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*Jozef Hajim KABILJO*

## YOU ARE OUR DEAR BROTHER



*Jozef Hajim Kabiljo wrote his wonderfully precise and simple testimony on how he survived the times of the Holocaust at the age of 87. He sent it to the Federation of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia in 1984 from Israel, where he lived to the end of his life.*

*His story shows that he was with the home guard in Pale when the liberation came. From an Ustaša prison, together with a small group of Jewish tradesmen whose work was needed, he was turned over, under guard, to the home guard.*

*The reason his story ends there can be seen at the end of his testimony in the words he quotes of the home guard captain.*

When the German Army was ruthlessly demolishing Belgrade, and when they bombed Sarajevo in the early dawn of April 14, 1941, I was sheltering with my wife and two children in a nearby village. Late that afternoon, to our great distress, Yugoslavia capitulated.

Returning home, we found a completely demolished apartment. We sat and wept. Mustafa and Izetaga Hardaga were my good friends and, at the same time, they were the owners of the rented building in which I ran a plumbing shop and a factory for lead pipes. They had a large, Bosnian style house at the very corner of the Jewish Primary School, across the street from the Sephardic Temple and the Gairot

Palace, with eight shops and, on the first floor, was the Hadruga brothers' apartment. Mustafa sold Persian carpets and Izetaga had a shop next door to the Husretbeg Mosque in the market and sold everything "from modern shoes to clogs". Their wives were called Zejneba and Bahrija. They were religious, patriarchal and wore long, hooded over-dresses.

Having heard that many had fallen dead at the Mejtaš crossroads, and that all houses had been demolished, these true friends, all of them seeming out of breath, ran over to see what had happened to us and whether we were alive.

The four of them took the four of us straight back to their house without a word. We hadn't saved anything, we entered the home of the Hardaga family with a knapsack and, as though at the house of a parent, we were welcomed and entertained more than well, so much so that we forgot ourselves and did not think about the great misery which was happening around us.

I withdrew all my money from the Melaha Bank to quickly redo an apartment, despite the fact that the Hardaga brothers advised me with the following words: "Don't leave our house before the war ends," and took me by the hand to their basement to show me that they had money. They embraced me and said "You are our dear brother, no matter what your religion is."

War psychosis changes from one day to the next. It began to get worse and worse for us Jews. We were outside the law. There was a lot of robbery and extortion. We were banned from the food market. Deportations to the death camps began. The appointed two commissioners to my shop who promised me the moon and managed to get me some yellow identification from the Police Administration. This meant that I was protected because I was needed by the Independent State of Croatia and they asked me to cooperate with the commissioner because, if I did not, I would be sent to a camp. There was a large notice written in oil letters on the wall of the Hardaga house. They were making death threats to anyone who hid and helped Jews. Hardaga tore this notice off the wall at night.

Embittered, we watched from behind the curtains of our room as, under the very nose of the Ustaša guards, the worst Sarajevo scum demolished our temple and plundered everything the army couldn't demolish with dynamite. Its beauty and the size of its copper dome had made this new Sephardic temple unique in the world.

Zejneba's father, a general goods trader in Pazarić, often came to visit the Hardaga family, as though they were his own, bringing them big bags of food. He revealed to us the secret that in his home he was hiding the family of Izidor H. Papo, his wife and two children. Papo had a thread factory in Sarajevo in Kračule Street. He was closely linked in trade with Zejneba's father, Ahmed Sadik Šarlop. He managed to get the Papo family across to Italy. The Ustaša butchers learnt this, so they arrested him and threw him in the Sarajevo prison known as Hasan Kule. They then transferred Sadik, with another forty Sarajevo prisoners, to the notorious Jasenovac death camp. Right in front of the camp entry gate, on the orders of Luburić, they killed them all with daggers.

The Hardagas were welcoming and, above all, kind to us, but the view from our window showed the Gestapo office, the Ustaša police, the joint Sephardic and Ashkenazi Community and the Bar-Kobhe sports hall all within a circle of 200 metres. The sports hall served for the receipt and sending of parcels to inmates in camps and prisons. A somewhat smaller "Kal di Kapon" served as an assembly point for sending people to compulsory labour. The helpless, whom no one wanted, were put in the other rooms and it was also an assembly place for the elderly who were being sent off to camps. My shop was also inside this circle. Within this circle I would run into many of my fellow-citizens with their many lamentations and desperate protests and surprise at the fact that I was still moving freely around and still with my family.

It was for a short while that this miracle of a yellow identification card saved me, despite the fact that I was obediently working for my commissioners. This would have worn out nerves of steel.

With tears in our eyes we explained to our hosts our desire to return to our uncompleted apartment and we were left without enough words to thank them.

One morning the commissioners, Stipo Stjepanović and Bruno Eterle, were waiting for me outside the door of the shop with a tough question: did I know who had destroyed the machinery for the production of lead pipes? After a short conversation, the commissioners went to the police administration to report this rather awkward matter.

The workers who operated these machines did not appear for work that day and for us, this was a risky situation. We needed to flee immediately.

Vlado Zubović, an officer, had married a Serb woman and in order to avoid being captured, he defected to the home guards. But it was pos-

sible to speak to him. He was my next-door neighbour. We sought advice from him on how to get out of this grave situation.

Vlado got a home guard pass for himself, his wife and two children for Trebinje so that he could leave my wife and children there with his mother-in-law.

Major Radović, the head of the chemical laboratory in the army home-guard hospital was my friend from skiing on Mt Jahorina. I confided in him face to face and he took me by the hand straight to the hospital prison and made sure that I got everything I required. I changed and got into bed. Dr Leon Pinto was doing compulsory labour in the hospital, as a doctor, wearing a home guard uniform with a Red Cross armband. He was examining patients and was shocked when he stood by me. I quietly told him how I came to be in the prison hospital and he put the chart with the diagnosis on my bed, squeezed my hand and said "We don't know each other". I lay like this for almost a month. A molar began hurting me really badly and I reported this and was given a referral slip for a dentist.

A *Volkesdeutscher* took out my molar and looked at me sternly. At one in the morning, the night duty officer in the hospital, with the police administration guard, signed for the prison guard that the police were taking me over. I was taken to the blockhouse of the Marijin Dvor area. There they recorded my personal details, the guard strapped on his revolver and took me along the coast straight to Miljacka, to the Hasan Tower, to the Beledije prison.

The prison door guard let us in and signed the handover document for the guard, hailed the turnkey and ordered him to throw me into number four. With no conversation with me whatsoever, the iron door clicked behind me.

Inside the cell it was dark, only the glimmer of a tiny light bulb in the hallway allowed me to get a glimpse of and feel the raised wooden bed with about twenty inmates, all huddled together in the middle and deep asleep. I felt around for a small place for myself on the bench and heard quiet whispering in Spanish. I leaned my ear closer and made out that they were accusing a tavern keeper who had denounced them. They took no notice of me at all, but I took the hand of the one who was whispering and addressed him with the following words: "*Ken sos tu?*" (Who are you?).

"I fled from the hell of Belgrade where there are no longer any Jews and, travelling from village to village, I finally got to Sarajevo, to

my cousin. My name is Jozef Kabiljo.” I shuddered, but didn’t interrupt him. “I was born in Sarajevo. Two decades ago my father had a men’s suit shop next to the Catholic Cathedral. He moved to Belgrade. The Academic painter Danijel Kabiljo Danilus is my cousin. I completed primary school in the *maldarim*. My teacher was Avram Altarac.” I held him to me with both arms and wiped the flood of tears from my face.

“I remember you well, you were my school friend, you used to give me half your breakfast so that I would draw you a monkey, and always only a monkey. The other students got fed up with it and started calling you *el majmuniko*.” (monkey man). Next to him was a big, young-looking man, with a round face, the son of the market gardener Katan, a big family in Velika Avlija, next to the big, old temple. They were all taken to Jasenovac and all killed.

“My name is the same as yours, Jozef Kabiljo,” I said.

At that moment the door opened and the turnkey interrupted the conversation. Like a brigand he woke up each and every person and shouted at the top of his voice:

“If anyone knows anything about the water supply system, come with me.” I was the first to stand next to him, then the young-looking one, my apprentice Brozović, stood next to me and kissed my hand.

We rushed down the stairs, straight into the big storage area. The fire-extinguishing equipment was there. All the lights were on. Inadvertently I stepped into the water and the guard shouted sharply “Next to the wall!” All four walls were lined with highlanders from the villages of the Trebević mountain. Now they all instantly raised their hands and pressed themselves with their palms against the wall.

I immediately noticed that the problem was drinking water. I looked for the hydrant, for shut-off valves and for the water meter. I closed all the valves I found and set off to recover the water. I gave each person a canvas bucket and, forming a chain, we bailed out a large quantity of water. Many villagers from Trebević and Jahorina recognised me. I asked them secretly “How on earth did you highlanders fall into the trap?”

“By deception, but now it’s too late, there’s no life for us any more.”

The day was dawning and the prison warden appeared but did not want to look at this great human misery. The guard took me to him in the office so I could explain everything to him. The guard told him that all the people were wet up to their knees. “May they all drop dead,”

he said, using the Ustaša vocabulary. Then he asked me “Are you a *chifut*?” (Jew).

“Yes I am.”

“Go back to the *chifut* cell.”

The turnkey on the long hallway on the first floor practically stuffed me into the elderly men’s *chifut* cell. This was more than horrifying at first glance. Not a single person could stretch out. They were all sitting with their legs crossed, and they were all in their old age. Squatting right next to the door was a tinsmith assistant, Maestro, with the worst case of itching. The Partisans had sent him from Crepoljsko to Sarajevo for medical treatment and someone there denounced him.

I took the only space there was, next to the cell toilet. With great difficulty I managed to convince the guard of the real state of things inside the cell. In the morning, the police doctor opened the tiny square window in front of which Maestro placed himself, his body and chest bleeding from scratching his terrible itching.

The same day, late in the afternoon, the prisoners from “Number 8” were ordered to each collect their things to move to a better prison, in the old police administration in Obala Vojvode Stepe. Before we left the guard took three of us and gave us a bucket each and some old sacking to scrub the long prison hallway. We worked skilfully and rapidly like true professionals.

We approached the remaining part of the stairs which led to the second floor, to the “office” for the interrogation of detainees, through which many communist patriots passed and did not come out alive, and neither did Benjamin Finci-Binjo, who died after brutal torture. He was thrown from the window of the prison cell on the second floor into the concrete-covered prison yard. The secretary of the local committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia in Sarajevo, Marijan Braun, and his fourteen-year-old brother Antun died the same way.

There were countless numbers of communists and progressive patriots in prison at the time of the elections of communist leaders Đuro Đaković and Dr Jokačević.

While washing the hallway we reached the stairs to the second floor at an unfortunate moment. I saw the guards carrying out a stretcher covered with an old blanket, from under which could be seen a head as yellow as wax. The man was holding on to the stretcher with his left hand. I recognised my good friend Foht. This was an encounter which I will never forget. He was an honourable patriot who didn’t follow in the

footsteps of the *Volksdeutschen*. He was a design engineer for central heating. He was married to the sister of Danijel Ozmo, an art teacher at the Sarajevo Secondary School, the son of parents who had eight children. He belonged to the Roman Petrović group of painters. He was taken to Jasenovac in 1941 and shot in 1942. His sister, Hana Ozmo, the secretary of Benevolencija, was also shot in Jasenovac.

At night, in a long column of the elderly, the feeble and crippled in cold and storm such as we had never seen before, we stepped into the deep snow, making a path through it. When we fell, only the guards had the strength to pull us up, by force or by beating us. I was dragging under my arm the exhausted Danon, a flour trader. The column dragged itself with great difficulty, somehow reaching the great gates on the yard of the old Police Administration prison on the bank.

The big prison yard was also covered in snow. The elderly men could neither sit nor stand, and it was impossible to get to a certain room on the first floor because water from the frozen pipes and faeces from the toilet had spilled down the stairs. Somehow, with great difficulty, I climbed up to that floor with a guard. The guard woke the *Zimmerkommandant*, Altarac Čizmar while, in the other room, I found Judge Papo and five inmates lying on the bare, damp parquet floor with no covers. A few of the somewhat stronger of us from above dragged the old men along the ice as a human chain, while the superiors were stacking them up in the room like sardines. It is difficult to imagine such misery. It was here that I had a sad encounter with a good friend and good neighbour. We looked at each other sadly, and he whispered: "We'll sleep here together."

"How did you manage to get a straw mat into the prison?" I asked him.

"Here's how: just before the second world war, young King Petar made an unofficial visit to Sarajevo. In front of the Husret-Beg Mosque, the terrorists of the Croatian Ustaša movement shot at the king. The incident was hushed up, but the youth terrorists were tried and I was officially appointed to defend them. With my painstaking defence, I saved their necks.

"Ever since the day the Independent State of Croatia was proclaimed, they have been persecuting me constantly. In the month of November they arrested me and asked me to turn over my apartment to them and immediately after that they threw me in prison. My wife went to the court president to beg for mercy. He promised, and acknowl-

edged my merit on behalf of the Croatian movement and ruled that food and bedding could be brought to me. Prison Warden Lerec allowed my son to bring food and things, but then would not let him leave the prison. My son managed to escape. For four days now I have had no news of my son or my wife. I haven't told Lerec that my son is missing, nor have I received any decision. So, if the snow melts, I'm in Jasenovac."

The prison warden, Jozo Lerec, a tall man with a consumptive-looking face, was harassing everyone from the guards to the most desperate old men. He beat Judaći Koen, a tinsmith, with a lash because he dared to beg him to visit his wife in the hospital. She had jumped from a high window in a state of shock. In the big prison basement he discovered two eight-year-old children disguised in women's clothes. He chased them off to the men's camp.

One of these two children was the only child of the *hazan* of the temple of Bjelave, Josef Koen, famous as the owner of the Sarajevo Haggadah which travelled from Barcelona to Sarajevo and which many writers of international reputation have written about.

The guard obeyed the unusual order. He took them by their hands and, going from one room of prisoners to another, asked whose children they were. Koen's child was holding a prayer book tightly in his hand. They immediately recognised this religious child. He was a child of the temple, who often carried the children's Sefer Torah. They sent him to Čizmar Altarac's room.

The child was bright and immediately from the door recognised his father lying on the bare floor, and hugged and kissed him. He said that his mother had sent him to help him. The father was delirious with fever and asked him over and over again: "Whose are you, you good child?" He sat by his father's head and read passages from the prayer book he had learnt from his father, praying for his father's good health.

Beside them on the damp parquet was another very ill man – Levi "Kanja" the oldest Sarajevo second-hand goods dealer, from the outskirts of the city. They had carried him to the prison on a stretcher. This was a large, well-known community with a house below Bjela Tabija, next to Smrtna Stijena. Koen, in fever, was talking to God: "Almighty, have mercy on us who recognise you, praise the work of your goodness every day, and punish Satan who inflicts evil on you, not for our sake, but for the sake of our innocent children." The child was using a wet cloth to cool his father.



It was with great difficulty that we took him away, not to hear his father's death rattle.

Early in the morning the hearse came from the Konkordija undertakers. Judge Papo, Altarac Čizmar and I carried him out to the car in an open wooden coffin and put him in the car. Papo was pushing me to see him to the cemetery, but Lerec chased me away. Just two days later we also carried the second-hand goods dealer, Levi, to the hearse.

The second friendly child was jumping from one lap to another, and everyone by now knew that he was the child of Moni Altarac, a bright and always cheerful taxi driver and owner of a motor mechanic business. This was a large family, with ten children of the carpenter Avram Altarac, also known as *la kultura*, who would often be invited by the intelligentsia to spend a merry evening at the Šadrvan Tavern.

Moni married the daughter of Glaser, the manager of the Pinto-owned Šik factory. With his garage and mechanic business, Moni had a good reputation and so was absolutely indispensable to the Ustaša. When the notorious Luburić came to Sarajevo, he was moved completely, with his workshop and cars, to Jasenovac, and placed at the disposal of the butcher Ljuba Miloš. He proved to be an artist in dealing with that brigand.

Five months later, Moni found his son in the death camp and, thanks to the mercy of Miloš the butcher, the two of them managed to get through four years. Following his liberation, the son, with the motor mechanic trade he had mastered in Jasenovac, moved to Israel and now, happy and content, runs his own motor mechanic business in Haifa.

On the mat of our room superior, Judge Papo, Lindo Altarac and I were planning how to get our hands on freedom while these freezing days lasted and while all the trains from Brod to Sarajevo were buried in snow.

We knew very well that Jasenovac only offered us death. There were about sixty elderly men in the room, all of them starving, either dozing or sleeping. All their family members had been taken away and they had just surrendered to fate. They cared about nothing and didn't even speak among themselves.

Lindo said "They took away my wife, two children and the two freight vehicles which kept my family fed." The locals jokingly called Lindo the Mostar fox, and were all surprised that he had not found a way to save himself.

His first proposal was to break into the former office of Dr Ezra Kajon, the police doctor, and go out to the Obala. This fell through.

His second proposal was to somehow get to the loft. With great difficulty we managed to get out into the attic. We removed roof tiles and saw that we could not get out that way, but returning to the room was risky. We hid in a large wooden chest, as big as a room. Archives of no importance to the Independent State of Croatia had been stored there. One of the biggest records there was a bundle of about ten files on which was written in large letters "Dr M. Zon", which at that time meant this was some kind of good client of the police.

Hungry and frozen, it was not until late in the afternoon that we were able to return to the room during the changeover of the guards.

Judge Papo, surprised by our long absence, encouraged us not to give up but to continue. He told us about the death of Levi, the second-hand dealer, and said he would assign us to take the body down to the Konkordija hearse, and that we should again try to go to the cemetery with the car, so he too would follow us. But Lerec didn't miss anything and he threatened Papo: "Make sure that car doesn't drive you out as well."

The guards became disturbed early in the morning and could be heard in the courtyard. They were going from room to room selecting young and healthy people, of whom there were very few, to work on cleaning the unfinished part of the building, the part next to the old Koševo Hospital itself. We set off in a double line.

This large, unfinished building, intended as a hospital, had been turned into Ustaša barracks. This barracks was occasionally used for a manoeuvres baptism for recruits who had finished their six months of training. One unit would go to the Skakavac waterfall, and another to the Crepoljsko forest to fight a battle with the Partisans. On the way they would kill peaceful villagers in front of their houses and chase the women and other household members to the barracks.

Our host in the Ustaša barracks, up on the third floor, begins to introduce us to our job. He opens the doors of the great hall. It was an awful stench and an even more awful sight: faeces on the floor and big pools of blood, even blood splashed on the walls. The feast of the young Ustašas' baptism probably finished here. Some of us were pressing handkerchiefs to their noses, some to their eyes.

The Ustaša looked at us angrily and shouted: "Don't waste time, get to work," and gave us some rough old rags and a small number of

buckets for water. The witnesses of this atrocity said “Well, our Lerec is lenient compared to this heinous crime.”

They took us back, hungry and frozen, via Štamparska Street, Sokol House and the Benevolencija building, outside which guards were guarding the inmates of the women’s camp. Dead silence, like outside Koševo Cemetery. Our women and children were there. We were approaching the demolished big temple, once the pride of our community. The poor had taken its heavy walnut doors and architraves to burn to thaw out their frozen children.

I glanced at the house of my good protectors, Mustafa and Izetage Hardaga, and saw right in front of the door Zejneba’s sister, pretty Nađa, wearing wide women’s trousers. I raised my hand so she could recognise me in this unfortunate column. She saw me. As though struck by shock, her cry ruptured the air, although no one knew why. Only Lindo, beside me, knew it had something to do with me.

Nađa’s father, Ahmed Sadi, whose nickname was Šaralop, was born in 1884 in Thessalonica, in Greece, and had grown up among Jews in Bitola. He moved to Sarajevo in 1913 and, from 1930, he lived in Pazarić. He preferred to do business in Sarajevo with Jewish companies and bought goods for a mixed goods store. He often visited his children in the house in which, thanks to the goodness of a decent family, we had been protected for quite some time, and it was there that we also met Ahmed Sadik, a man full of goodness and true faith which he carried in his heart. He saved the family of Isidor H. Papo, his wife and two children, from certain death, and the Ustaša criminals killed him in Jasenovac.

Yad Vashem became interested in the case of this saviour and in Jerusalem he was proclaimed Righteous Among the Nations. In the valley of the destroyed Jewish communities near Yad Vashem, in a beautifully planted park, the names of Ahmed Sadik and the Hardaga family will live for eternity.

The Vrace Memorial Park was completed in November 1981, and is one of a kind in Europe. It was built in Sarajevo on a hill where national heroes, fighters and victims of the Fascist terror were shot. Engraved in stone, on artistically arranged walls which had once been execution sites, are the names of victims. And here the name of Ahmed Sadik is recorded for eternity.

This unexpected encounter with Nađa shook me strongly to the point of tears. Awaiting us in the prison yard was Alhalel with a caul-

dron of hot, non-greasy soup and, after that, the comfortable straw mat in the prison cell.



*Vrace Memorial Cemetery in Sarajevo: the names of Jews who perished and other victims of the Fascist terror*

We told Judge Papo of the terrible misery of the Orthodox villagers from the surroundings of Skakavac and Crepoljsko and that we are anticipating having to do the same revolting work the next day as well. Lindo had brought some information from the unfinished hospital. He had found a way, an easy way to escape from the labyrinth of this hospital, through the plum orchard and a shortcut to the railway station. There he was at home. He was the king of unloading fruit and vegetables from Mostar and he also loaded empty crates into open wagons. There is no checking of the baskets until Mostar and, if we reached there and the Italian guards were to catch us they would shout *ben venuto!*

I liked this idea so much that I immediately showed them the “bunker” where there was 16,000 dinars hidden, and I gave this to Lindo, because the whole thing would go more easily with money, and then we went to bed.

Salamon Altarac Ćizmar, the room superior, asked Lindo what he had been doing so late, and he repeated to him what he had told us.

Lindo came to our room early in the morning and we continued talking. Suddenly two detectives and a guard were asking who Lindo was. "I am," he replied curtly, and they quickly handcuffed him.

Lerec, who was always in a bad mood, was waiting for him in the office, interrogated him and beat him. Shortly after this the same people burst into the room again and asked "Who is Kabiljo the plumber?"

"I am," I said.

"Come to the office with us."

Lerec grabbed me by the lapels of my coat and asked "Why did you give Lindo four thousand dinars?"

"To buy me a little food."

"Where did you get the money?"

"When I came to the prison they didn't search me and they didn't take my money."

"Are you the one with the shop next to the *chifut* school?"

"Yes, I am."

"Get out of here, go to your room!"

I ran back, happy as could be, and told Papo what had happened. Lindo remained, all bloodied, in a corner of the office.

I wondered how I got off so easily with that villain. Then I remembered that, two years earlier, the owner of the Bosnian Post Office printing company, Josip Bretler, had been elected president of the fishermen's association and that, within two months, he had to catch a Danube salmon and organise a banquet for them.

Having paid the workers, I checked again and saw that Josip was hanging around a lot in high rubber boots with another person whom I didn't know. Josip, the rich man, rewarded this man really well and they drove off grandly to Foča in a taxi for this exceptional fisherman to show him where the Danube salmon lie. The Turkish coffee they had drunk in my store at that time had come in handy for me now.

At my request, Papo, the room supervisor, assigned me to clean the prison yard thoroughly and watch two agents bring two women from the gate. I jumped to lend a helping hand to carry the bulging, heavy leather suitcases over to the office. I saw the wife of Moric Sternberg, known in Sarajevo as a contractor of various major city works. With her was her daughter Lola, the wife of Dr Oskar Grof, who was in war imprisonment. She could have fled but had stayed behind to take care

of her elderly mother, of whom I always spoke with deep respect. I had pleasant memories of the frequent banquets at which her brother Jakov played the violin and her other brother Karlo the cello. They would be joined by cellist Jakov Buki Bahar and made a pleasant trio.

At the prison office they were asking for their personal information. I reached for the suitcase and Lerec looked at me and ordered me to first put them in the women's section.

I talked about the prison, not exaggerating anything.

From the prison courtyard, they had broken into the basement of another house. A long, dark line of small windows. I saw and recognised each and every person next to the entrance door. The number of children and women was unknown. They cursed my living and dead, in Spanish, thinking I was one of the detectives.

Beside the entrance door was a round table and on it two children. The mother covered them with her body, protecting them against the cold air. When she raised her head I recognised her, the wife of Kamhi, a cobbler from Krekova. Her husband was in captivity. We looked at each other without greeting.

Suddenly Aunt Blanka, the mother of Buki Bahar, threw herself at me from a dark corner with her full weight, lamenting explosively at the top of her voice. She had simply gone crazy. It was only now that she recognised the Šternberg family and again fell into a state of hysterical weeping.

A calm and good-natured young woman squeezed into a smaller space and cleared two square metres for the newly-arrived sufferers. She spread a blanket for them onto which they crammed themselves like two poor women. They thanked her with their tears. For me, these moments were more than terrible. I had to go back and immediately tell about the desperate life these women, old women and children were living. We were wringing our hands helplessly. Still, at the administration they decided to intervene because there was spotted typhus spreading in both the women's and the men's camps.

With no hesitation, Lerec assembled twenty of us and several guards, wrote a few words to the commissioners, Bujas and Milaković and sent us off to bathe at what used to be the Ashkenazy Municipality.

Judge Papo and I led the group so that I could start up the water heater. We opened the commissioners' door and – surprise – Jakov Maestro was there. He had voluntarily gone to the women's prison in Đakovo with the jurist Teodor Pinto, who later defected to the

Partisans in Slavonia. He was consulting with Srećko Bujas, head of the Sarajevo District Court and Judge Milaković. He was telling his colleague Maestro sharply and loudly “I am performing an unrewarding function, at a time of beastly rampage and lawlessness in the Independent State of Croatia. We, commissioners, Milaković and I, are putting maximum effort into alleviating your suffering but we are not succeeding. This barbarian Lerec has sent you to bathe but the bathroom and showers no longer exist, even the pipes themselves have been torn out as Jewish property.”

Weeping, Judge Papo begged Bujas, who knew his merits, to use his influence to help him out. He didn't promise anything and only shrugged his shoulders. Maestro was also looking sadly at his distant cousin and mentioning the names of the dead, of the closest relatives, in the Đakovo camp. Bujas cut the conversation short and his last words were “Run in any direction you can! The inquisitors are worse than terrible.” We three public servants used to solve people's problems together but now we can't even solve our own. We kissed one another, certain we would never meet again.

We returned to the prison unwashed, but happy to have been spared a day of compulsory labour. Five clever young men seized their chance while the guards were guarding the fenced-off front side. They stepped into the shallow and sluggish Miljacka river behind the temple and the community building, climbed up onto the bridge and fled straight to Mjedenica and the Trevebić mountains. In the yard they lined us up by name, ten of us, seven young men and three older ones. We all knew one another, apart from one man in an ironed suit and tie and with expensive suitcases in front of him. At the roll call he responded as Professor Fred Novačić Najfeld. The guards gave orders to move and Novačić asked “Mr Supervisor, what about my suitcases?”

“They'll follow you to the station!”

We quickly crossed the Čumurija, the bridge, and reached Bistrik. It was a steep climb and the guards were following us to be sure we were not late for the train. No one was carrying anything except old Judači Koen who had a bag, some copper kitchenware and two Tanah books.

We arrive at Bistrik station out of breath. There was no one on the track, only Arnautin selling hot *salep*. I ordered *salep* for everyone, the guards as well.

Behind us, four Ustaša privates arrived and took over the list to count us. In a little while, another one with the Ustaša privates said

something and was looking at us from the distance. The train arrived and they made us get into a reserved car. We were all sitting, silent. Ten minutes later, the lieutenant asked each of us separately what we do: Levi a glazier, Levi and Finci carpenters, Koen and Maestro panel beaters, Kabiljo a plumber, Atias a painter, Papo a tailor, Finci the manger of Rubič's warehouse and Novačić a teacher. Less than an hour's drive to Pale, and the lieutenant came back to me and asked again whether I was an electrician or some other kind of tradesman. I repeated: a plumber for water, sewerage, gas and central heating. To make sure he asked me questions to the very last detail and finally spoke out and said he was from the same profession and was a manager with Viktor Penzo in Osijek. The conductor said "Pale Station!" and we all jumped from the train.

Following the instructions of the villagers and the station manager we took a shortcut to the children's convalescent home, but the smart Ustaša privates, four Muslims from near Foča and Rogatica, they let the ten of us walk through the deep snow and tread a path for them, those Ustaša.

Exceptionally exhausted, after three quarters of an hour of tiring walking, we spotted the convalescent home and a home guard next to the sentry box. He had taken his uniform coat off so they could see his Ustaša epaulettes. He allowed the lieutenant to go into the guard house with twelve soldiers and one guard. Face to face they agreed he would let us use the entry booth with the workshop. We felt we were at the border, but didn't know whether it was a Chetnik or a Partisan border.

I was silent and didn't say a word to anyone. I broke free and asked the lieutenant, my trade colleague: "Excuse me, but what are we going to do here in the forest?"

He looked at me and replied loudly: "If the first Partisan rifle should happen to fire, one of you will hang from a beam." A miracle, but everyone took this calmly as though it had nothing to do with us.

"It is the sergeant's wish that you dig a trench for yourselves and make a toilet so that you don't pollute the surroundings." Hungry, wet and frozen, we dug. The Ustaša privates, hungry, were looking for the lieutenant to talk about food. He was nowhere to be found, so the sergeant gave the Ustaša privates some of his own food. We all lay down in the workshop to sleep, so no one knew who was guarding whom. In the morning one of the Ustaša privates woke up and headed to Pale to get the sergeant who told him that, next to the Catholic church, was the



saddler, an Ustaša commander, and “you reach an agreement with him any way you can”.

The Pale commander reached an agreement with Colonel Rajman to feed these four Ustaša privates until some definite solution was found. There was no one looking after us. Next to our booth, over the wire, was a convent, burnt out, smoke still coming from it. And we, hungry, were digging like moles and found some staples, a kitchen clock and some half-burnt blankets. We were supplying ourselves and old Koen was reading paragraphs from the thick book of Tanah and repeating: “You see, children, how there is a God.”

Beside our booth, the workshop had become a reception room and we were tired and wanted to wash and clean ourselves. And we also had a guest, a municipal guard had come to see who those communists were who had settled in the woods. He was armed with a revolver and there were two hand grenades hanging from his belt. He wanted to know everything: who we were and what we were. He had to report to the head of the municipality, Hadžalić, who also had his own sawmill. Hadžalić listened to the commander’s conversation from his phone.

Now the home guard sergeant also announced the visit of Colonel Rajman. Professor Fred Novačić put on his tie. We let him, the teacher, say a word or two in a more refined way. We saw Rajman riding a horse up the hairpin bend. We, the others, withdrew and the sergeant was waiting to hold his horse. Professor Novačić introduced himself and changed the topic of the conversation, asking who those tradesmen were: “Do you have a panel beater? Give him to me. I have tools and sheet metal for him to forge and solder me a coffin to be sent to Osijek urgently.” Grey-haired Judaći Koen stepped out and stood in front of him and his first words were that he had served in the Austrian Army.

“And do you know how to tailor and solder a tin coffin for me?”

“Certainly. I’ve done far more difficult work.”

In no time the body of a home guard was brought to our workshop. It had probably been under the snow for a long time and was unusually bloated. Novačić offered Judaći his geometrical skills, I got him a bracket on which he could weld the tin sheets and the carpenters rushed to get planks of wood from Hadžalić’s sawmill. The same day the sergeant called on the army telephone to say that the coffin was finished and was well made. Judaći saved our reputation to such an extent that Colonel Rajman asked the Ustaša for the ten tradesmen to be placed at the disposal of the home guards to contribute to the improve-

ment of the hygiene service, because of the typhoid which had spread widely in Pale.

Four Ustaša privates took us before the home guard command, they got travel papers, food and a receipt for ten men. We were so overjoyed that we almost kissed the Ustaša privates.

Colonel Rajman came up to us with the words: "As of today, you belong to us home guards, for work, food and clothing. Be smart and work hard, don't flee, because you will be killed. On this hillock is the gendarmerie barracks and our warehouses. Take what you need. At this same place, for today, you will get food from the army cauldron." The sergeant took us out and gave the colonel's orders to the quartermaster, and we threw away the rags and got dressed. We were given mess kits and hoped that we could wait for the cauldron with food.

The cauldrons with food were brought to the square outside the barracks, and the army from the border positions with the Chetniks and the Partisans was settling in. The captain approached us, asked us, and told us that he had served a Jew for eighteen years, in a mixed-goods store in Osijek.

"A few years ago the boss said:

"You have served me long enough," and he gave me a shop in the same street and goods to get started with. Those are the Jews that we are now persecuting. Go to the cauldron first and, if it's not enough for you, you will get some more."

We returned to the children's convalescent home and sorted out our tools for the work we had been told we would get.

I am now stopping writing. I began writing modestly and simply, the way I know how – although, as a manual worker, and at an advanced age (87), I'm not much called upon to do this – because I feel morally indebted to the murder victims to put all the atrocities down on paper.