
Raul TEITELBAUM

THE PRIZREN ELEGY



Raul Teitelbaum was born in Prizren in 1931 to Dr Yosef Teitelbaum and Paula, *nee* 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 Mecer 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.

CHILDHOOD ON THE RIVER BISTRICA

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 heard 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 role 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 Weis selberger, 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 round-about 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 belongings. 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 Schmidhuber. 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 Sephardic 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 Magdeburg. 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.