

סאנסקי מוסט

SANSKI MOST

DERVENTA דרוונטה

TRAVNIK טראוויניק

BIJELJINA ביילינה

BRČKO זאווידוביצי' ברוצ'יקו

DOBOJ דובוי

ZAVIDOVIC

ואגרב

TUZLA טוזלה

ZAGRE

VLASENICA ולאסניצה

ZENICA זניצה

VISOKO ויסוקו

ŽEPČE ז'פצ'ה

SARAJEVO

VIŠEGRAD

בלגראד

וישגראד

BEOGRAD

WE MOSTAR מוסטאר

SURVIVED...4

YUGOSLAV JEWS ON THE HOLOCAUST

סקופייה

SKOPLJE

# CONTENTS

FOREWORD .....	9
INTRODUCTION .....	11
I WITH THE PARTISANS .....	13
Cadik Danon: <i>The life story of a Rabbi</i> .....	15
Bjanka Auslender: <i>Destiny's child</i> .....	39
Drago Auslender: <i>We were unaware of what was coming</i> .....	54
Josip Elazar: <i>With a rifle and a guitar through the storm of the war</i> .....	61
Livia Babić: <i>A life between jewelry and socialism</i> .....	72
Olivera Đurđić: <i>My memory is the only monument to my family</i> .....	82
Dr Jaša Romano: <i>Through life – honestly and lovingly</i> .....	92
Eliezer Katan: <i>Through forests and mountains</i> .....	100
Regina Kamhi: <i>I dried diepers on my breasts</i> .....	117
Lenka Lea Strahinjić: <i>Run, they are rounding us up!</i> .....	123
II IN THE CAMPS .....	129
Lea Šrajer: <i>Why did i let go of mother's hand?!</i> .....	133
Eva Arsenić: <i>The stolen loaf saved my life</i> .....	141
Dina Remer: <i>I was saved by a transport which i could not avoid</i> .....	149
Vera Štajn: <i>Thank you to the german woman Hilda Miller</i> .....	163
Ješua Abinun: <i>I stayed alive by coincidence</i> .....	175
Jonas Fischbach: <i>Ljubo Miloš: „I want to shoot directly into the   serbian heart!“</i> .....	192
Eva Đorđević: <i>Scars in the wounded heart</i> .....	202
Jelena Viculin: <i>Return from a hopeless journey</i> .....	211
Jakob Atijas: <i>Optimism sustained me</i> .....	219
III ITALY, SWITZERLAND .....	233
Samuilo Alkalaj: <i>Diary</i> .....	235
Kornel Neumann: <i>Remember?</i> .....	252

Isak-Iso Finci: <i>I remember not my parents, i know not my saviors</i> .....	262
IV HIDING IN THE TERRITORY OF YUGOSLAVIA .....	267
Dr Estera Mrčarica: <i>The neighbours did not betray us</i> .....	269
Natalija Kovačević-Tajtacak: <i>A long race with death</i> .....	275
V PROTECTED BY MIXED MARRIAGE .....	281
Berta Postružnik: <i>Halid Muftić – saviour of the jewish family</i> .....	283
Dr Lucija Rajner: <i>For those who have long been gone</i> .....	291
Ivan Ninić: <i>The perishing of my dearest</i> .....	299
VI IMMIGRATING TO PALESTINE.....	309
Stela Švarc: <i>A long journey to the port of salvation</i> .....	311
Cvi Raam: <i>A long way to salvation in Israel</i> .....	317
VII FORCED LABOUR IN AUSTRIA .....	323
Ruža Lihtner Krndić: <i>People of negotin, thank you for saving my life!</i> .....	325
VIII AT FORCED LABOR .....	339
Dr Đorđe Bošan: <i>From the line for execution my mother pushed me into life</i> .....	341
IX KASTNER'S GROUP.....	347
Marta Flato Ladanj: <i>Saved from the raid as six-months old baby</i> .....	349
X BORN IN THE CAMP .....	355
Drita Tutunović: <i>Born in the camp</i> .....	357
XI APPENDICES .....	365
GLOSSARY.....	383
Contents of the first volume of „We Survived“ .....	389
Contents of the second volume of „We Survived“ .....	391
Contents of the third volume of „We Survived“ .....	394

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*Dr Estera MRČARICA*

## THE NEIGHBOURS DID NOT BETRAY US



*E*stera Mrčarica, née Musafija, was born on 24 January 1933 in Sarajevo, of father Meir Musafija and mother Frida, née Šnetrepl (Schneetrepl).

*E*stera had a sister Perla-Biserka, born in 1938, who passed away in 1978. Her brother Albert, born in 1929, is living in Oregon, USA.

*A*ll members of her direct family survived the Holocaust, while many close relatives perished.

*S*he spent the war hiding in Sarajevo. After the war, she completed her elementary school, the teacher training school and the Teacher Training College (group for biology and chemistry) and later, in Ljubljana, graduated from the Faculty of Biology in 1957. She did her master's degree in 1974, and her Ph.D. in 1979 in Sarajevo. She retired in 1998 as full-time professor of the Medical Faculty in Niš.

*S*he was married to Momir Mrčarica, electrical engineer (passed away in 2005), with whom she has a daughter Vesna, professor of mathematics, living and working in Niš, and son Željko, engineer of electronics, living with his family in Zurich, Switzerland. She has four grandchildren.

The language of my mother's family was Yiddish, and of my father's it was Judeo-Espagnol. We spoke Serbo-Croat, and if the elders wanted us children not to understand what they were saying they would speak German. My parents were not especially religious, but the family did observe all the great holidays, especially the Passover and Purim. Our mother and the

whole family observed the Shabbat; she lit candles every Friday evening, even during the war, when possible, and also after the war.

Since my mother's father died quite young, my father was the one to read the Kiddush for Shabbat and the dinner was made also for my mother's family. Father was the central male figure for both families. After my mother's father died, along with the death of her brother in the World War One, my father became a sort of the person who gave everyone advice. My mother became the oldest child of the family with many younger ones. She feasted for Yom Kippur.

Sarajevo had a developed Jewish life. A Sephardic temple was built before the war, the most beautiful one in the Balkans. My whole family was going to that temple, as going to the temple was also a feat of social life. The most attractive and enjoyable was the celebration of Passover. It was an opportunity for all every spring to do the big Passover cleaning. The Seder was a true celebration. Father, a good singer, always sang songs and prayers, Haroset was his favorite. There was always matzo, and everything was pleasant and ceremonious.

And while I was growing up and still a child I felt some kind of anxiety, almost fear. I remember once going along the street, a skinny thing, and someone from the group going behind me shouted the derogatory local jargon word for a Jew:

– Čifutka!

I ran all the way home to feel safe.

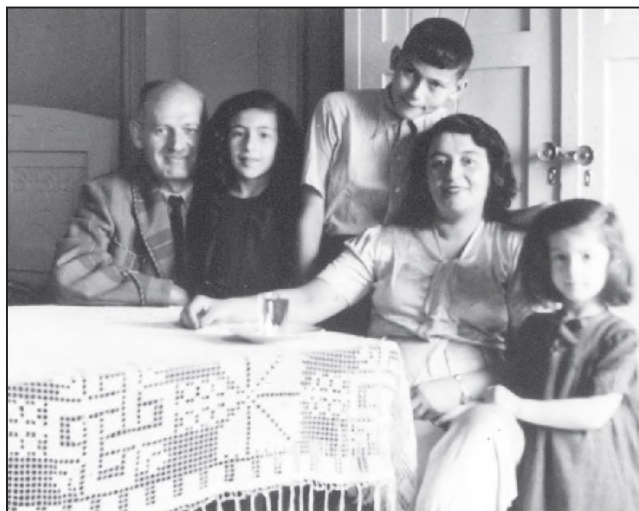
I remember the destruction of the Sephardic temple in 1941, with the sudden onset of euphoria against the Jews! I even remember that they even took off the copper plates from the temple's roof, plundering and taking whatever could be taken away. It was simply an attack on the temple. The Ashkenazi temple still exists to this day.

I was in second grade when World War Two started. All schools stopped operating, as they were turned into barracks for the mobilized troops. Even my father was mobilized, although he was fifty. But, he soon came back. The uncle, who was mobilized, ran away and we gave him civilian clothes in order not to be arrested. In that chaos many people were fleeing in similar ways.

After the coming of Ustaša to power, anti-Semitic decrees were adopted. My parents were given the yellow armbands and the badges with the black Magen David. They were prohibited from going to certain places. Jewish children were officially forbidden from continuing their education beyond the fourth grade of elementary school. Jews were immediately forbidden to possess a radio or a telephone. Ours were seized right away. And that was legal! Even today, when I think about it, it seems impossible that nobody in the world

reacted or did something against such torture against the Jews. There were rumors that something abominable was happening to the Jews, there was fear.

My grandmother, aunts and uncles came to our home, they talked and were upset, and I am sure that nobody could even assume what was to happen. No one had an idea of what was going on in the camps. They were all thinking about what to do. Father was already sick, mother was not in the best of health, my sister was only three years old. Fleeing implied a great risk, as it led to uncertainty. Sarajevo was full of the military, making fleeing difficult and risky. We were not among the affluent families who could get counterfeit documents and travel with them somewhere. But, nobody was fully aware of what was in store for us.



*Family  
MUSAFIJA: father  
MEIR, daughter  
ESTERA, son  
ALBERT, mother  
FRIDA, and  
ESTERA'S  
younger sister  
PERLA-BISERKA*

We were living in a four room apartment and we had a lodger, don Mato, a Catholic priest, a good man, from the island of Hvar. We put our valuables and jewelry in his part of the apartment. Mother later donated some of these things to the Museum, because that was all we found in the apartment when we returned.

In 1941 we were not yet used to being citizens of a lower rank, and we lived normal lives. The first one to be taken away was my mother's youngest brother, the youngest of the seven children. His name was Uriel. I think that he was taken away as a communist. Possibly, he was executed right away, but I do not know when and how it happened.

The Sarajevo Jews were being gradually taken away through the so-called raids, which happened at irregular intervals all the way until 1943. As far as I know, it was the most prominent Jews that were taken away in the initial raids, those with the greatest influence in Sarajevo, especially the rabbis.

During the first raid my mother's brother David Šnetrepl was taken away; he had just married the rabbi's daughter Estika. He wrote to us from Jasenovac. As member of the Hashomer Hatzair he completed the apprenticeship for metal worker and applied to immigrate to Palestine. Thanks to his trade, he stayed alive for quite a long time, and he sent postcards from Jasenovac, but finally he perished there.

Still, we did not have a full understanding of what was happening with the Jews. One nice Sunday in November all five of us were getting ready to go for a walk. Mother took longer to get ready, so father and my brother went out earlier, and my mother, sister and I were still in. That was when they came for us. There were two agents in civilian clothes and one Ustaša. They did not treat us brutally, and mother did not put up any resistance. The agents spoke German with my mother. The Ustaša looked very plain and he followed every step my mother made. We took with us some food, clothes and blankets. Our apartment was sealed and the three of us went escorted by in a tram to an old barrack dating back to Austrian times. That was a collection centre. The yard was already full, as many Jews were already brought there. In the evening they put us in the premises on the ground floor. We were put on the bare floor, and already that night all the men were transported to Jasenovac. There was terrible crying heard. It turned that it was a very good coincidence that father happened not to be at home. There we stayed for some days, guarded by armed guards. In order to reunite families, people moved other people across the room over their heads. I do not have clear memories of it all. We were to be transported further.

I remember very well one day. It was evening, it was dark. They grouped us, in order to put us onto rail carriages. The atmosphere was tense. But, that day there was another raid in Sarajevo and new groups of Jews were brought in. My mother took a risk and moved us into that group which was just brought in. Thus, thanks to the unsystematic work of the Ustaša, we avoided the transport and sure death. Since many Jews were brought in, they took us with another group of Jews to a different collection camp – a small Jewish temple in Bjelave. Again, we settled ourselves on the floor, putting our blankets under us. They were not guarding us too watchfully. We were counted every morning. We could receive food and clothes if it was brought for us, and grandmother and aunt did this, and father was hiding with my brother. It seems to me that the Jewish Community still operated and that we received from it a bag of apples, every child got one. My mother was sick, she had a bile attack.

A friend of my father's, Muharem Kundurović, was a police doctor, in charge of controlling the health among the inmates and father asked him to help us. While doing a round of the camp, he told my mother to act sick, and he told the German camp commander that there was an outbreak of typhoid;

therefore the sick should be separated in order to prevent the potential outbreak of disease among the German soldiers. The German commander ordered the sick to be taken out and liquidated in order to prevent the outbreak of disease. We were separated from the group, along with a group of women and children, and taken together with them to the hill Bakarevac. There dr Kundurović enabled my mother, sister and me to escape. It all last-

ed for three or four weeks, so by the end of 1941 we escaped the camp.



*ESTERA with brother ALBERT in Sarajevo in 1938*

We came to my grandmother's, but since it was too risky, we split. I was with my parents' friends, the family of Vajsil-bey Čolaković. They lived in Koševo, in a small ground floor house with a big garden. He was living with his wife; only the two of them, his son was a writer and lived in Zagreb. That was where I hid, without leaving the house and garden for about half a year.

My brother was at the ophthalmologic clinic. Mother took him there in order to protect him from being taken to camp. The clinic director was a Catholic. My mother told him the truth that my brother was Jewish, and the doctor

helped him at the clinic for a long time.

Father slept in the bank building. He worked illegally in the bank, for Asim-bey Dugalić, who was the bank commissioner. We lived on father's earnings in the bank.

Mother was with her mother, along with my little sister. Her single sister Rahela was also there. Half a year later, in summer of 1942, Dugalić, who had close links with the authorities, managed to remove the seal from our apartment. There were no valuable things in the apartment and we were selling whatever could be sold.

We lived in our apartment until the end of the war.

All our neighbors were aware of us being there, but they did not tell on us. Whoever could and wanted to was helping us financially, and those who could not they did not disclose us. If it was not for the liberation of Sarajevo on 6 April 1945, and if the then authorities remained in power any longer, we certainly would be executed on the anniversary of the declaration of the Independent State of Croatia, 10 April, because they certainly would have discovered us and would have executed us without taking us to any camps.



My grandmother and aunt Rahela were taken away in 1942 and I do not know where they perished. One of my mother's brothers – Izrael Šnetrepl, was hiding in Sarajevo, but in 1943 he was discovered and taken away without any subsequent trace of him.

Date	22.8.50/91	
Name	K U S A F I J A , Estera Musarova File 7-1-49	
BI 1913	BP Sarajevo	Nat. Jewish
Next of Kin		
Source of Information	Unknown / GIC New York	
Last kn. Location		Date
CC/Prison	Arr.	lib.
Transf. on	to	
Died on	in	
Cause of death		
Buried on	in	
Grave		D.C.No.
Remarks	returned to Sarajevo in 1945	

7.1.49

Name	K U S A F I J A Estera M. File	
BI 1913	BP Sarajevo	Nat. Jewish
Next of Kin		
Source of Information	Unknown / GIC New York	
Last kn. Location	Sarajevo / Yug.	Date
CC/Prison	Arr.	lib.
Transf. on	to	
Died on	in	
Cause of death		
Buried on	in	
Grave		D.C.No.
Remarks	7.1.49	

*Copy of document inscribing ESTERA MUSAFIJA in the Memorial Museum Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, 1945*

Since the aunt was pregnant, she was transported together with her daughter to El Shat, where she gave birth to her second child, Perla, who is presently caring for her 95 year old mother.

Today, at this age, and after so much time, I still cannot understand how the whole civilized world failed to react to the way in which the Jews were treated.

I did not mention here my father's family, because they were not living in Sarajevo and I was not in contact with them. Father's two brothers were saved by their wives. One lived in Zagreb, the other in Zavidovići. Father's step sister Blanka, née Musafija and married Musafija had five sons and they all perished, I do not know where.

Later in my life I never had any trouble due to my being Jewish. I am still proud to belong to this nation which has given the world so many intelligent men. My father, devastated by the suffering and poor living conditions, died in 1954.

I had two aunts, my mother's sisters, who lived in Turbe, near Travnik. They were married there. Roza Mandelbaun was taken with her husband and the just born son in 1941 and she perished, with her son, in the Đakovo camp. Grandmother was still not taken away when information came from the Jewish Community of Osijek that she had perished. Her son Cvi was executed right after arriving to the camp. Grandmother did not know this; they hid the news from her. The other aunt, Hensika, married Štajner, together with her husband Aleksa and daughter Zlata, managed to escape. For a while they were hiding in Livno, then moved to Split, and joined the Partisans.