, the masses of people and flags. The cries of "Better war than the Pact," and "Better the grave than a slave," still echo in my ears.

I remember the tears and weeping of my mother as she dragged me off the balcony, not to look out into the street. A few days later all classes at school were suspended. We children, delighted at this, didn't know what was in store for us!

Father sent my mother, my brother and me to Arandelovac, to stay with the family of his manager.

The building and our apartment were requisitioned. Part of the furniture (Father's study) was taken away to be used by the city commandant, Neuhauser, and Father moved in with our *Sandak*, Samuel Davičo. Following an incident of sabotage by Emil Almozlin in Belgrade, Jews were rounded up in Tašmajdan. About 120 of these were selected and, on July 28, 1941, executed in Jajinci, near Belgrade.

The rounding up of hostages was done by issuing a proclamation obliging all Jews to report at a specified time. My father, pedantic and punctual, didn't wait for his *Sandak* so that they could go together, but went alone, so as to be on time. The *Sandak*, like many others, was late, and the Germans already had enough hostages. Our *Sandak* went to Canada with his family and survived. My careful father also secured passports for all of us in time, and money in Canada, but fate had something else in store for us.

Mother was hiding with the two of us in Arandelovac and, occasionally in the village of Misača. From that village we heard a thundering sound and saw fire on the horizon on the evening of April 6, when Belgrade was bombed. A day or two later we saw Father for the last time. He had come to visit us and then returned to Belgrade. We lived in hiding like this until a neighbour told us that the Gestapo would come early in the morning to take away Jewish children who were hiding. I remember that night, running drowsily through corn fields with a local guide. We somehow managed to slip through to Belgrade. We moved in with a cousin of ours, Jelena Ozerović, the wife of Manfred Ozerović, in Kotež Neimar. As well as the two of us, Mother was also taking care of two children of her cousin Demajo, who worked at the

Jewish Hospital. She tried to save them as well, but their mother demanded that she bring her children to her, although she knew the hospital was being closed and that they would be taken to the camp at Sajmište, where all of them were later killed. To this day I have a vivid memory of the face of Alma, who was a little older than me at the time, pale, with black eyes and luxuriant curls of black hair.

In order for us to survive, Mother occasionally had to cross “over”. This was the expression used for a trip to Zemun, which then belonged to the Independent State of Croatia. There Vojvodina farmers would trade meat products for gold and jewellery. One day, with a cousin of ours whom we used to call Aunt Eme, we were returning late in the evening and the curfew began. We were close to where we were staying, but we suddenly ran into a police patrol! Shouting and threatening they tried to take Mother’s bag of food from her. Mother then exhibited extreme courage and insolence. Shouting, she demanded (in German) to be taken to the command headquarters so that they could be told “whose wife I am!” This insolence paid off and the patrol allowed us to pass. Poor Aunt Eme was so scared that she jumped into a rubbish container as soon as she saw the patrol. When the danger had passed, she emerged, dirty and smelly, but alive!



*The Nahman family in happy days: (L) mother Leopoldina with sons Jovan (L) and Aleksandar and, (R) father Marsel (Moša)*

My mother exhibited even greater courage perhaps when she went to the Jewish Community and took advantage of the fact that the guard outside was an Austrian to get him to let her in. She then purloined from the archives the files on the two of us and on our cousin, Josif Mevorah, so that we were no longer in the records.

In 1942 we found stable accommodation where we remained until the end of the war and beyond.

In order to provide more permanent protection, Mother converted us to the Roman Catholic religion under her maiden name, Czerny. Mrs Mevorah lived in a nearby street with her son and sister and they were the only Jews in the neighbourhood. What Mother had to think about is illustrated by her advice to my brother and me to be careful if we had to urinate in a corner somewhere outdoors, not to let others see us and notice the characteristic difference which would reveal our origin. The surroundings were such that we never had any unpleasant situations. The only unpleasant things I remember, particularly in 1943 and 1944, were the more and more frequent night raids and apartment searches. The special police were particularly rough, while the Germans were a little more lenient, I suppose because Mother would reply to their questions in German.

During the war I attended the second grade of primary school in Arandelovac and took supplementary classes for second, third and fourth grade privately in Belgrade. After the liberation of Belgrade I took a special examination and continued regular schooling at the Sixth Boys' Secondary School.

After the liberation we resumed our surname Nahman and our membership of the Jewish Community.

Mother died in Belgrade in 1988, at the age of 92.