

סאנסקי מוסט

SANSKI MOST

DERVENTA דרוונטה

TRAVNIK טראוויניק

BIJELJINA ביילינה

BRČKO זאווידוביצי' ברוציקו

DOBOJ דובוי

ZAVIDOVIC

ואגרב

TUZLA טוזלה

ZAGRE

VLASENICA ולאסניצה

ZENICA זניצה

VISOKO ויסוקו

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SARAJEVO

VIŠEGRAD

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SURVIVED...4

YUGOSLAV JEWS ON THE HOLOCAUST

סקופייה

SKOPLJE





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*Bjanka AUSLENDER*

DESTINY'S CHILD



*Bjanka Auslender was born on 10 December 1929, to father Izidor Levi and mother Flora, née Levi. Although the parents had the same family name, they were not related.*

*In the Holocaust she lost forty-four members of her direct family, including her mother's brother and eight sisters with their children. Her father, mother, grandmother, her mother's sisters with children perished in the Đakovo camp, while her six years younger sister Sarina was taken along with other children from Osijek to Auschwitz, where she was killed.*

*Her father was the only child. His father's name was Avram, his maternal grandfather was Cadik, and the grandmother that she was named after was Blanka. They had all lived in Sarajevo.*

*She matriculated in Zagreb in 1949, enrolled at the Faculty of Philosophy and graduated in time. In Zagreb she married Drago Auslender (whose memories are also included in this volume), with whom she has a daughter and two grandchildren.*

*From her graduation from university until her retirement she worked as librarian in the Zagreb City Library.*

My parents lived with my *Nona* and my father's parents. This community, which has been with me since I was born, is the most precious memory of my childhood. I also had a baby sister Sarina who was born in 1936, also in Sarajevo. Our father was the only child, whereas our mother had a big

family. My *Nona*, Bjanka Levi, had eight daughters and a son. My mother's family was a patriarchal Sephardic family and lived in number 8 in Velika avlija street, in the close vicinity of *Kal Grande* (the Big Temple). Thus, these traditions and everything about the patriarchal Sephardic life is related to my family.

When I say that the family was patriarchal I mean the great respect for the elders. We lived with my *Nono* (grandfather) and *Nona* (grandmother), my father's parents, and this home imprinted in me the feeling of „*bizar la manu*“ (kiss the hand of your Nona or Nono). And this meant every time when they came from the Temple, when we were sitting at the table, before prayer. This tradition was not so much upheld by my parents, since they considered themselves to be more modern, but it was passed on to myself and my sister by my grandmother and grandfather.

My Nona wore the *tukada*, a hat embellished sometimes by gold coins or other decorations. My maternal grandmother wore Sephardic clothes with *tukada*, while her eight daughters no longer did so as it was not fashionable. They wore regular civic clothes.

We were a middle class family, neither rich nor poor, living a decent life. Grandfather was a bank clerk, I remember him as an elderly gentleman, and my father had a pasta factory “Union”. It was not a big industry, more like a small business. Thus, there was always pasta, flour and other food-stuffs at home.

My mother did not work. She stayed at home, with her mother in law and my grandfather who was already retired. I remember that practically every Friday with my Nona and my mother we would be greeting and seeing off a group of poor Jews for whom we had small packages made, containing some flour, oil, sugar, pasta. It was always the same people who came, people I otherwise did not know. And I also remember that Nona made these packages on Fridays and always saying:

„*Pardona mi!*“, meaning: forgive me.

I asked her:

„Nona, why do you say forgive me when you are giving?“

And I clearly remember her saying:

„Dear child, I have to say so because I have and I do not take from others, while they are in a dire situation and it is more difficult for them to take.“

This *pardona mi* left a deep impression in my childhood. Otherwise, we mostly lived within the family. The holidays were the best time: Passover, Purim, the whole family getting together. There would be thirty or forty in our home. Doors of all three rooms would be open, for everyone to be seat-



ed, we sang songs, wore costumes. We, the children, would be especially lively when we were getting money – „*papilikus di Purim*“ (small coins for Purim). We had some kind of little bags, tied around our necks, and we would go to each of our aunts, and there were many, and get from them some coins. The elders, I remember, would be taking the „*platus di Purim*“ (offers for the Purim). They would bake a variety of sweets, sweet and salty cookies, and take them to friends and persons dear to them.

I can still very vividly remember those days, it usually happened on Friday evenings, and my sister and I would be sitting in our Nono's lap. I on the one leg and my six years younger sister Sarina on the other. Nono would tell us Bible stories. I could have been about ten and Sarina about four. This was so until 1941, when everything was suddenly and unpredictably interrupted.

Grandfather would always tell us in advance what he would be telling us about: of the seven hungry and seven rich years, of Abraham, Isaak, Jakob. He had so many Bible stories. He also told us about our old traditions, about how Jews used to live, and he was very much engaged with us, his little grandchildren, Bjanka and Sarina. And it was from them that I acquired and inherited most of these customs and traditions. Afterwards, life changed and everything was turned upside down. Never again was I in a family that would resemble what we had back then.



*BJANKA as a four-year old girl*

At home we spoke Judeo-Espagnol. My grandmother hardly spoke anything else. They would especially speak Judeo-Espagnol when they wanted children not to understand them. But, they were wrong in assuming so because it did not take long for us to understand the language. Judeo-Espagnol was the

language of my parents, my predecessors, and I understand it even now, although my contact with it had stopped when I was about ten or eleven years old. But it still resonates in my ears, in my head, and I am always very pleased to meet people who know the language. My aunt Batševa, the seventh daughter of my grandmother and grandfather, spoke Judeo-Espagnol and with her I could understand the words. My parents, however, were more modern and they motivated us to learn other languages as well.

We were children, we understood whatever was happening in our own way and through our own language. But it was mostly in the form of story-telling and fairy-tales. I still carry with me a feeling that it was all a fairy-tale. Grandfather told us his stories in a very vivid manner, accompanied by movements. He devoted most time to us, and wanted to pass on to us something of what he knew.

When we got together for holidays we would be singing Sephardic romance songs in Judeo-Espagnol. Even now when I occasionally hear these songs I come to life. I had an aunt who sang wonderfully and had a musical instrument *def* (daire, tambourine), so she would sing along and play it. There was always singing in our family when we got together, thirty or forty of us! All my aunts were married and uncle Jozef as well and he was living in Belgrade.

Everyone in the family was religious, but not excessively. We strictly observed the kosher rules. Lights were not lit on Saturdays. After prayer on Saturday, there would be girls coming to heat the food for Saturday. After coming back from the Temple, we would usually eat *pastel*. This girl was a Muslim, we loved her very much and she loved us. She was the one who would get the food warm. Grandmother always went to the Temple, morning and night, while the rest of us would sometimes go and sometimes not.

Near to our home was the *Kal Grande*, but we also went to the Great Temple, which was destroyed in 1941. I cannot recall the name of the street. It was a well known temple in Sarajevo, built after the design of Spanish synagogues, in oriental style.

Before World War Two there were about 10,000 Jews living in Sarajevo. In the neighborhood of Vrace, the names of all these people are engraved in stone plates. On these plates I found the names of all the members of my family, because after the war we were to report all those who had perished and never came back. Of about 10,000 Sarajevo Jews, only 1,000–1,500 came back. After the war I did not live in Sarajevo. I had neither the strength nor the wish to continue living there.



*FLORA and IZIDOR, BJANKA'S mother and father, while engaged*

We learned to read and write Hebrew in religious classes. Our religious teacher was professor Jakob Maestro, who ended up in the Jasenovac camp in an atrocious manner – he was beheaded because he said he was a Judaic theologian. There are documents testifying to this. Learning Hebrew was the most difficult thing for me – it was something I knew nothing about, practically like hieroglyphs, but I had to learn. As a primary school pupil I could read, I am not sure how well I could write Hebrew.

Everyone in the family had his or her obligations. Including children. I often wondered why, I protested, even cried when other girls would go out to play and I had to do my chores. And these chores were: to clean shoes (the girl who helped around the house did not do that), dry and put away dishes, to spend some time at home sitting, reading and just being at home, to help set and clean the table, to pick up the left-overs, regularly visit my aunts, and always be of assistance if there is need to for instance go quickly and buy something at the shop. It was a practice to install in children since very early age some habits, duties, chores which were very much respected.

It was my Nona, not my mother, who always had the final say in this respect. She was the one who decided who was to do what, what to eat, who and when is to do certain chores. I could never tell my mother that I would not do something. Because she would say:

„Nona is here. Ask her.“

The most ordinary food was *pastel, zelenika ... Pastel* was a dish cooked before the Shabbat, on Friday morning, and was eaten on Saturday, at about ten o'clock, after the temple. It was made of a layer of pastry at the bottom and at the top with minced meet in between. It was baked at high temperature. *Zelenika* was also pastry on top and at the bottom, but filled with a mixture of fresh cheese, eggs and spinach. We would also cook okra with lamb. Okra was sold in the markets dried and on a string. We would make oriental dishes like baklava and “urmasica” and other desserts in sugar syrup. Muslims would invite us for their holiday *Bajram*.

Until 1941 life was mostly about living with the family and a broad circle of friends, not all of whom were Jewish. There were among them also Muslims or Christian Orthodox, and others.

The year 1941 unexpectedly changed our life. The bombing of Sarajevo, the fear, the terror. We were living in the centre of town, and had to flee our house because a bomb had hit the neighborhood. We were fleeing towards Bjelave. We would be spending the days there and returning at night. Those were the first signs that everything had changed. Our uncle, the husband of my mother's sister, was killed in the bombing.



The Germans bombed Sarajevo, right after the bombing of Belgrade. They hit the buildings of the Post Office, Theatre, the then Aleksandrova Street (we lived close by). There was even a whole family which died in a small house. It was children that I played with. The bombing of Sarajevo was for me the end of all that my childhood represented to me, it was an ominous tiding of what was to come.



*The numerous families together in Sarajevo for Hamishoser. BJANKA is in her mother's lap, in the carrying pillow, behind her is father IZIDOR*

After the bombing, some members of our greater family were in detention. Two of my uncles were taken prisoners by the Germans. Others who were mobilized managed somehow to return home from the Yugoslav Army. Subsequently, the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) was declared, and that was the moment when detention of Jews began. Jews were first being collected and taken for forced labor in Sarajevo itself. Already in May we often saw announcements that Jewish men are to report for forced labor. Father was still going to his factory. However, at that time the Ustaša commissioner of the NDH had been appointed, so father was something like a worker in his factory, helping to keep the factory working. But, every now and then we would hear: Izidor has been taken for forced labor, Isidor has been taken ... He would come home exhausted.

We, the children, were not to know everything. I heard many times my mother crying, or my grandmother or grandfather. And then, one day, we heard that my father Izidor and my grandfather Avram, who was more than 75 years of age, were taken to Jasenovac; we were never again to hear a single word from them, they were never to return. We heard from some people who were there that father lived for a very short period (I think he suffered from his intestinal tract) and he lost his life in the camp. We never got a single word from him or from grandfather.

My mother stayed with my Nona, an old lady of seventy-five. And while others were trying to save themselves and were fleeing in the direction of Mostar, mother did not want to leave my Nona. Her only sister who went to Mostar was my aunt Batševa, we called her Ševa, a teacher in the Jewish kindergarten in Sarajevo. She arrived to Mostar and managed to find some hiding. Her husband Eliezar Levi, a well-known writer, professor of Greek and Latin from Sarajevo, followed her. However, he was recognized at the so-called "Malta", the border, and he was detained and taken to the camp, never to return. He was taken to Jasenovac.

We stayed on in Sarajevo, hiding practically every night, with some of our aunts who lived on the outskirts of the city. There were rumors that they are first taking the people from the center of the city and only then from the outskirts. The hiding and the fear lasted until November 1941.

We always had everything readily packed and I was already beginning to wish that they would take us somewhere so we do not have to flee and hide. The house was overtaken by sadness and silence. My mother overnight looked as if she was ten or twenty years older. My parents had the perfect marriage, the whole family spoke about it, it was filled with true love.

Friends permanently urged my mother:

„Flora, go with the children, hide with them!“

And my mother would say:

„We cannot. I cannot leave my old mother, my mother-in-law.“

So, November of 1941 came. One afternoon we were just getting ready for a sleepover somewhere. Our aunts lived in Bjelave, and even further away in Bembaša and near the Tobacco Factory. We would usually go there in the afternoon and come back in daytime. That day three men came, one was SS and two were Ustaša, with big U on their caps. I think I will never forget those faces. They ordered us to quickly get ready, that we were going, that they are taking us for labor somewhere.

It was two of my mother's sisters and their children at home, as their husbands were already taken to Jasenovac. So we took with us what we already had packed – some bags, suitcases, I do not recall specifically, with

some food. There was my little sister of six and myself of eleven, my mother and my Nona. They pushed us into trucks. Neither my sister nor I could climb up. Somehow they got us in, pushing us from below, while others were helping from the truck pulling us up. The trucks were packed full; one could not even stand up. We were crammed up tightly as a book. It was all Jews from our neighborhood: from Baš čaršija, Aleksandrova street. They took us to a big barracks building and put us in big empty rooms, with nothing on the bare floors.

The barrack building was near the railway station, so wagons were close by. We stayed at the barracks for two or three days, without getting any food. We had already eaten what we had taken with us, even what we got from others. After two or three days, on a cold November night, very late, they got us up (and we were in fact happy to leave those barrack rooms) and got us into livestock wagons. Again weeping, calling for help. The fog was thick, like it sometimes gets in Sarajevo. At one moment my little sister and I had lost our mother, and our Nona. Then we all found each other again. And somehow we got into those wagons, with sixty or seventy people perhaps, small children, sick elderly women. The train started into the unknown.

We had no idea where we were going.

Hygiene was terrible. There were no bedpans or toileting utensils and one corner of the wagon was said to be for such needs. I know that we travelled for a long time. It was dark, everything was dark, the wagons were sealed. Listening to all the noises was horrible; I think I shall never forget the crying, wailing, sobbing, but also the singing of the younger ones. The words of the songs were saying: „we are now leaving our town, our bed is hard, but freedom is close at hand, and we rejoice at it – baramba“. I can still hear it resonate in my ears.

However, we were not taken to the camp right away. This train, not listed in the railway timetable, with wagons packed with women, children and the old, took several days to get us to Loborgrad, Croatia. The first stop after some days was Zagreb. That is when the doors of the wagon opened for the first time. It must have been after three or four days in the suffocating wagon. We had to take care of all our physiological needs in the wagon itself. When we stopped in Zagreb, we were met by women of the Zagreb Jewish Community who had brought tea, water and some warm food and bread. All I know is that that was the first time we had some food. I was twelve at the time; my sister was six years younger. Our hands were outstretched to get some food. The thirst was horrible; there was no water, nothing to drink whatsoever. The stench was unbearable. And the door closed again, and again we were heading somewhere, stopping somewhere, and after some

time we were again in Sarajevo. Lobargrad was full to its capacity and could not take any more inmates.

We returned to Sarajevo and settled down in a school in Marindvor. It was December of 1941. The train trip there and back took seven days, and we were now in this school building. It seemed like heaven. The school was clean, with wooden floors, there was straw to sleep on in the rooms. We could take visits, so my mother's non-Jewish friends came to visit us and bring some food. We were dirty, some had lice, some were stinking, sick, not human any more. My mother's friend Milena asked my mother to let my sister and myself go with her, although she was a Serb and at that time also at risk. First she took my little sister to wash and feed her, and then she took me. She gave me a bath and fed me. She managed to get us out as her children. However, my mother had not expected our onward journey to be as tragic as it turned out to be and she decided to keep her children with herself. So, we went back, to the school in Marindvor and soon afterwards we were again put on a train. Into sealed wagons. Ustašas kept the guard. While we were travelling in the wagons someone said we were going to Slavonski Brod. Then we heard through the window that in fact we were going to Đakovo, where we were taken into a mill, where wagons could approach. The doors opened. There were dead bodies already inside. My Nona was still half alive, she and my mother had to take care of us, the children, and of the elders, the mother-in-law.

We were said to be the first shipment to arrive in Đakovo. The first sight of Đakovo was the mill, huge, three floors. A cold and foggy December day. I cannot know how much below zero, but blood was freezing in our veins. The coldest, however, were our souls.

The camp had already been arranged, with thick barbed wire around, dogs, guard houses, and watch towers. They were pushing us and shouting: „Faster! Faster!“

The children would fall and stand up. It was snowing. We were terrified, because they had said we would be going to a labor camp. First, before we entered the camp, there were barracks where we were to wash and shower. We were dirty, smelling badly, we travelled for so long. Everything gave out a pungent stench. They stripped us naked. There were only women, children and old ladies there. The few men rounded up in Sarajevo with the women and children (my relatives were not with us, as they had already been taken away) were separated already at the Marindvor school and were taken away separately. This camp was intended exclusively for women and children. So, we were waiting in the freezing cold to take our shower. And in fact they were showers, not gas chambers.

We took our clothes off, threw them away, burnt them and were given other old clothes, or clothes some managed to keep. After the shower we were met by a group of smiling women right there in the camp! They were women from Osijek who, for some time, could come to the camp, they were members of the Osijek Jewish Community. They welcomed us with warm tea, some food and smiles. It was healing for our cold and sad hearts. It was like being reborn.

We got tea and some food, and took our places on the first floor of the mill. The first floor was for the first detainees. There was straw on the floor and it was December of 1941. That transport consisted of about 1,200 women and children. The mill was enormous. I later learnt that the mill belonged to the diocese which temporarily lended it to the Đakovo camp for this purpose.

We settled ourselves in a corner: my mother, my little sister, I, my Nona, my mother's sisters with their children, so we were somehow together. It was terribly cold with no heating, we were exhausted, overwhelmed with sadness and misery.

My mother put her arms around myself and my little sister and told us happy stories. This possibly put a smile or two on our faces. She was promising that we would be staying there for a while and returning home again to find our daddy and Nono and that everything would go back to how it used to be. And we trusted her completely. She sang lullabies to us. I was crying for my coco-milk, which I always had after dinner. So mother told me that after we go back home I would be getting a double portion of it or however much I wanted. The coco-milk was of special significance for me. Nothing else seemed to matter as much before going to bed.

At that time the Osijek Jewish Community was still allowed to bring food to the Đakovo camp. Women would come to visit, giving us a piece of bread, cheese, some food. Later I found out that at that time the Jewish Community of Osijek took on itself the obligation for our food and care. There were some women doctors who came and took turns in the Đakovo camp. The citizens of Osijek at that time still had not been rounded up and taken to camps. It was after the infamous Tolj arrived that this function of the Osijek Jewish Community was abolished in the Đakovo camp, and after that we only irregularly received some food. There was also a kind of an infirmary, a tailor's shop, some work was being done in the kitchen, and we were given very small portions, but they were there. The horrible fact was that we were surrounded by barbed wire, dogs, and we children had nowhere to move around.

So in the camp it was us and these good women who managed somehow covertly to take away small children from the camp to Osijek. One of



them liked me, her name was Ela Guter. She was a tailor and she lived with her mother, an old lady, in Osijek at number 2 Rajznerova street. She took me and begged my mother to let her take me, promising to take good care of me. She came often with a permit to Đakovo bringing food and assistance collected in Osijek. It was mostly uncooked food, cooked eggs and some other foods. Probably 70 percent of what got there went to the Ustašas, and only a small part to the camp inmates.

My mother made a decision and – she gave me away! Aunt Ela one day took me out as her child, I do not know how she managed to pull that off. I can still remember how my mother embraced me tightly before I left.

„We will go back. We will be together again“, she told me.

After that time the Osijek Jewish Community managed to organize for children up to 10 years of age to be accommodated with Jewish families in Osijek, Vinkovci, and other places around the region of Slavonia. That is when my little sister Sarina got out. She was placed with a wealthy family in Osijek. I do not know their name. Aunty Ela Guter was a tailor. She dressed me from top to toe. Apart from me she had taken in another small child, two years old, the little boy Drago, or Dragan. This is how in February I got out of the Đakovo camp and my sister did the same in March and we both ended up with Jewish families in Osijek. However, I suffered so much and was so ill (I had a very bad case of dysentery, aunty Ela just barely managed to save me), that one day a woman activist of the Jewish Community of Osijek took me back to the camp. Thus, after having left the Đakovo camp, I went back. I could hardly recognize my mother. During that month that I had not seen her she had become an old woman. My grandmother Sara had in the meantime passed away. I could stay with my mother for only as long as aunty Ela was staying, as I was coming as her daughter. One night, I think we stayed overnight, I was clutching very tight to my mother, her tears keeping me warm. I think she felt that we shall never see each other again. At that time my mother was twenty-nine. That was the last time that I ever saw her. She died in Đakovo, of typhoid, and I had not known this until after the war. I trusted that I would see her again, because she had promised me so, and I trusted my mother unconditionally.

In Osijek, aunty Ela took care of me, caressed me, as if I was her own. It was the same with the little boy Dragan. Things were also very good for my little sister Sarina. They loved and cared for her, and tried to make up for being without her mom at such an early age. However, these illusions failed.

Difficult and hard times came for all people of Osijek, noble and good families who tried to save the children. I was not alone, there were my two nieces in Osijek as well, also with a family.

On a sad and most awful of days the worst happened. How I managed to avoid it, only God knows.

Aunty Ela sent me to her nephew in Bjelišće. He was married to a German woman. There was a big timber industry there. She sent me there for a few days knowing that I would have a good time with the Bihler family. While I was there for some days, I think during Easter holidays, aunty Ela was taken away, together with her eighty-years old mother, as well as my little sister with the family that took her in (the lady's name I think was Olika) – to the Tenja road, which was a collection centre for Jews of Osijek.

The Bihler family, from Bjelišće, kept me. Since he was a Jew, they fled from Bjelišće to Osijek, where they lived in the Reisnerova Street, I cannot remember the number. They had their own little house, they saved me.

And my little sister did not even go together with the people who took her in, the people she called her uncle and aunt, her second mother, but all the eight and ten year old children were rounded in separate wagons. They never got anywhere. Allegedly, on the way to Auschwitz, all children were executed.

My aunt Batševa Levi, one of my mother's eight sisters, the one who was the teacher in the Jewish kindergarten in Sarajevo, was the only one who managed to save herself by going to Mostar, a town under Italian occupation. She sold everything that she had, everything that she managed to have with her, and she sent a Muslim woman, who was supposedly doing such things, to take me and bring me to my aunt in Mostar. The Bihler family could not guarantee that they would be able to keep me.

So, one day in the summer of 1942, a woman came to take me. After a lot of all kinds of difficulties, as it was all in the middle of the war, I arrived to Mostar to be with my aunt Batševa. She lived with her nephew, from Mostar, in a small room, by that time completely empty, as she had sold everything to pay for me to be brought to her. Thus, truly by magic, I was saved from Đakovo. My little sister, my cousins, who were also small children, or my mother or grandmother, no one of that big family, nobody was alive, except for my aunt Batševa Levi and my oldest cousin, who was a prisoner of war.

We lived in Mostar for some months. In 1942 Mostar was divided: Ustaša administration and Italian administration. The Italians protected us.

There was a Jewish soup-kitchen in Mostar and that is where we ate. I was even doing apprenticeship for tailor, so as to be qualified for some work. At that time I was twelve and a half. However, Mostar was soon to become part of the Independent State of Croatia. The Jewish Community together with the Italians organized for the Jews to move and be saved. And this was

not only for Jews from Mostar, but from other regions as well from which Italians were withdrawing in 1942.

Sometimes in June we started from Mostar to the island of Lopud, where the Italians put us up in a hotel. It was very good. We were under guard, hungry, but nicely accommodated. Life was organized. We were starving, but there was no torture. We, the children, even attended some school. The teacher, Ms Kon and other teachers from Sarajevo, organized our lives and got the children together. We assisted in the kitchen. For me, compared to Đakovo, this was like being in a sanatorium. How my children's soul felt, knowing nothing of my mother, my parents, sister, one can only imagine. I went to sleep in tears and woke up in tears. But somehow, we all had a shared destiny, everyone had someone who was taken away. We lived in hope that, in the end, we would be reunited. No one could have imagined that we were never again to see those most dear to us.

While in Lopud, the Italians got all of us who were in different collection centers together and in small ships transferred us to the island of Rab. There were several thousands of people collected there. From the „Grand“ hotel we arrived to barracks full of bed-bugs, hundreds crammed in every barrack building. The good luck for our group was that we were put into a solid constructed barrack building. Those who were transferred to Kraljevica were put into wooden barracks, like tents. We were separated from them by a road only. So, across the road, it was plain tents, detaining Slovenians. In the island of Rab we lived as true camp inmates. Separated by thick barbed wire, guards, hungry, hungry for food but also for everything else, but still alive. There was no torture.

We somehow managed to get life organized. The older inmates took care that we were busy with something. School was set up. I remember that the Sarajevo teacher Ms Kon was teaching us some subjects. Gatherings were organized, as well as working in the kitchen, cleaning, washing. We even had Italian lessons. Every day, every one of us, children and adults equally, were given one *pagnoca* (bread, weighing about 100 grams). Children above 12 years of age were even taken to the beach for swimming. In this way we could even wash ourselves.

We stayed in Rab until the capitulation of Italy on 8 September 1943. Older youth was organized, training courses for nurses were organized. I would guess they were getting ready to join the Partisans. We were eavesdropping on everything. After the capitulation of Italy, the Jewish detachment was established. Together with my aunt who saved me and with a group of Jews from the camp I was transferred to the town Rab. The camp was abolished, abandoned. We were put in hotels and boarding homes and were given better food. However, this was short lived. The Italians were with-

drawing from the island and Germans and Ustaša were coming. We had urgently to leave the island of Rab and move to the liberated territory.

Already by the end of September, we joined the Partisans. It was thirteen of us. We were scattered in small groups. We moved on to Senj. From Senj, long lines of Jews from the island of Rab were moving to liberated territories. With my aunt I got to Moslavina. All on foot. Of course, there was shooting as we were moving, there was hiding in mud-huts. Winter was soon to come, it was already October. It was an endless journey. We started towards Moslavina and my aunt, being a teacher, was right away engaged to work in a children's home. I came to that home. Subsequently, children were being distributed to different accommodations. The children up to 10 years of age were sent to a village called Dišnik, or maybe Bršljanica, something like that; we were sent to another village. For the children without parents, either due to them being with the Partisans or being dead, boarding schools and children's homes were set up. I got into a children's home. We were collecting food for the wounded and for the Partisans and we attended classes.

Until the Sixth Offensive we were in different accommodations in the territory of Moslavina and subsequently, via Hungary, we moved on to Bajmok. In the wider liberated territory, where there were Partisans and the National Liberation Army, there were some twelve, maybe more, such children's homes. That is where I completed my first year of grammar school, living in the children's home in Bajmok.

And the war was over.

Happiness, shouting, enthusiasm. We were all going to find our families. We were transferred from Bajmok to Zagreb. Right away, already in 1945, a Partisan children's home was established in Habelićeva street number 1. I came to Zagreb, my aunt as well. However, there was an order that we were all to go back to where we came from. My aunt returned to Sarajevo, and I went along. Those were possibly the worst days of my life, because I realized that nobody of this big family had returned: eight sisters and a brother, forty-four close family members, my mother's sisters and their children – this for me was the terrible truth. That is when I first thought of suicide. I no longer wanted to live. All hope had been lost, all illusions and expectations came to nothing. I was in puberty. Life to me did not make sense. I was invited to go back to Zagreb, despite the fact that I was born in Sarajevo and belong there. The boarding school in Habelićeva 1, the Partisan boarding home and grammar school instilled in me new strength and trust in life. My aunt remained in Sarajevo until 1948, after which she immigrated to Israel. In Zagreb I completed two years of grammar school curriculum during one year, thus matriculating in academic year 1948/49. Until that time I was per-

manently in the boarding school. After matriculation, I received scholarship and I was practically for the first time out in the street. At the age of nineteen I was alone, not ready for life outside the boarding school. Luckily, I found a good friend from the time of the camp in Lopud and Rab – Drago Auslender – my present day husband. He asked me:

„What are you doing? Why are you wandering around?“

I told him that I had been given a scholarship and had enrolled to study at the Faculty of Philosophy, but had no place to stay, that I am in the street. And he said:



*BJANKA by the monument to her dearest family in Đakovo*

„Listen, let us try. I am living as a boarder with a very nice lady, Rikica Kajon, the sister of Mr. Levi, secretary of the Jewish Community of Zagreb, who has taken me in. Maybe she will take you in as well. I will ask her.“

He told her about me.

„Is she related to Batševa Levi, teacher from Sarajevo?“, she asked.

„Yes, that is her aunt.“

„Get her here right away; she will share my room with me. I will make in my room another bed and she can come“, she said.

So, my destiny changed overnight. Not only that I had found another mother, Rikica Kajon, but I had also found my future husband, Drago Auslender. My life

once again made sense. I became optimistic, regained my trust in life and my destiny. Getting out of the close vicinity of death does not happen too often. And I also found my good, dear, noble husband, had a daughter who became a master of veterinary science and gave me two wonderful grandsons. In fact, I was born again. I am a happy woman.