
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 Vasović-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	240878
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

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

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.

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 one². 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

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.