

Milan Fogel • Milan Ristović • Milan Koljanin

RIGHTEOUS AMONG THE NATIONS SERBIA



Jewish Community Zemun
2010

This edition has been financially supported by:

The Rothschild Foundation (Europe)



Claims Conference ועידת התביעות
The Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany

This work has been supported by a grant from
the Conference on Jewish Material Claims
Against Germany



JOODS
HUMANITAIR
FONDS



Grad Beograd
Sekretarijat za kulturu

Milan Fogel • Dr. Milan Ristović • Dr. Milan Koljanin

RIGHTEOUS AMONG THE NATIONS - SERBIA

First edition, 2010

Published by: Jewish Community in Zemun • Dubrovačka br. 21, Zemun

e-mail: jozemun@eunet.rs website: <http://joz.rs>

Editor: Nenad Fogel

Translated from Serbian: Olivera Polajnar

Proofreader: Ida Dobrijević

Glossary, choice of photographs and captions: Nenad Fogel

Technical editor, cover and page design: Jugoslav Rakita

Copyright: Jevrejska opština Zemun & authors ©2010

Printing completed in October 2010

Printer: Štamparija Akademija d.o.o., Beograd

Print run: 1000 copies

Place and date of issue: Belgrade 2010

Milan Fogel - Milan Ristović - Milan Koljanin

**RIGHTEOUS AMONG THE NATIONS
SERBIA**

Belgrade, 2010.

CONTENTS

LIST OF THE RIGHTEOUS	6
COMPARATIVE LIST OF JEWS SAVED AND THEIR SAVIOURS	8
EDITOR'S FOREWORD	10
INTRODUCTION	12
UNARMED HEROES UNDER DEATH THREAT - STORIES ABOUT THE RIGHTEOUS	15
THE ZEMUN SAGA	16
HAYRIA, MY LOVE	22
WHY EVER DID YOU COME BACK?	28
THE GOOD PEOPLE OF ŽUPA	32
IN WAR EXPECT DANGER FROM ALL CORNERS	38
MY DEAR GODFATHER, MY FRIEND	44
A PARTING WITHOUT GOODBYE	48
PANTS OFF	52
TO THE HILLS FOR SALVATION	54
TO BE A SERB IS NO EASY THING	58
GRANDFATHER SVETA AND MOTHER ANKA	62
JELENA GLAVAŠKI'S LOFT	64
THE LICE BIT MY EARS OFF	70
TO FREEDOM WITH SLOBODAN	74
TAKE CARE OF MY CHILD UNTIL I RETURN	80
OPERATION TONSILS	84
SCHOOL HEADMASTER	86
I WOULD HAVE HELPED YOU, TOO, IN SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES	90
SAVED BY THE VINEYARD	94
BEWARE OF HOW YOU CROSS YOURSELF	98
ON THE SLOPES OF MOUNTAIN KOPAONIK	100
MILORAD TOŠIĆ'S TESTIMONY	106
DEEP - ROOTED SCENES IN LITTLE ALEXANDER'S MEMORY	108
ON PASHA'S HILL	112
LOVE WITHOUT PREJUDICE	114
MY WIFE IS A JEWESS	116
THE EXECUTION SITE ON LAZAR'S FIELD	122
AMIR WAS LOVED BY TWO MOTHERS	126
IS THIS YOUR MOTHER?	130
A BITTER TASTE OF CAKES	132
A "GOODBYE" WITH A BIRTHDAY CAKE	136

CONTENTS

WE WON'T GIVE UP OUR JEWS	142
AN ODYSSEY IN NEGOTINSKA KRAJINA	148
MAMMA LUJZA	160
A WEDDING TO FOLLOW ALL THE SUFFERING	162
THERE ARE NO JEWS IN THIS HOUSE	164
NO ONE CAME FOR RENICA	168
FROM BANAT TO SERBIA AND BACK	172
A TALE FROM DORĆOL	178
THE SILENCE OF MOUNTAIN MALJEN	182
IT'S SAFEST IN ENEMY TERRITORY	186
TWO WOMEN – BOTH MOTHERS TO ONE CHILD	192
A FRIENDSHIP THAT PASSED THE HARDEST TEST	194
ESCAPING THE USTASHI KNIFE	198
NEVER ASK WHO IS HIDING YOU	202
THE IMPORTANT THING IS THAT THEY ARRIVED SAFELY	204
IN GOD WE TRUST	208
GRANNY KATICA FROM PERLEZ	212
THE LONG JOURNEY TO FREEDOM	216
WE ARE GOING HOME	220
TO THE HOSPITAL ON 'PIGGYBACK'	224
TEARS OF JOY	228
IF WE SURVIVE THIS ICE, WE'LL SURVIVE THE FASCISTS, TOO	232
FROM ONE HELL TO ANOTHER	236
MOTHER, I DON'T WANT TO GO!	240
SAFE AMONG CORNSTALKS	244
MAYA MADE IT TO MOSTAR	246
THERE WAS ALWAYS ROOM FOR PERSECUTED JEWS AT ZANKOVIĆ'S	250
I WILL NOT LET THE CHILDREN GO TO CAMP	252
DON'T FIGHT BECAUSE OF ME	256
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	259
JEWS IN SERBIA DURING WORLD WAR TWO	260
THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN SERBIA AND THE STATE OF YUGOSLAVIA (1918-1941)	286
BIOGRAPHIES OF THE AUTHORS	322
BIOGRAPHY OF THE BOOK PRESENTER	325
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	326
GLOSSARY	327



LIST OF THE RIGHTEOUS

Stating year of decoration (in alphabetical order)

1. Andeselić, Marija - 1993.
2. Andeselić, Natalija - 1993.
3. Andeselić, Vera - 1993.
4. Arandjelović, Čoaš, Vera - 1991.
5. Arsenijević, Ljubivoje - 2000.
6. Arsenijević, Milje - 2000.
7. Arsenijević, Vujka - 2000.
8. Baić, Klara - 2007.
9. Benčević, Antun - 1994.
10. Blendić, Djordje - 1992.
11. Blendić, Jovan - 1992.
12. Blendić, Mitra - 1992.
13. Blendić, Nikola - 1992.
14. Blendić, Nikolica, - 1992.
15. Bogičević, Mijajlo, - 2009.
16. Bogičević, Milica - 2009.
17. Bondžić, Borivoje - 1980.
18. Bondžić, Grozdana - 1980.
19. Bošnjak, Nikola - 2010.
20. Botić, Radovan - 1989.
21. Bradić, Jovana - 1994.
22. Bradić, Sava - 1994.
23. Cvijović, Mira - 1994.
24. Čanadi, Marija-Mariška - 1995.
25. Dudas, Ana - 1995.
26. Dudas, Pal - 1995.
27. Djonović, Radovan - 1983.
28. Djonović, Rosa - 1983.
29. Djošević, Adanja, Dara - 1998.
30. Djurković, Aleksandar - 1999.
31. Glavaški, Jelena - 1987.
32. Gligorijević, Milan - 1996.
33. Imeri, Mihaljić, Hayria - 1991
34. Jakić, Ana - 2001.
35. Janošević, Katica - 1964.
36. Jovanović, Bogdan - 1968.
37. Jovanović, Danica - 1993.
38. Jovanović, Desanka - 1968.
39. Jovanović, Dušan - 2006.
40. Jovanović, Ljubinka - 1967.
41. Jovanović, Mileva - 1993
42. Jovanović, Milka - 1992.
43. Jovanović, Nada - 1968.
44. Jovanović, Nemanja - 1968.
45. Jovanović, Olga - 1993
46. Jovanović, Petar - 1993.
47. Jovanović, Stanko - 1967.
48. Jovanović, Tihomir - 1992.
49. Kirec, Miroslav - 1990.
50. Knežević, Milenija - 1980.
51. Knežević, Slobodan - 1980.
52. Kostić, Bosiljka - 1997.
53. Kostić, Dragoslav - 1997.
54. Kostić, Ljubomir - 1997.
55. Kostić, spouse - 1997.
56. Kovanović, Divna - 1999.
57. Kozarski, Danilo, Bata - 1994.
58. Kozarski, Julijana - 1994.
59. Kozarski, Olga - 1994.
60. Kozarski, Stevan - 1994.
61. Kudlik, Bela - 1987.
62. Kudlik, Katarina - 1987.
63. Lepčević, Mileta - 1978.
64. Ljubičić, Lazar - 1994.
65. Ljubičić, Milosava, Mila - 1994.
66. Matyasovics, Ana - 1998.
67. Matyasovics, István - 1998.
68. Mandušić, Ljubica - 2007.
69. Marinković, Djordje - 1996.
70. Marinković, Stanka - 1996.
71. Marković, Levec, Martina - 2000.
72. Milenković, Ljubo - 1999.



73. Milenković, Svetozar - 2002.
74. Milenković, Vidosava - 2002.
75. Milharčić, Lujza - 1985.
76. Mladenović, Biserka - 1999.
77. Mladenović, Vladimir - 1999.
78. Nikolić, Raša - 1995.
79. Novaković, Krsta - 2003.
80. Panić, Angelina - 1993
81. Panić, Dr. Svetozar - 1993
82. Pašćan, Nadežda - 1994.
83. Pejić, Aleksandar - 1986.
84. Pejić, Dr. Mirko - 1986.
85. Pejić, Nevenka - 1986.
86. Petrović, Aleksandar - 2002.
87. Petrović, Kosa - 2003.
88. Popović, Djordje - 1999.
89. Popović, Marija - 1999.
90. Popović, Predrag - 2001.
91. Prica, Spasenije - 1991.
92. Protić, Miroslava - 2009.
93. Protić, Simeon - 2009.
94. Ranković, Jelica - 2007.
95. Rašić, Helena - 2006.
96. Rašić, Veljko - 2006.
97. Rezniki, Arslan - 2008.
98. Szagmeister, Julijana - 1988.
99. Szagmeister, Laszlo - 1988.
100. Stamenković, Jelenko - 2005.
101. Stamenković, Ljubica - 2005.
102. Stefanović, Milutin - 1992.
103. Stefanović, Svjetličić, Mileva - 1992.
104. Stojadinović, Dr. Miloslav - 1966.
105. Stojadinović, Zora - 2001.
106. Stojanović, Andrei - 2001.
107. Stojanović, Djordje - 2000.
108. Stojanović, Katarina - 2001.
109. Stojanović, Randjel - 2009.
110. Stoković, Dragutin - 1996.
111. Stoković, Vasović, Radmila - 1996.
112. Stoković, Živka - 1996.
113. Tabaković, Dr. Pavle - 1978.
114. Todorović, Kruna - 1995.
115. Todorović, Mita - 1995.
116. Todorović, Radmila - 1995.
117. Todorović, Živojin - 1995.
118. Tomić, Marija - 2009.
119. Tošić, Milorad - 1978.
120. Trajković, Dragoljub - 2009.
121. Tumpej, Andrej - 2001.
122. Vasić, Predrag - 1994.
123. Veljković, Cila - 1999.
124. Veljković, Miroslav - 1999.
125. Veljković, Zlata - 1999.
126. Zdravković, Predrag - 1980.
127. Zdravković, Stana - 1980.
128. Zsámboki, Pal - 1995.

Montenegro

Zanković, Petar - 2006.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Jakovljević, Andja - 1992.



COMPARATIVE LIST OF JEWS SAVED AND THEIR SAVIOURS

Saved	Saviours – The Righteous	Pg.
Beherano Benjamin & Josip; Fogel Danilo	Levec Martina	16
Bahar Ester - Stela	Imeri-Mihaljić Hayria	22
Kalderon Ester & children Mirjam & Josif	Stamenković Jelenko & Ljubica	28
Deutsch Julia & son Ilan	Bondžić Borivoje & Grozdana; Knežević Slobodan & Milenija; Zdravković Predrag & Stana	32
BenAvram Roza	Čanadi Marija-Mariška	38
BenAvram Josef	Zsámboki Pal	38
Belah Pavle	Benčević Antun; Cvijović Mira	44
Deneberg Mirko & Pavle	Baić Klara	48
Lovrić Milan	Stojadinović Dr. Miloslav	52
Papo Isak & Rena & children Lea & Rahela	Bogičević Mijajlo & Milica; Protić Simeon & Miroslava	54
Semnic Danilo	Djonović Radovan & Rosa	58
Popadić Branko	Panić Dr. Svetozar & Angelina	62
Lebl Jennie	Glavaški Jelena	64
Schomlo Miroslav, daughters Milana & Ana	Todorović Mita & Kruna; Todorović Živojin & Radmila	70
Fenje dr Josip & Hermina & children Magda & Ilonka; grandson Slobodan	Milenković Svetozar & Vidosava; Petrović Aleksandar	74
Weiss Uri	Kudlik Bela & Katarina	80
Schefer Pišta	Tabaković Dr. Pavle; Lepčević Mileta	84
Kaponi Gershon	Prica Spasenije	86
Kalef Matilda & Rahela	Tumpej Andrej	90
Stern Mordehaj	Kozarski Julijana & Stevan; son Danilo & daughter Olga	94
Family Baruch	Stojadinović Zora	98
Ruben Raka	Bradić Sava & Jovana; Marinković Djordje & Stanka; Nikolić Raša; Vasić Predrag	100
Gutman Julius & Klara	Tošić Milorad	106
Kraus Blanka & son Alexander	Jovanović Danica; daughters: Olga & Mileva	108
Adomi Hana & family	Rašić Veljko & Helena	112
Adanja Jakov, Avraham, Gizela & Benko; Schalom Stela with two children	Djošević Dara	114
Kemeny Julie	Pejić Dr. Mirko & Nevenka & son Aleksandar	116
Schosberger Tomi	Pašćan Nadežda; Ljubičić Lazar & Milosava-Mila	122
Meir Engel	Szagmeister Laszlo & Julijana	126
Avramović Borko	Čoaš Vera	130
Danon Teodor & Beatrisa & children Cadok & Amada	Stojanović Randjel	132



Bosković Vera	Jovanović Stanko & Ljubinka	136
Tajtacak Rebeka & children Sultana, Natalia, Sophia & David	Novaković Krsta; Petrović Kosa; Veljković Zlata & parents Miroslav & Cila	142
Levi Žak & Anka i children Rena & Gideon	Blendić Djordje & Mitra; Blendić Jovan, son Nikola, grandson Nikolica; Djurković Aleksandar; Jovanović Tihomir & Milka; Milenković Ljubo; Popović Djordje & Marija; Stojanović Andrei & Katarina & son Djordje	148
Adanja Mirjana	Milharčić Lujza	160
Herbst Jehudit	Gligorijević Milan	162
Levi Paula & son Josif; Romano Neli & Jakob	Mandušić Ljubica; Ranković Jelica	164
Deutsch Rena	Stoković Dragutin & Živka; Stoković Radmila	168
Ungar Margita & children Tihomir & Olga	Trajković Dragoljub	172
Lunginović Sonya	Andeselić Marija; daughters Natalija & Vera	178
Brukner Tugomir	Arsenijević Ljubivoje & Vujka & son Milje	182
Levi Klarisa & Lihtner Ruža	Mladenović Biserka & Vladimir	186
Lihtner Ruža	Kovanović Divna	186
Kohn Petar	Matyasovics Ana & István	192
Teitelbaum Raul	Jakić Ana	194
Levi Kalman	Jovanović Bogdan & Desanka; son Nemanja & daughter Nada	198
Baruch Sonia	Kirec Miroslav	202
Families Koen, Natan & Konforti & Abravanel dr Haim	Rezniqi Arslan	204
Kremer Alexander & Olga	Botić Radovan	208
Arueti Anuška	Janošević Katica	212
Konfino Marko	Kostić Ljubomir & spouse; son Dragoslav & daughter Bosiljka	216
Shapiro György, Rozencvajg Pal	Jovanović Dušan	220
Hochberg Maya	Jovanović Petar	224
Margulis Rafael & Olga & children Rajko & Aleksandar	Popović Predrag	228
Deutsch Blanka & Hana	Dudas Pal & Ana	232
A number of Jews, transport	Tomić Marija	236
Bararon Jaša	Stefanović Milutin; Stefanović Mileva	240
Laufer György	Bošnjak Nikola	244
Buchvald Maya	<i>Jakovljević Andja - Bosnia and Herzegovina</i>	246
Richter Milan i Adela and children Marjan, Ivan & Stanka; Piliš Elza & son Leo	<i>Zanković Petar - Montenegro</i>	250



EDITOR'S FOREWORD



In 1953 the Israeli parliament, the Knesset, founded “Yad Vashem” – a museum in remembrance of Holocaust victims. Ten years later a commission for proclaiming the Righteous among Nations was established. The reward in the form of a medal and diploma are a testimony of the courage of individuals, exclusively non-Jews, who

during World War Two risked their own lives, as well as the lives of their families to save those of Jewish people who, for the most part, were completely unknown to them.

In 1941 the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was occupied by Germany and its allies. By dividing the country, mostly on ethnic principles, Germany managed to secure the unconditional support of the top elite of all the nations living in Kingdom Yugoslavia at the time. Although deeply opposed, all who stood in power in the territories of the quartered country still had one common aim – the extinction of Jews. In order to better understand the courage of the Righteous, a special part of the book, written by Professor Dr. Milan Ristović, has been dedicated to historical conditions in which these rescues took place. Dr. Milan Koljanin has written a comprehensive chronology of the conditions Jews lived in Serbia and the Yugoslav state prior to 1941. Up to the nineties of the twentieth century, all Righteous within the territory of former Yugoslavia were recorded as Yugoslavs. With the breaking up of the country and the forming of new states, the need arose to impart all instances of saving

Jews in the territory of today’s Serbia. In our choice of individuals noted in the list of the Righteous of Serbia we relied on official Yad Vashem records. However, we also established that in the list of the Righteous of Serbia there were persons who performed their heroic deeds in the territory of today’s Bosnia and Herzegovina (8). We also noticed that certain cases of rescuing Jews inside Serbia had been registered as feats of the Righteous from Slovenia and Croatia (3). For this reason, our list differs from that of Yad Vashem in some ten names. Through life stories written by Milan Fogel, the book presents the precious deeds of 128 proclaimed Righteous of Serbia. Our book also includes a few additional stories. Here I would like to point to the story of Petar Zanković from Sutomore. The reason for publishing this story lies in the fact that it is the one recorded case of saving Jews in Montenegro and is worthy of being remembered along with other stories in this book. Another case would be the story of Andja Jakovljević who saved a Jewish life in Mostar. Notwithstanding the fact that she was a Serb by birth and that she lived in Smederevo (Serbia) after the war, the reason for publishing her story among the Righteous in our book was that she had been omitted in the Book on the Righteous from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Fully aware that editions of this kind are rarely published, we have also included the stories of two individuals who have been recommended for the Righteous title, but are still waiting for the final awarding decision. The research we have undertaken in collecting material for writing the following stories revealed that there were many who played a role in the effort to save Jews, but have in time been simply forgotten or have not received adequate attention for their contribution. All who read the stories with due attention will note that beside those proclaimed as Righteous, there were many others who also took active part in the process of saving Jews. We hope that the stories contained in the book will be a way to commemorate their contribution and



preserve it in memory.

It is with great pride that we dedicate this book to the citizens of Serbia who saved Jewish lives during World War Two, and hope that by recounting their life-stories we have woven a unique memorial in their honour.

Nenad Fogel

Belgrade, July 2010



INTRODUCTION

Considering the time period that has gone by since World War Two, it is evidently hard for new generations to comprehend the prevailing dark atmosphere of years spent under the occupying forces. Post war generations could obtain information about various aspects of the war and wartime events from many written materials or from stories recounted by parents and relatives. The rationale of this book is to advance understanding of the period. Hopefully, this will give cause to objective reporting on the darkest period in the entire history of not only Serbia, but the whole of Europe.

Currently, such endeavours gain importance in light of steps taken by day-to-day politics to obscure appraisal benchmarks and input diverse interpretation concerning the operation and responsibility of Quislings during the occupation of Serbia. In the aftermath of such interpretation, a process of gradual discharge of all responsibility for cooperation with the enemy has been set in motion. Moreover, the ongoing process consciously dismisses the fact that responsibility for war crimes does not expire.

One must also not omit the emerging negation of the Holocaust. Some countries, as well as individuals, pseudo-historians, have made assertions that the Holocaust was a blatant Jewish fabrication and that the extinction of Jews never happened. By doing so, they dismiss proven facts about death camps in which 6.000.000 Jewish lives came to a violent end. Taking into account this aspect of the problem, it is not only constructive, but absolutely necessary to constantly draw attention to data that unequivocally describe events that took place during the occupation.

This book, by rendering a historical background of the period, aspires to present to its reader an overview of extensive conditions in which individual human drama

took place. Light is shed on a period when racism reached its culmination. Language of hate escalated and resulted in the annihilation of Jewish people. The Roma people shared the same destiny. The plight of Serbs differed very little. The first years of World War Two witnessed overpowering of Europe by the German Nazi Army and its advance far into the European part of the USSR (the former name of Russia). In the onslaught, Yugoslavia was also crushed. By this act, the fate of Jews in the region was decided.

The book exclusively looks into events that occurred in Serbia. One must bear in mind that after its defeat, Serbia was divided among its occupying forces: Srem fell under the Independent State of Croatia, Bačka under Hungary, Banat remained under German authority, and the south-east of Serbia was handed over to the Bulgarians, and Kosovo and Metohija to the Italians. On the remaining territory of Serbia Hitler established a state under his control. An in-depth account of the situation is elucidated in the segment by Professor Dr. Milan Ristiović. Dr. Milan Koljanin's section looks into the history of relations toward Jews in Serbia and into particular stages of their development.

Beside the previously mentioned occupation forces, the German Gestapo and other German civilian and military authorities operated in Serbia. These operations included the support of the Nedić Special police, Srpska straža (the Serbian guard) and government bodies, as well as the followers of Ljotić, the Pećanac Chetnicks and other enemy collaborators. Furthermore, criminal actions of the Ustashi in Srem and the Hungarian occupying forces in Bačka were sustained throughout the war. Death by firing squad was imposed for any offence, however insignificant, that the aggressors thought fit to pronounce capital punishment for. These were not mere threats – each day arrests were made and executions carried out. It was standard procedure to publicize these deeds by placing public announcements. This inevitably



spread fear among the population and made effective recruitment of informers possible. Anything arousing suspicion was promptly reported. Such information led to the arrest of many people and very frequently to their execution. It is absolutely necessary to point out this course of events in order to better understand the social environment in which saviours of persecuted Jews acted.

Apart from its historical section, the book contains prose chapters which tell the life-stories of Jews saved. The presentation of these stories is an effort to preserve in memory the many people who put their lives at risk to save Jewish people from persecution. Disregarding the mortal risk they were taking, people frequently harboured persons completely unknown to them. To impart the full meaning of such actions, each story has been written as a testimony about both saviours and the saved; without the story of the saved and the life-threatening circumstances they were faced with, there could be no comprehension of the greatness of the deeds of the acknowledged Righteous. Often an entire chain of persons took part in the rescue of the persecuted, but only some of them received recognition from the state of Israel in the form of the medal "Righteous among the Nations". Reason more for the stories to be brought to life is the fact that they mention all the many who partook in rescue operations and yet were not given due recognition. It seems, unfortunately, that they had never even been nominated. In a number of cases, proposals had been rejected due to misconceptions and insufficient understanding of circumstances prevailing in certain regions of Serbia.

The medal was established by the Israeli centre Yad Vashem (Memory and Name). Founded in 1953, Yad Vashem is the world institution for archived documentation, research work, education and commemoration of the Holocaust. The Institution has a special department named Righteous among the Nations. Presently 128

persons have been awarded the Medal of the Righteous in Serbia. As this number constitutes only a part of the people who contributed to the rescue of persecuted Jews, Serbia can be proud of the humane actions and compassion of its citizens.

It is sixty-four years since the end of World War Two and the passage of time has yielded its effects. Many of those saved and their rescuers are no longer among the living. In order to acquire knowledge about them, the author of the stories of the Righteous made use of all opportunities that came his way to interview those still living and the descendants of the deceased. The author's endeavour toward a high standard of stories' authenticity has, in this way, been achieved. Consequently, each story has its own effective dramatic quality; some present complete dramas. For instance, the story "Hayrija, My Love" features all components of creative writing: an introduction, a plot and a conclusion. The majority of stories are accounts rendered by the saved. At the same time they are a document about the courage and valour of their saviours.

Danilo Fogel
Belgrade, 03.08. 2009



Milan Fogel

UNARMED HEROES UNDER DEATH THREAT

Stories about the Righteous



THE ZEMUN SAGA

“Will one of the three of you come down from that attic and help me?” Martina asked in a hushed but commanding voice, her eyes steadfast on the holed planks used to air the storeroom, through her flat, by way of the roof.

Benko, Josip and Danilo, three Jews, had been hiding in her attic for more than a month now, after escaping the rounding up and deportation of Zemun Jews to the Jasenovac and Stara Gradiška camps. The unanimous opinion of the safe-house tenants was that Danilo least resembled a Jew by appearance: his hair was dark brown while the Beherano brothers had jet black hair. Therefore, he was chosen to answer Martina’s call and descend from the attic.

One might be offended by the term ‘rounding up of Jews’ as though they were, God forbid, cattle to be steered, but Danilo has never used any other word for the deed. Men, women, the old and young were driven off in cattle wagons to the camps sometime towards the middle of 1942. The men were taken to Jasenovac and the women and children to Stara Gradiška death camp.

Under occupation, like the majority of Zemun Jews, Danilo had spent his days working as a forced labourer. He had been commandeered to the sanitary warehouse of the former King’s Army. In the evenings, exhausted from the toil of daily work, he would, nevertheless, run to the Hashomer Hatzair meetings, the Jewish youth organization that had decided to join-up with the Resistance movement. Resorting to different means of diver-

sion they brought havoc into the lives of the German occupying forces and later to the Ustashi authorities of the Independent State of Croatia. In the process of apportioning the Kingdom of Yugoslavia among the occupying forces, Zemun had fallen into the hands of the IS of Croatia. Danilo was getting ready to join the Partisan guerilla forces.

That momentous day in July Danilo had eaten a bunch of sour grapes, recently sprayed with pesticide “blue stone”. He just made it to the door of his parental home, his bowels barely containing themselves, reminding him of what he had so hungrily eaten that day on a starved stomach. When Ružica Požar, an activist of the Resistance movement, came that evening of the 26th of July 1942, she found Danilo bent double over an ailing stomach. However, there was no time to be lost for any kind of compassion, so she came up to Danilo and quietly told him that he had to leave the house that same evening and go somewhere safe. By giving him an address to go to she was implying that a raid was set for that night and that the entire Jewish population of Zemun

would be sent to concentration camps the next day.

Oblivious to the hardships that awaited him once he joined the Partisans in Bosnia, Danilo was determined that he would not go to any camp. By now everyone was already at home, as there was no other place for them to go to, due to the numerous restrictions prohibiting the movement of Jews across town. Jews could not hold jobs, the children were forbidden to attend school. Jews were allowed to buy food only after everyone else had done so, which often meant that even a little bread was hard to come by at the bakers’. Outings to the cinema



Martina Levec



or theatre were things to be wished for even if they had had the strength or desire to go. The daily routine came down to leaving the house early in the morning, toiling in the forced labour stations throughout the day, and returning home dead-tired late at night, each night.

“They will be rounding up Jews tomorrow and sending them to the camps,” Danilo spoke heavily. His throat hoarse with pain and sorrow, he could barely pronounce in a hushed voice that he was leaving immediately, that same night, to join the Partisans.

“Do you want us all killed because of you?” asked David, the eldest brother, furiously. “It’s a wonder that we have managed to stay alive thus far in spite of your illegal engagements.”

Danilo watched his mother, waiting to hear what she had to say. She could not hold back the silent tears that had gathered in her eyes. Were they aware of the hell they were being driven to tomorrow, Danilo wondered. How could he help them, where could he find refuge for them?

“Go,” his father said, while tears fell down his face. “Hurry up, it is almost curfew.”

His brother, Joška, stood speechless trying hard to comprehend what was going on, not believing that this could be happening to them – to a close-knit family that was always together. Like Danilo, Joška was also a member of the Hashomer Hatzair, which had joined up with the youth organization SKOJ at the beginning of the war. Possibly he was beginning to realize that Danilo was the only family member chosen to survive. As if he could stop him from leaving, David caught Danilo by the sleeve of his jacket; but he too, could not contain his tears any more and slowly loosened his grip. Danilo was now free to go and pack and be on his way.

He promised that if anything happened to the family because of his departure, he would certainly be notified and would promptly go and register with the Special

police. The stupidity of that remark made him wonder at his own words, but was there anything smarter that he could have come up with? He knew all too well what Ružica Požar had told him and what that meant. There was no difference between going to the Special police or taking a gun to his head and ending his life right there and then. He packed his things aware of the tears of those entrapped by a fate they knew not how to change. Danilo himself did not have the strength to cry; his eyes blurred as he hurried with his task, afraid that he might change his mind in these last moments and remain with his family which was in advance condemned to the harshest sentence without a trial. As a matter of fact, he packed rather quickly. Although it was summer, he put on his spiked mountain shoes, packed a sweater into his shoulder bag, which he always took with him on his moshava trails, and left the house. Was there anything harder in life, he asked himself, than to say good bye to the ones you hold most dear, knowing that you might never see them again? He had reason enough to be torn by such thoughts for in the end, not one of his kinfolk ever came out of the camps dead or alive.

Curfew had already started when Danilo left the house. He tore off the yellow star from his sleeve and briskly walked to 9, Gardoška Str., to the house of the Kraljević family, their former neighbours. In fact, he went to Dimitrije Stakić, a boiler repair man, who lived in the house in a rented flat. In the flat he came across the Beherano brothers, Benko and Josip. It was a pleasant surprise to find them there, since it could only mean that they, too, had been warned in time to find shelter. The next day the boiler man informed them that all Jews had been deported to the camps. Not all, Danilo thought, and for the first time tears rolled down his face.

They spent a few days in Stakić’s flat and then they had to part. Activists of the Resistance movement took care of their safety and this was why they were frequently moved from one place to another. Danilo was placed



in the attic of the Plavšić house which stood in Ribarska Street. The younger Plavšić boy, whom he already knew, left him a pack of cigarettes and some matches. Danilo was a non-smoker. All of them in the Hashomer Hatzair abstained from the use of tobacco and alcohol. Through the small attic window, Danilo looked at the city lights. He could tell exactly which lamp in which street had fused out; tracing the yellow lights of the street lamp-posts he was, once again, in his mind traversing the streets of his town. All at once it dawned on him that he had become a prisoner in his hometown. For the first time in his life, he lit a cigarette.

A few days later Danilo was transferred to an unfinished house in Sindjelićeva Street. Here he once again met Benko and Josip; with them too, was Alfred Katschka the cantor's son. Alfred showed them a large bundle of gold jewelry, wrapped in a woman's scarf. He was certain that this was the means to his salvation. Ružica Požar, his girlfriend, transferred him to the Chetnik's; at least, that was what they heard, and from then on, no trace of him was ever heard of, nor found. Perhaps the gold had been his undoing.

Although they had to split up once again, they were all glad to leave the half-finished building, where rags hung in place of doors, and the danger of being discovered was ever present. Josip and Danilo were transferred to Brica's flat, which was in Karamatina Street across from the Bosna café. From there they could hear the café female singers, relentlessly singing one and the same song into the late hours of the night. "Oh don't leave, don't go, stay with me here," the song went on and on. Danilo would have stayed gladly, but the town spies and informers were always on duty in the streets, and for a pittance informed the occupation authorities of Jews that were still at large in town. At the street corner stood a big post where the new town authorities put up their warnings and announcements. Even from a distance, the words were clearly visible saying that anyone giving shelter to

Jews would be killed on the spot. How many people had so far risked their lives, Danilo thought, and how many more of them will yet be endangered until the liaison for his transfer to the Partisans becomes operative? Who were these people that were helping them? Were they heroes, unaware of the consequences of their deed? No, Danilo mused to himself, they were fully aware of what lay in store for them if they were found out, but they chose to help rather than wrestle with their conscious. They were people determined to save a human life at any cost from those, if any such existed, who illicitly wanted to take that life away.

And then came another parting, when Danilo was placed with Pera and Branko, students from Belegiš. For the neighbours from Ugrinovačka Street Danilo was a refugee from Maradik. He spent the nights in a dusty uninhabited room, with no bed, with only a small window facing Čukovac, so that in case of danger he could flee in that direction. He huddled on the floor with his back to the wall and tried to fall asleep. Each time he closed his eyes he would hear a squeaking-grinding sound. In the end, straining his eyes in the dark, he managed to notice that the room was full of rats which were feasting on his mountain shoes! The grinding sound came from the rats that were trying to munch off the shoe sole metal spikes. He had had enough. His intention had been to join up with the Partisans and not seek refuge in strange houses like a sissy. However, he was at the same time aware that all was not that simple: one could not go to the bus stop, buy a one way ticket and find himself among the Partisans. A massive German and Ustashi troop offensive was under way and travelling on roads without special passes had been prohibited. There was no way a Jew could obtain such a pass.

Finally, Danilo came to the house of Martina Levec. It was in broad daylight, round noon. There he once again met the Beherano brothers. He could not believe that he was placed in the attic of a two-flat house where the



lower flat was occupied by three high-ranking Nazi officers; and still one more Nazi lived in a room in Martina's first-floor flat. "How was this possible?" Danilo asked himself. "Who was this courageous woman?" Her brother had been taken to Germany as a forced labourer and she had received orders to be of service to German



Martina Levec receiving the Righteous award from Ambassador to Israel in Belgrade, Yoram Shani (2000)

officers. During the day the officers were at their posts, and at night they were at home. This was the reason why Danilo had to be brought to his new hiding place during the day despite the danger of being seen and recognized by someone in the streets.

Martina's lodger was one of the high-ranking Nazi officers, Colonel Schwartz, the commander of the Zemun Airport, who often boasted of his very low party card number, that of the National Socialist Party of Germany. A hardcore Nazi, he should have presented a great threat to the underground fighters and to Martina, too; however, her conduct implied that she feared nothing. But besides being a high-ranking officer, Colonel Schwartz

was also fatally in love with Martina, which in itself was nothing unusual, her being a beautiful, tall, attractive, young lady. Martina did not respond to any of the colonel's outbursts of love. It might have been just that, the anticipation of a love that could be, that distracted him from seeing what was happening right under his nose.

One day a settee board broke and it had to be fixed. Martina could not call a carpenter for she was, primarily, afraid that he might run into and thus discover her illegal attic lodgers, and secondly, she had no money to pay him. They were already hungry most of the time and food was scarce. The German officers proved to be great misers. They brought their rations in a quantity just enough to feed themselves. In the same way, they penciled the level of wine left in the bottle after taking each drink. Martina was no great cook. On one occasion she cooked for herself and her "squatters", as she called them, a pumpkin cut into slices like watermelon, to which she added some stale bacon to enhance the flavour. Wow, how everyone enjoyed the treat; here, at last, was something fine to eat?!

In the courtyard of the house his family had lived in, a carpenter had set up a workshop where Danilo used to spend his time learning the basics of the trade. He believed that the knowledge would come in handy once he reached the Palestine. So it was Danilo who went downstairs to help. But the Beherano brothers came down after him. It must have been the work of the devil or a sense of utter hunger that made them follow him. The fact that Danilo had already helped Martina with some chores and that Martina herself also went hungry, could not dissuade them that Danilo wasn't down there to have a secret bite. Martina had some old tools and a planer. Just as Danilo started to work the board, Colonel Schwartz appeared out of nowhere. He had forgotten some papers at home. There was no way they could pass by him and return to the attic undetected. Danilo braced



himself and calmly continued to grind the board while the Beherano brothers were sent off to the bathroom where they were to stay locked-in until the threat was over. Unfortunately, the colonel went straight for the bathroom door, gripping the door knob.

“Who’s inside?” he asked Martina brusquely, seeing that the door was locked.

“Who’s inside?” Martina repeated in the same tone.

“My apprentice,” Danilo replied calmly, in fluent Ger-



Martina Levec, center, in front of the house where she gave refuge to three Jews (1946.)

man, “he’ll be out in a moment.”

Martina hooked her arm into the colonel’s escorting him to his room. While the Nazi was overwhelmed with the little attention he could get from her, which on this

occasion Martina bestowed with a dazzling smile, the Beherano brothers managed to escape to the safety of the attic. Never again did they leave the attic room until the moment when they departed from Martina’s house.

Benko was the first to leave the shelter. After his stay with Martina for one month, Benko’s girlfriend, Olga Gavrilović, came with forged documents and transferred him to Belgrade. Benko remained there up to the end of the war, living under a false identity.

With the episode happily ending in this way, Martina, who lived alone, began to ask Danilo for help more often. At last she declared that he was her servant so that he would, on occasion, serve the Nazis at dinner. She introduced him as a Serbian refugee who had escaped the Ustashi dagger, but the seasoned Nazi colonel had his suspicions. A few days earlier, when Danilo was once again acting as handyman, this time repairing the power installations, he encountered the colonel again, who observed that the electrician remarkably looked like the carpenter. All that Martina did was to off-handedly reply that the electrician wore a cap while the carpenter had been bare headed?! That night the colonel was convinced that he had already seen Danilo somewhere before, but in the heat of the conversation with his fellow officers he paid little attention to him. The Nazis frequently discussed various subjects during dinner. Among

them was a leftist, Josef Ungar, for whom one could, surprisingly enough, say that he was almost a Communist. The colonel remarked that Serbs existed only to serve Germans, to which the communist Ungar replied that such conditions could not last much longer and that



changes were soon to be made. And so they embarked on the theme of the *Urbemensch* which made Danilo mumble in German as he passed by: “Niche wrote about that.” Once again Danilo had inadvertently caught the attention of the veteran Nazi. However, a couple of days before, Martina had been cleaning up the colonel’s room when she came across a letter from his sister, who had remained in Germany. Her woman’s curiosity outweighed her sense of propriety so she read the letter. The sister wrote how she was very surprised when she saw that the Barbarian Balkan folk, deported to Germany to work as forced labourers, were well acquainted with radios and pianos. Martina kept a piano in her house and was so much offended with the assumptions

imparted in the letter that she could not pass such a good moment to get some revenge.

So when Danilo moved away from the table, the colonel asked Martina how a servant could comprehend what Niche wrote about.

“Not everyone can be a servant here,” Martina replied calmly. “One must first obtain a university degree and then apply for service.”

Finally, a message arrived for Danilo and Josip to prepare for transfer. Courier liaison had once again been established and the two of them, after staying with

Martina for three months, left to join the Partisans.

The colonel continued to court Martina. Finally, he suggested that she should come with him to Germany. Martina had, by now, used every possible line to put a stop to his amorous siege so she finally opted to inform him in confidence that her grandmother was a Jew.

“If you don’t speak of it, none will be the wiser,” the colonel replied hopefully. “All you have to do is come away with me.” He was now convinced that all barriers to their love had been broken down.

Not even a fabricated story about a Jewish grandmother proved to be refuge for Martina, but the war was nearing its end. Her illegal activity was detected and she was urgently transferred to the Partisan units while Colonel Schwartz, defeated on more than one battlefield, returned to Germany.

Following their parting in Zemun in October 1942, Danilo and Josip were to meet Martina once again only well after the end of the war had been proclaimed.



*On leaving Martina Levec
Danilo Fogel joined up with
Partisan units*

Martina Levec, married Marković
awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 2000



HAYRIA, MY LOVE

“Hayria, I have searched for you for so many years. Why couldn’t we have met twenty, thirty years ago? I had so wanted to hug you, to take you to my house and let you meet my children. We could have told them stories of how I was once your child. I was only a tiny baby when you took me into your arms. While YOU hoped that fate had given you another daughter, I was certain that you were my mother.”

Stella was evoking childhood memories. She could not remember when and how she had come to Hayria, but their parting had stayed with her throughout the years; she had been forcefully taken from her. She recalled that momentous re-encounter when she was five; by then the war was already over. The event was to prove it would be yet another of her childhood partings and, unknowingly at the time, the final one from Hayria.

The Second World War had set out new borders, new establishments and systems throughout the Balkans. In mid 1944 Kosovo and Metohija had been divided up, leaving Kosovska Mitrovica under German army occupation. At the time, nearly a hundred Jews lived in Kosovska Mitrovica. They had a reputation for being good neighbours and honest workers and were respected for this. However, in the eyes of the occupying forces they were a menace to be dealt with. Such were the conditions in which Bukica, a Jewess, gave birth to a daughter. Blagoje, the baby’s father, was at one and the same time overjoyed and at a loss what to do. At first German rule meant that all Jews were driven to forced labour; Bukica was commanded to the task of cleaning the hospital. The next phase began with the incarceration of men of Moses’ faith into provisional camps. Bukica and Blagoje decided that they would not stay and witness the unraveling of the situation. They had to leave Mitrovica and so they joined the Partisan

forces. The baby was left with grandmother Ester. Very shortly, the final solution befell the two of them, grandmother and baby alike. All Jews, men, women, children, the old and infants were destined for death camp, Stella and Ester among them. They had a long journey ahead of them. Awaiting them at its end was the Staro Sajmište death camp near Zemun.

From her teenage years Hayria had helped grandma Ester with her household chores. In the prevailing state of affairs Hayria very soon became aware of what was happening to the Jews; that her own family had not yet been persecuted by the occupation forces was a miracle in itself. It seemed as if the Roma population had thus far been spared; for how long, she could only guess. Would their fate be that of the Jews? At the time, she was living in Ada, a village near Mitrovica, with her husband and five children. On hearing that grandma Ester and Stella had been taken to the provisional camp, she set off together with her children to see them. She dared not go into Mitrovica with her two eldest, so she left them behind in a grove to await her return. With her three younger children, Hayria entered the camp. The guards must have thought that she worked there since no one asked why she had entered the camp with the children.

Grandma Ester was glad to see Hayria and a sad smile lit her face when Hayria kissed her hand. She held Stella close to her and the little girl’s eyes opened wide when she recognized Hayria. Whenever she had had a minute to spare, Hayria would play with the child, so that Stella now eagerly stretched out her arms to her. Hayria readily embraced the child.

“Blagoje has been killed,” grandma Ester told her. Looking at her neatly dressed and cared for grandchild resting in Hayria’s arms, she continued: “I don’t know what has become of Bukica. It seems as if she has simply disappeared from the face of the earth. She must



have perished, too.”

Hayria’s children tugged at their mother’s pantaloons while she stood deep in thought, holding the child in her arms; facing her was Ester with a crushed and grief-stricken look in her eyes.

“I’m old and only God knows what fate awaits us,” grandma Ester spoke, pointing at her fellow sufferers scattered round her, seated in the first spot they could find for themselves. “What happens to me is of no consequence, but this child must live.”

Grandma Ester started to cry. Hayria was crying too, sensing that this would be their last meeting.

“You have five of your own,” grandma Ester continued. “One more child will not be a burden to you; bring it up together with your own.”

Hayria simply nodded her head in approval, words completely escaping her in their shared grief.

“Should Bukica or I return, you will give her back; if not, tell her who her grandmother and parents were when she is old enough to understand.”

Hayria listened intently to everything that grandma Ester had to say to her. For a moment she placed Stella on the ground gently rubbing dirt into her soft face. On lifting the child up, Stella in her now soiled dress and with her smudged face could on no account be told apart from her own children. Hayria dared not cry any more. She took her leave of grandma Ester with deep respect and, holding Stella close to her, started straight for the camp gate. Her own children, making a terrible racket, ran at her side trying to get hold of her pantaloons. No one had counted the number of children she had taken inside the camp and the same happened as Hayria headed for the exit. Once outside, Hayria set off to Ada at a pace which her own children found difficult to keep up with.

“Miradia”, Hayria spoke gently smiling as she changed Stella into her new clothes, identical to the ones her

children wore. “That will be your name from now on.”

And from that moment Miradia could not be told apart from the Roma children in the village.

Miradia crawled round the clay-built house scurrying to catch up with the children in the yard. She soon forgot the few words she had learnt up till then and quickly picked up the Roma language. Like most village children she hardly knew that there was a war going on. She had a new mother and was growing up with her brothers and sisters, Hayria’s children. Being the youngest, she was looked after and loved dearly by all. Miradia had never been so happy in her life.

The smell of war could still be felt in the air, but the children joined gullibly in the celebrations of victory, unaware of any difference in their day to day life. Hayria asked Miradia to take a walk with her. It was spring and Miradia picked flowers on the way hoping her mother Hayria would be pleased with the bunch. When she handed the flowers to her, Hayria stopped and, kneeling down to face the child, spoke to her gently:

“Miradia is not your real name.” She stopped, sensing she didn’t have the strength to tell her everything all at once. She lowered herself onto the dewy grass beside the road and Miradia immediately climbed into her lap.

“Your name is Ester, the same as your grandmother’s, Ester Bahar. Your own mother used to call you Stella. Both your mother Bukica and father Blagoje were killed in the war.”

“Is your name Bukica?” asked Stella, alias Miradia

“No, mine is Hayria...”

“You are my mother.” Stella jumped to her feet and headed for the village. “It makes no difference what you are called.”

“Stand still!” Hayria ordered the girl. “Now repeat what I have just told you.”

Stella was told to repeat who was who all the way back



to the village since Hayria was determined to respect Stella's grandmother's wish and honour the memory of her real parents. Finally, Stella comprehended that this was something important and put in an effort to remember everything said. On reaching the first village houses, Stella ran off to play with the children.

Unfortunately, it seemed that some people had still not had enough of war. There was always something for them to do to taunt the lives of others as well as their own. Hayria's husband had some time before quarreled with his neighbour over a piece of land, mainly whose furrow had been eaten into. Some very bad words were exchanged and good neighbourly relations gave way to cursing and swearing. Even some threatening knives and axes were drawn out. Fortunately, the police came in time and put a stop to any eventual bloodshed.

"They've stolen a Jewish child!" exclaimed the offended neighbour.

The policemen looked at one another conscious that they had accidentally stumbled on evidence that gypsies do steal children, however implausible it might seem. They set apart the querulous neighbours and in the hope that they could reach a peaceable solution, they asked them to swear on their honour that their feud had come to an end. Then they set off to inform representatives of the once large Jewish Community in Priština of what they had learnt.

Josif Josifović, an activist of the Priština Jewish Community, together with a few member Jews immediately set off by horse-carriage to Ada. They quickly found Hayria's house. Standing inside the front door, her husband blocked their way in.

"How many children do you have?" Josif asked.

"Ask her", the husband replied curtly. "It's not my business to count the children."

Surrounded by her children, Hayria emerged behind her

husband's back.

"Six," she replied, looking distrustfully at the strangers standing in front of her house.

"We have been informed that you are hiding a Jewish child," Josif remarked.

"No, not hiding," Hayria pointed at the fair-skinned little girl. "She is mine."

"And how can this be?" Josif had not expected her to own up that the child was Jewish.

Hayria recounted the whole story of how Stella had come to live with them. She let them know that she had fulfilled her promise to grandma Ester and had told Stella who she was and who her parents had been.

"As they were both killed during the war and the grandmother perished in the death camp, Miradia is now mine," she concluded, oblivious to any possible problem.

"Thank you for saving the child, but she must come with us." By now Josif was convinced that the child had not been stolen. "We shall send her to Belgrade to check whether there are any living relatives."

Hayria would not hear of it, her Miradia was going nowhere.

Left with no other choice, Josif called the police to take the child away.

The policemen assured her that the child would be returned if no parent or relative willing to take Stella in was found. Nevertheless, nothing could console the grief-stricken Hayria, her feelings could not be subdued by vague promises.

Together with her brothers and sisters, Stella wept inconsolably. They all clung fast to Hayria's dress, but their feeble, infant arms could not save their sister Miradia. All that Hayria managed to do was to place two boiled eggs into her little hands so that she would have something to eat on the journey.



The coachman hastened the horses. Disheveled and in tears, Hayria ran up to the carriage, got hold of the reins and, pressing her body hard to it, tried to stop the horses. “I won’t let you take my child away,” she shouted while inside the carriage policemen held fast the weeping child.

Visibly shaken by everything that he had witnessed, Josif took Stella to his own house. Stella would not eat anything; but when hunger eventually overcame her, she took one boiled egg and ate it. They had to transfer her as soon as possible to Belgrade to a Jewish shelter for war orphans.

Hayria cursed the neighbour who was responsible for

her child’s removal. Had the neighbour kept quiet, Miradia would have stayed and spent her life with her second mother. She swore to herself that she would find Miradia and bring her back home.

“You have enough children as it is,” her enraged husband warned her. “Should you go now, don’t ever come back again.”

At the same time, Stella was admitted to the shelter in Belgrade. She would not speak to anyone. They washed her, changed her clothes, but she refused the food they offered her. She hid under a table, took the second boiled egg and ate it. Although she was hungry, she wanted nothing from these people.



Stella was told stories in the shelter, cared for by smiling nannies, all of whom encouraged her to join the other children in their games. Nothing could persuade her to join in. She simply did not react to anything happening round her. Finally, the thought that Stella most probably did not understand what was being said to her came to mind.

“Do we have a teacher from that part of the country?” the Shelter matron asked on hearing Stella murmur some very strange words. “This child doesn’t speak Serbian.”

Very quickly they found a woman Partisan from Kosovska Mitrovica who was delegated to the Shelter for social work. The woman kept turning round the room

Children, war orphans in Belgrade. By courtesy of Jewish History Museum in Belgrade



looking for the child. They pointed to a little girl hiding under the table. Slowly she knelt down on the floor beside the child and asked what her name was in a combination of Roma – Turkish. Stella, her eyes wide open now, looked in bewilderment at this woman: here, after all those days, was someone who knew how to talk to her.

“My name is Ester, but my mother Bukica and father Blagoje called me Stella. My grandmother’s name is Ester ...”

Stella could not finish saying everything that Hayria had taught her since the lady speaking to her had fainted. With great difficulty they managed to lift Bukica from the floor. On realizing that Bukica had found her lost child, the entire Shelter was simply overjoyed.

Bukica took Stella home. However, Stella wanted her mother, not Bukica. With utmost care and love Bukica tried to draw the child to her. Stella continued to retreat from her into a world of her own. She stubbornly refused to take the hand offered.

Hayria had started off on her long journey. In anger, her husband shouted that he would take in another wife and that there was no place for her in Ada anymore. Her motherly instincts led Hayria to Priština and from there to Belgrade. Finally, she managed to find and meet Stella and her mother. Tears swept away any happiness the occasion might have brought since all hope that she would bring Miradia back home with her had vanished. Hayria was fully aware that Stella had found her real mother. She was obliged to fulfill the promise given to grandma Ester. This was the last time Hayria saw Stella, alias Miradia.

As the years went by and Stella grew up, she bore in her heart a longing for Hayria. The day came when Bukica decided they should immigrate to Israel believing that it would be best for Stella. However, not even this could make Stella forget Hayria. The letters she wrote to Ada

were returned or simply went unanswered. True to his word, Hayria’s husband had not allowed her to return home and she had had to leave the village. But where had she gone to? No one knew. Stella was determined to find her. She wrote to everyone she thought could offer information or help her in her search. But Hayria could not be found. Finally, she heard of a historian, a Mr. Dželetović, who was well acquainted with the state of affairs in Kosovo. It was left to him to tell her the sad news; Hayria had died as a beggar in the streets of Priština.

Now Stella knew that there was to be no meeting with Hayria ever again. However, there was still one thing she could do to preserve the memory of her. She planted a tree in the Forest of Memories knowing that once it grew to its full height, its branches would give shelter to living beings: just like Hayria’s arms had once protected her.

Hayrija Imeri Mihaljić
awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 1991



The synagogue in Belgrade, home to Jewish children – war orphans, 1944



WHY EVER DID YOU COME BACK?



Mayer Kalderon

A reserve lieutenant, Mayer Kalderon, like all loyal citizens, joined the active service to defend the country. It was uncertain as to when Hitler's army would attack the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, but it was clear that reprisal was soon to follow the demonstrations of March 27th, 1941, when the Tripartite Pact was openly renounced. However, the April war was short lived and for Mayer, and the greater number of soldiers

of the King's Army, it ended abruptly. The declaration of the capitulation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia found Mayer's division stationed somewhere between mountains Ozren and Rtanj. In the subsequent general commotion proliferating among the Yugoslav King's Army ranks, the transition from soldier to prisoner was more or less instantaneous. While Mayer's unit was being taken to the provisional camp from which prisoners were sent on to labour camps in Germany, Mayer kept to the back of the column of prisoners and eventually disappeared into the greenery of the forest. Choosing freedom over prison camp, he soon found himself lost in the depths of the woods. He had no knowledge of the area he was in. He traversed the forest without any sense of direction. However, luck had not deserted him for he eventually crossed paths with Jelenko Stamenković, a notary from the village of Sesalac near Sokobanja. Jelenko was the kind of man who could never leave a living soul stranded in the woods, so he took Mayer to his home. He lived in a modest house with his wife Ljubica, his two

daughters and parents. Not knowing what had happened to Belgrade, Mayer's anxiety for his family grew with each passing day. The Kalderon family: mother - Ester, daughter - Mirijam, son - Josif and father - Mayer (before he was drafted) lived in a new house on Zvezdara in Belgrade. Mayer Kalderon, an electrical engineer, worked at Radio Belgrade station. In August 1941 he decided to thank Jelenko for his hospitality and head for Belgrade. Jelenko's father, grandpa Ljuba, decided to go with him for part of the journey and see him off. Together they travelled the long road to Čuprija, from where Mayer, dressed in peasants' clothes, set off on his own for Belgrade. Mayer journeyed over two hundred kilometres on foot before he reached his family. The happiness of homecoming was short lived. Being a Jew, Mayer was required to report immediately to the Special police. The same day he was registered, he was sent off to forced labour duty. He wore the yellow band on his arm, but always took it off as he approached the house they lived in. Mayer and Ester had introduced themselves as Slovenians to their neighbours. In October he was taken from his labour duties to the Topovske šupe concentration camp.

Franciska Fani Kralj was a Slovenian of Catholic faith. Once she fell in love with Mayer, she was resolved that there was nothing she wouldn't do for love. She converted to the Jewish faith, took the name Ester Avram and married Mayer in the Belgrade Synagogue in 1931. However, as a Slovenian converted to the faith of her husband, she was exempted from the norms of anti-Jewish laws. The children had yet to be spared from their impending fate. Mayer sent letters to Ester from Topovske šupe camp begging her to urgently reinstate her old documents and list the children into church registers as followers of the Catholic faith. It didn't take him long to convince her, as Fani daily witnessed what was happening with Jewish women and children. As yet, none of their neighbours knew of the children's



Jewish descent. Only their doctor, Ms. Gajić, knew who they were. The children fell ill with scarlet fever. The doctor decided that she should not quarantine the house. The posted announcement would certainly attract the attention of the gendarmerie and she did not want to jeopardize the safety of the children.

During Mayer's stay in his home, Jelenko Stamenković had learned that he and his family were Jews. Notwithstanding the danger of such a relationship, Jelenko was resolved to be true to this newly-founded friendship. On learning of Mayer's imprisonment he was determined to provide food for Fani and the children from his farm. In her house he came across a large family of Fani's Slovenian relatives. They were refugees living in Mayer's home. From the month of November 1941, however, no more food was taken to the concentration camp. Mayer had perished in front of a firing squad.

"Why ever did you come back?" Fani repeated ceaselessly in despair once she realized that she had lost her husband forever.

Fani managed to obtain new documents for her children from the Catholic Church in exchange for a large amount of money. Nevertheless, they lived in constant fear that they would be discovered. Jelenko could not detach himself from their predicament so he offered to take the children to Sesalac.

In March 1943 in the company of the children, Jelenko reached Žitkovac, a tiny village near the Aleksinac coal mine. It was well before dawn and for a moment Merika, as they now called

Mirjam, thought that the stars had fallen from the sky. In the darkness she had caught sight of the glowing carbide lamps on the helmets of the miners, who were passing on their way to work. As a measure of precaution, Jelenko decided that from there on they would go on foot. That meant that they had to walk some twenty kilometres of the way. Jelenko carried the three-year-old Josif in his arms, while Merika, only eight, ran playfully beside them. However, unaccustomed to long walks especially down country lanes, she soon found that she could hardly keep up with them. She tried to stifle her fatigue by running from one tree to another fantasizing that the end of the road was right there with the next one she reached. Finally, they arrived at Sesalac. Only the

Stamenković family knew of their Jewish descent. The rest of the village was unaware of the fact. They believed that they were refugees from Belgrade. Some two months later Fani joined them.

Although crammed in a single room, they were much safer there than in Belgrade. Fani was eager to partake in all domestic chores and kept house together with Ljubica. She was an amateur seamstress and was able to sew the much needed clothing. Footwear was a problem since children's feet grow fast. Fani managed to put together a pair of "opanke", i.e., sow-hide traditional Serbian shoes, for Merika.

"Where are your shoes?" she asked Merika crossly, seeing that the child was running barefoot in the yard.



Mirjam, Ester and Josif Kalderon



Ljubica and Jelenko Stamenković

Merika turned. For a moment she couldn't remember where she had left the shoes. All too soon she saw the house pet dog licking his paws, evidently satiated. One shoe was forever lost. Mother could do nothing else but sew a new one.

Life was by no means a quiet country idyll. Always on the alert, Ljubica would catch sight of the signal scarf inside the tailor's window. It was a sign by which Uncle Dragi, whose house stood in view of their backyard, warned them of approaching enemy soldiers. Jelenko's house was built atop a stream ravine. On the other side of the gorge, hidden in the rising forest, was his shepherd's log cabin. Fani and the children would find shelter there each time various armies passed by.

On one occasion they had to stay in the cabin for quite some time and food became scarce. Fani sent Merika into the village hoping she would return with a basket of food. The ravine bed was the fastest way to the village and since she was the smallest, Merika could approach the house unnoticed. Time passed and there was no sign of Merika. Fani began to cry, regretting her decision to send the child into the village. All at once Merika was standing in front of her with a basket full of food in

hand.

"Now where have you been traipsing all this time?" mother asked, overjoyed that the child had come back safe and sound.

It turned out that Merika had taken a wrong turn where the ravine bed branched out and had unfortunately run straight into three men, chests adorned with cartridge belts and rifles in hand.

"The men wore tall, black, fur hats", Merika recounted. "They asked a lot of questions and finally let me pass."

The days of war passed in eluding danger and hiding. When there were no enemy armies staying in the village, life in Jelenko's household passed in harmony and ceaseless playing of their and Fani's children. Finally, the war came to an end. It was a highly emotional parting. Vukosava and Vidosava, Jelenko's and Ljubica's daughters had grown so close to Josif and Merika that they looked on them as their own. Fani and the children had to return to Belgrade but their farewell, as time passed, proved not to be a definite parting.

Ljubica and Jelenko Stamenković
both awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 2005





THE GOOD PEOPLE OF ŽUPA

Ladislav and Julia Deutsch completed their medical studies in 1937. Ladislav was conscripted and sent to Macedonia to complete his military service. Julia followed him to Macedonia. She worked as an intern in Skopje. When in 1939 they approached the Ministry of Health in Belgrade to ask for positions in the Serbian countryside, the Ministry willingly complied with their



Dr. Ladislav Deutsch

request as people in general sought employment in towns. They were posted in the small town of Aleksandrovac in the Župa district. A one-storied house was placed at their disposal. The ground-floor was divided between the consulting room and the pharmacy while the two rooms on the floor above became their dwelling space. Ladislav was given a salary; Julia worked for a modest fee, although the workload of the practice was shared equally among the spouses. Their lack of experience was compensated by diligence and an acute sense of responsibility toward their patients. Very soon they gained the appreciation of the town folk.

When the government of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was toppled in the aftermath of the 1941 March demonstrations, Ladislav was called up to join the army forces. It somehow happened that at the same time Julia's father set off from Zagreb to visit his daughter and son-in-law. Soon upon his arrival, as a result of an existing grave heart condition, he died sometime in the night between April 2nd and 3rd. He was buried in the town cemetery

and a great number of town-folk attended the ceremony. In this manner the people of the town expressed their appreciation for their doctors' attentiveness. Her father's death was to be the first misfortune to befall Julia. Soon events would pile one upon another and profoundly change her life. Yugoslavia was invaded and anti-Jewish regulations enforced immediately. Ladislav was obliged to hand over the gun he had in his possession to local authorities. A few days later, Borivoje - Bora Bondžić, a clerk in the town hall, knocked on their door just as night was falling.

"Keep it, Doctor." Returning the gun, Bora's only comment was: "If one is put into a position where his life is being threatened, then one has the right to defend oneself."

At the time, neither of them knew that it would be Bora who would be in a position to help the Deutschs in their gravest hour.

In June 1941 Ladislav and Julia were evicted from their house. Seeing them standing in the street, the local policeman was so moved that he invited them to his house. The house was at some distance from the town and he lived there with his pregnant wife and five children. The Deutschs were given the part of the house that was, at the time, unoccupied. They had free lodging, but it did not come without certain grievances. The policeman liked his liqueur and when drunk, would beat his wife. One evening an officer of the borough council came to the house to inform them of the forthcoming listing of Jews. He suggested the Deutschs leave Aleksandrovac for a couple of days, so that he could write in the report that there were no Jews living in the town. The Deutschs were quick to pack all they needed and soon left the house. Initially they wanted to reach Ladislav's family, but the already imposed ban for Jews to travel by train precluded their plan. They could do nothing else but return to the policeman's house.



From their first days in the town, the Deutschs had made friends with the veterinary, the teacher and the Orthodox priest. Julia still had some of the coffee her late father had brought them and they frequently entertained their friends. When the council officer came round again in December 1941 to tell them that they had to leave Aleksandrovac immediately since the Gestapo had begun a search for Jews in hiding, it was the priest who came up with a solution. He had a colleague serving on mountain Željina where the Germans had not ventured during wintertime.

The Deutschs had new dwellings. The young priest, and his still younger wife, accepted them in the tradition of benevolence and hospitality. The church, priest's house and school were at a reasonable distance from the village houses scattered over the mountainside. For some time the Deutschs went practically unnoticed by the mountain inhabitants. A group of officers of the King's army, who had absconded into the woods upon the army's surrender, attached themselves to the Chetnik movement. They, too, were staying in the vicinity on mountain Željina. When they heard that the doctor was staying at the priest's house, the Chetniks persuaded Ladislav to best join up with them since his life was in constant danger, and furthermore, they were in need of a physician. And so Ladislav went off with the Chetniks while Julia moved to the village where the wives of the Serbian officers were staying. She shared a house with a woman with five children. Each house had to post up a list with the names of all the occupants staying in it. Beside her war name, Radojka, Julia had no documents with which she could hide her Jewish origin.



Dr. Julia Deutsch

It was winter when, one day, Bulgarian army units came to the village. They were searching for Partisans and Jews in hiding. Julia was left with no time to run from the village so she hid in the attic of the house. Shivering from the cold, she stayed there for some hours before the Fascists finally left. On hearing what had happened, Ladislav immediately requested that Julia join the men, convinced she would be safer with them. From then on, Julia began a life of survival in harsh mountain conditions, hiding in the forest and caves which became their only living space.

As the spring of 1942 approached and the woods turned green, Julia tried to forget the hardships of wintertime she and her husband had lived through. She was pregnant. However, the seasons of the year change quickly and Julia best felt this when the mountainside was blanketed with snow in early autumn. The intense marches, mostly by night, lack of food and clothing were each day becoming harder for doctor Julia to endure. Major Kosanović, the Chetnik commander, decided to move Julia in with a villager where she would stay and give birth to her child. One night, accompanied by a village boy, Julia left the mountain and reached Boturiće where she was put up in the house of Stana and Predrag Zdravković.

The three Zdravković brothers lived with their families in the Boturića hamlet. Predrag was the eldest and Julia was given a room to stay in his house. During daytime she never left her room. The much needed petroleum for the lamp wick was becoming scarcer by the day and in order to preserve it, they ate dinner in the early evening hours. To make use of the daylight they rose early in the morning. Breakfast



Predrag and Stana Zdravković

was eaten and then everyone went to see to their chores. Since it was winter, the field work had abated and the women sat round the stove keeping warm and teaching Julia to knit. Julia was content. It had been a while since she had slept in a clean bed, her feet free of boots, and her body unperturbed by lice which she had inadvertently brought with her from the woods.

And then, once again, Borivoje - Bora Bondžić came into their lives. Being in a position to obtain timely information about enemy operations, he sent word to Predrag that a raid of their village was in preparation. Someone had reported that a pregnant Jewish woman was hiding in the Zdravkovićs' house. Bora managed to find a new shelter for Julia, but the villager who was supposed to take her in, did not appear at the designated place of meeting at the agreed time. Julia stayed at Bora's house for a week. Grozdana, Bora's wife, was constantly worried about the doctor's condition since she could give birth to the child at any moment. Germans frequently passed down the road near their house and it had become their habit to come into the yard and fetch water from the well before they continued on their

way. It was only a matter of time before Julia would be detected, especially once the baby was born. Finally, Bora decided to move Julia to the village of Latkovac where she could stay with Čedomir Knežević. In order to leave Aleksandrovac and head for Latkovac, they had to pass the full length of the town. Julia was placed inside an ox-driven cart. Fearing that she might go into labour right there in the cart, she strained herself to endure the bumpy journey. Luckily, they managed to reach Čedomir's house.

At the same time, a real drama was unraveling in Boturića hamlet. No Jewish woman had been found in Predrag's house, but not far from there another woman had given birth to a child. It took much convincing to save her from being taken prisoner as the reported Jewess. Predrag was, nonetheless, apprehended and taken



Grozdana and Borivoje Bondžić



to Kruševac. Details of the reported incident concerning the Jewess had to be checked out. He was detained in an improvised prison inside a former bakery. Some hundred people, awaiting execution by gunfire, were locked up inside the flour storage space. They were to be executed in retaliation for the killing of a few German soldiers. The guard, who came to take the prisoners to their execution, had learned that no evidence of Predrag's guilt had been found, so he let Predrag pass from the storage space into a secreted part of the bakery to hide there till the doomed prisoners were taken away. When the last of them had left, Predrag was freed. He returned home with a head-full of hair white as snow. It was not the flour that had turned the hair white, but the horror of what he had lived through in the course of one single day.



Slobodan Knežević

On hearing that Predrag had been arrested, Čedomir Knežević immediately sent word to Bora: "Take her away from here, Bora."

His wife also insisted that Julia leave the house at once since she was not willing to lose her husband. Fear is immune to any kind of reasoning. Bora finally summoned up Slobodan and Milenija Knežević, who lived in Latkovac as well. Also, a young officer arrived from the woods and sped up the relocation. Fully aware of what was going on in their neighbourhood, Milenija and Slobodan gave a warm welcome to Julia, who was on the brink of giving birth.

It turned out that they didn't have to wait long as Julia went into labour that very night. Slobodan fetched a midwife from Aleksandrovac, who finally brought Julia's child into the world. The Deutchson, Ilan, was born on March 4th, 1943. Among the first to visit mother and child was Predrag Zdravković. In keeping with custom, he placed a large sum of money under the newborn's pillow. Julia was both delighted and surprised by his visit.



Milenija Knežević

"I've come to let you know that I have no ill feelings toward you," Predrag told her.

Unfortunately, Julia could not stay with Milenija and Slobodan for long. By the end of that year she changed more than twenty residences. Bora was generally the principal organizer, while it was left to Slobodan to take Julia and the baby, perched on the back of a donkey, to their new shelter. Out of their many hosts, very few ever really knew whom they had taken into their house. In most cases it sufficed to say that Julia, alias Radojka, and her baby were persecuted by the Germans. There were also times when Bora had to be rough.

"There's no need for you to know where we're going," he would answer brusquely to those who asked too many questions. "Keep your mouth shut! We are all at risk here!"

One day Bora came to fetch Julia and Ilan. He took them to a man called Rale. Rale's house was located in a spot which even the Germans in World War I had never reached. What this fact warranted didn't matter that much to Julia; more important was the realization



that she could at last settle down and rest.

Finally, liberation came. Everyone rejoiced, but it was a short lived happiness for Ladislav. His death in 1945 cut short the family bliss he shared with his son, Ilan, and wife, Julia. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Zemun.

**Grozdana and Borivoje Bondžić,
Milenija and Slobodan Knežević,
Stana and Predrag Zdravković,**
all awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 1980



*Various types of
Righteous Among the Nations medals
that were issued since 1963*



IN WAR EXPECT DANGER FROM ALL CORNERS

The majority of Belgrade's Sephardim Jews lived in Dorćol prior to World War Two. The family of BenAvram Saul - his wife, Ester, nicknamed Netika, and their three children: the eldest, Chaim, born in 1922, Rosa, known to all as Ruža and 12 at the time, and Josef, two years her junior - lived at 13, Jevrejska Street. Their grandmother, Barbara, lived with them as well. A large number of Netika's relatives also lived in the same building. Her sister, Matilda, was married to Josef Josifović. The pair had no children of their own and Ruža was their favourite. Two of Netika's brothers, Josef Judić, with his wife and three children, and Uroš Judić, with his wife and son, also had flats in the building.

Ruža and Josef went to the elementary school close to the house they lived in. After the signing of the Tripartite Pact and the subsequent rejection of the alliance with the Axis forces in the demonstrations of March 27th, 1941, it became absolutely clear that Hitler and his collaborators were going to attack the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The teacher instructed the pupils that the only bomb shelter in the neighbourhood was the one inside the school, and that they should run to the school yard on hearing the air-raid sirens. Ten days later the bombing of Belgrade began. Both children and their parents sought shelter in the school; Serbs, indigenous Germans, Jews, Hungarians, all packed together in the small space.

Netika had yet another brother, who lived in Kragujevac with his family, as well as another sister, Lenka, married to Avram Levi. Lenka and Avram lived in Belgrade in the Stari Djeram area. Since Kragujevac was too far and Stari Djeram was at the time on the Belgrade periphery, the large family decided to seek shelter with Lenka and Avram. To reach their sister, they had to walk the length

of Dušanova Street, then along Džordža Vašingtona Street, up Kraljice Marije Street, to Vukov spomenik Square, and from there, straight down Kralja Aleksandra Street until they reached Stari Djeram. All these streets named after monarchs and notables, kings and queens, were now reduced to rubble. To the odd-looking line of Jews it seemed as if the ruins, the dead and the wounded were propelling them to hurry on. Although it was crowded at Lenka's, they all stayed on since that part of the city had been spared from bombs. Once the bombs stopped falling on Belgrade, they all returned to Dorćol.

Before long, Yugoslavia surrendered and the German military administration instated in Belgrade at once began introducing and applying Fascist laws stemming from their ideology. The first to feel the brunt of their rule were Jews and Communists; the Communists for their organized resistance against the occupying forces, and the Jews for the simple reason that they were Jews. Jews were made to wear yellow bands on their sleeves and from the first were sent to compulsory forced labour duties. Incessantly exposed to degradation, both verbal and physical, they were ordered to clear debris, pull the dead out from the crumbling ruins, and perform the most humiliating jobs. Among them were Saul BenAvram and his son, Chaim. When the first camp was established on Banjica, Jewish forced labourers stopped returning to their homes.

One day Chaim came home unexpectedly. He wanted to see his family once more. As he was taking leave of his mother, he told her that he would try to escape from camp and head for territories under Italian rule, from where he hoped to find his way to the Palestine. Chaim's girlfriend lived on Zvezdara. He wanted to see his intended before he left. Before he could bring himself to say goodbye to her, he told her of his plans. The girl's father strongly disapproved of the notion of returning to camp. He told Chaim to flee instantly be-



cause it was his one chance to save his life. “I promised the German officer that I would return to camp if he let me go see my mother,” was Chaim’s reply, and with that, he returned to the camp. Chaim never reached the Palestine. At the same time, no one knew what was happening to his father, Saul, nor of his whereabouts. He had stopped returning home and there was no trace of him in the camp either.

Throughout this period the Germans were engaged in setting up new camps for Jews. After Banjica, a camp was established in Topovske šupe. From these camps Jews were taken to Jajinci, Jabuka and other sites of execution where they were eliminated. Up to October 1941, the men were routinely killed in mass executions. In the late autumn of 1941, the Germans established the largest camp – camp Sajmište on the Zemun bank of the river Sava. It was intended as a means to the final solution for the remainder of Jews still alive in Belgrade and elsewhere. The Roma were the first to be imprisoned in the camp. Once Jews taken into custody began to arrive in Sajmište, the Roma survivors were freed from the camp to make room for Jewish women and children, and for their old and ailing. The imprisonment of Jews in camp Sajmište began on December 8th, 1941. Some families managed to provide horse-drawn carts that made rounds of the buildings they were leaving. Small bundles, containing basic items future camp inmates were allowed to bring with them, were collected in these carts. Jews were further ordered to tie together the key to their residence and a piece of cardboard stating their address with string, and hand both over to the



Pal Zsámboki

Special police. The summons to report to the Special police for Jews, from where they would be taken in trucks to the camp, was also handed over to the copious family living at 13, Jevrejska Street.

Pal Zsámboki, a Hungarian nicknamed “uncle Pavle”, also lived in Dorćol. His home was in the neighbourhood of BenAvram’s family house. Uncle Pavle, a shoe-

maker, was born in Kanjiža in 1895. Early on in his life he had been sent to Vienna to study the craft of shoemaking. Soon noticed for his modelling skills, his fame as a craftsman spread. Hearing of his skills, the people from the Belgrade shoe factory told him how they would like to see him return to Serbia; the Djonoviés, proprietors of the factory, unequivocally invited him to work for them. The conditions they offered were exceptionally agreeable and Pavle accepted. He came to Belgrade bringing the latest collection of stylish European shoes. Before long, he set up his own shop and began to manufacture shoes on his own. His workshop was on the corner of Visokog Stefana and Dubrovačka Street. His business was blooming and on occasion he would ask the nice boy, Josef BenAvram, to deliver his goods to clients. Josef was a diligent

boy and appreciated the extra money he received as tips from satisfied customers. Uncle Pavle came to know the entire BenAvram family. From his arrival he had also come to know other Dorćol inhabitants beside the BenAvrams. He was well respected both as a man and a craftsman and made many friends among the members of the community he had come to live in. When war broke out, due to his excellent knowledge of German,



he was requested by the Gestapo to act as interpreter for them. He helped his fellow citizens as best he could, and when the transport from Dorćol to camp Sajmište began, he came to say goodbye to his friends. He could not come to terms with the fact that children, Josef and his sister, Ruža, among them, would be taken to camp.

He suggested to Netika that he would take them all to a safe place until the present state of affairs settled down. Netika would not let granny go to camp alone but agreed that Pavle should provide shelter for the children. At their parting Ruža held on to her mother's dress and would not be separated from either her mother or grandmother. Josef was disposed to go with uncle Pavle, believing it to be a temporary solution by which they, being children, would be spared the drudge of life in camp. Netika told Ruža how uncle Pavle was going to buy her a wonderful present and finally managed to make her go with her brother. Before they parted, Pavle asked for the keys of their apartment, instructing Netika to tell the Special police that she had been living in one of the flats of her relatives. Netika set off on foot with her relatives and mother to report to the Special police while Pavle walked with the children to a store to buy Ruža the promised gift. He returned the children to their flat in the early evening hours.

Josef and Ruža could not stay alone in the flat for long, so Pavle came up with a solution. He asked his acquaintance Vida, who lived near Bajloni market, to take the children in. She agreed and the children came to stay with her. Pavle took care of the children and helped Vida as much as he could. Soon they were faced with problems.



Josef Zsámboki

At a certain point of time after war broke out, Pavle had helped Joca Ćirić, a young shoemaker out of a job due to the war. However, his young colleague had taken to drinking. Joca's wife, Jovanka, could no longer keep the household running since all the money they had was spent on Joca's new habit. Joca was aware that Pavle had found a home for the Jewish children with aunt Vida and began blackmailing him. Pavle covered Joca's brandy expenses on a daily basis to stop him from reporting the children's presence to the police. In view of the fact that all those harbouring Jews were equally exposed to danger, Joca assertively kept asking Pavle for larger sums of

money.

Pavle was well aware that his protégées had become exposed to grave danger and decided to take them out of Belgrade. Pavle's brother in Kanjiža had two daughters, Mariska and Ilonka, both married and living in Novi Kneževac. The two family households shared one house. Ilonka was of frail health, but Mariska immediately agreed to take Ruža in. At the beginning of February 1942, Ruža was the first to set off on the journey to Banat. Uncle Pavle had friends willing to take them across the Danube. Travelling from one place to another presented no problem for Pavle, but with no identity papers of her own, Ruža was at risk. Pavle learnt of a captain who was preparing to sail for Banat in his small boat with a cargo of empty wine barrels that had to be returned. The plan was to place Ruža inside a barrel below deck. As they were about to set off, a German patrol unit came up to the vessel. On boarding the boat, they immediately descended into the cargo-hold and began tapping each barrel in their search for



smuggled goods. As they were nearing the barrel with Ruža in it, the captain appeared in a fluster below deck and told the Germans to come out at once. The air-raid siren had been sounded while they were in the cargo-hold. Although they had heard no siren, the Germans marched away from the boat at top speed to seek shelter. The captain hadn't heard any siren either, but the boat likewise sailed off at top speed. Ruža and uncle Pavle arrived safely at the home of Mariska Csanádi.

Mariska welcomed Ruža to her home and treated her as a daughter. Their neighbours had been told that cousin Ruža was the daughter of Mariska's uncle from Kanjiža and that she was going to stay with them for a while. Mariska gradually taught the city girl basic household chores. Ruža was learning how to wash clothes, to separate the whites from coloured laundry. Ruža also learned to cook and Mariska often took her to the market where they sold eggs and other farm products. Ruža soon found a friend in the neighbourhood, but was forbidden to speak of her real origin. By then, she had learned the first rule of war: to listen carefully to what she was told and to check her words.

Josef had stayed behind in Belgrade with aunt Vida. He could not go to school but would on occasion play with the children from the new neighbourhood. At that time, hunger was his worst enemy. Grateful for any food that came his way, Josef succumbed to a piece of bread with lard spread on it. Seeing him playing in the street, a neighbour had treated him to it and Josef, without giving a second thought to the fact that the food was not kosher

by Jewish norms, munched at it vigorously. It was not everyday that he was offered bread and lard.

At times, Josef would take his harmonica and practice playing on it since the violin his father had bought for him had disappeared together with other household items from their flat. One day, while crouching behind the door of a German canteen in Dorćol, Josef began to play Lilly Marlene. He had heard German soldiers singing the tune and had taught himself to play it on the harmonica. As he played the beloved song of German soldiers, a hush settled over the canteen. A German stood up from a table and found the little musician behind the door. From then on, Josef was no longer hungry. Each day he came to the canteen to play a song or two and went off with pots of cooked meals. There was food enough to spare for the hunger-ridden neighbours, who had a hard time finding something to eat.

However, Joca, the drunkard, would not let uncle Pavle alone. Each day he came for his liquor money and when on one occasion Pavle happened to be without any money on him, Joca threatened to go to the Gestapo at once and report both Pavle and the boy. It was August 1942. Joca was adamant and any attempt at reasoning with him was fruitless. Promised that he would get a double sum the next day, Joca, nevertheless, set off for the Gestapo. Pavle followed him and once he realized that Joca was actually heading for Gestapo headquarters, he hastened home. He found Josef playing in the street and since there was no time to pack, Pavle only informed aunt Vida of what had happened, and they were on



György and Marija - Mariška Canadi and son Endre 1942.



their way to the station to board a train for Pančevo. Left with no alternative, uncle Pavle mustered up his courage and, with the self-assurance of a man working for the Gestapo, he went ahead with his task so confidently that no one ever asked him who the boy beside him was. Thus, uncle Pavle and Josef also found themselves in Novi Kneževac in Mariska Csanádi's home. It was the one time Josef and Ruža found themselves together. Although a mere three kilometres apart, the two of them would next meet after liberation. The river Tisa was a boundary line between the regions established after the division of Yugoslavia. The river was also a line that separated brother from sister. The Tisa fishermen took Pavle and Josef across to the opposite bank of the river, from where they set off on foot for Kanjiža, which was under Hungarian occupation at the time.

In his native town, Kanjiža, Pavle had a copious family and their accommodation presented no problem. The following day Pavle went to report to the local police. He told them how he and his "son" Josef had fled from Belgrade since it was becoming far too dangerous for Hungarians to live there. Inventing a "wife, who had been killed in the bombing of Belgrade", he told the police of his decision to return to his hometown knowing it would be safer for both him and "his" child. The police believed his story and issued all the necessary papers for Pavle and his son. However, as Josef had no knowledge of Hungarian, Pavle hastened to take him away from Kanjiža. He left him with his relatives, Janos and Erszika Koso, on their farmstead. They were told the same story as the police. In fact, no one in Kanjiža was aware that little Josef was a Jew except for an attorney-at-law, who was also Jewish.

Living on the farmstead, Josef learned Hungarian swiftly. Although still a child, he always found a way to be of help to his hosts. Pigs were slaughtered each Friday and the meat was sold in Budapest. They had flocks of geese on the farm and, just as everywhere else in the world;



Patriarch Pavle in the company of Rabbi Cadik Danon at the Righteous Among the Nations Award presentation ceremony

goose liver was a treasured article on the Budapest market. Josef was no longer hungry. The one thing he could not do was leave the farmstead. However, his adoptive father came to visit regularly. It was on one of these visits that the two of them heard of the end of the war.

Ruža was a young lady of fifteen when the Russians liberated Novi Kneževac. The joy of liberation was dimmed when Russian soldiers began raping women and girls in the liberated town. Ruža had come to spend much of her time in the section of the house where Ilonka, Mariska's sister, and her husband, Janči-bači, lived. She happened to be sleeping in that part of the house when the incident with Russian soldiers happened. The drunken Russians barged into the house searching for women to entertain themselves with. Janči swiftly hid Ilonka in the pantry and threw a blanket over Ruža, who was sleeping in an infant's bed. Highly displeased, the Russians left the house. Persistent in his desire, one of them stayed on, saying he would not leave until he saw who was sleeping in the small bed. As he drew near the bed, Janči approached him from behind and hit him on



the head with a pole he found close by. He packed the Russian into a sack and carried him to the mill across from their house. No one ever spoke of the incident again.

Out of their numerous families, Ruža and Josef were the only ones to survive the horrors of Nazi persecution. Forever grateful to their saviour, Josef kept Pavle's surname and to this day has remained Josef Zsámboki..

Pal Zsámboki and Marija-Mariška Čanadi
both awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 1995



MY DEAR GODFATHER, MY FRIEND

Once the Kingdom of Yugoslavia capitulated, the banovina (province) of Croatia expanded its borders. The Ustashi regime of Ante Pavelić created the Independent State of Croatia by annexing Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Vrbas federal unit, and Srem region to Croatia. The newly-founded border with Serbia went along the rivers Danube and the Sava. Zemun became an ISC border town. From the beginning of the occupation there was a strong Resistance movement active in Zemun. Together with the Germans, the Ustashi and *volksdeutsche*s persecuted Jews, Communists and all others opposed to the new regime. Soon Resistance movement exploits escalated from mere propaganda. Deeds of terror were paid back with terror; Martin Volf, a notorious Ustashi, was assassinated; so were Valter Filipović, Chief of Ustashi police, Severović, and others. Jews from Zemun became members of the Resistance movement. As a rule, they were also members of the Hashomer Hatzair: Danilo and Josip Fogel, Josip Berherano, Bež Albahari, Edita Pisker, Erna Rot, Miroslav Klapfer, Ester Demajo, and many others. Most of them were waiting for the “liaison” that would take them to the Partisans, but this took time. In the meantime, they were ordered to forced labour duty. Despite this daily toil, they maintained regular contacts and took part in Resistance activities.

Antun Benčević lived at 26a, Sindjelićeva Street with his mother, a post office clerk who generally worked two shifts, and his grandmother, who saw to the running



Antun Benčević

of their household. Mira Cvijović, Antun’s cousin, lived with them throughout her years of schooling.

At the beginning of July 1942 a Resistance member, Evica Frlog, working under cover in the Ustashi police, informed Mira Cvijović that a major rounding up of Jews was in preparation. Jews were to be arrested and deported to camps Jasenovac and Stara Gradiška.

Mira, a prewar member of the SKOJ (Association of Communist Youths of Yugoslavia), immediately informed her senior comrades of future events. She was instructed to obtain as many passes as she could from Evica Frlog so that a number of Zemun Jews could be evacuated. Antun, nicknamed Braca, had joined up with the Resistance movement at the start of the war. The house they lived in had become a place of refuge for numerous Communists and persecuted Jews. Braca frequently stood watch in front of the house while Mira held meetings with members of their local SKOJ committee. Eventually, Evica managed to steal a number of passes with a German stamp and handed them over to

Mira. Mira immediately called a meeting of the SKOJ membership and entrusted members with passes which were to be delivered to certain Jews. Unfortunately, there was not an adequate number of passes for all the Jews, and even if there had been, such a move would have been too obvious to the enemy. Instructions were, therefore, given to prepare shelter with trusted people and members of the Resistance for those Jews waiting to be transferred to Partisan units. Braca asked for a pass for the dentist, Dr. Edmund Klajman. He was granted the pass.

Dr. Klajman was a bachelor who lived alone. His moth-



er and sister were in Poland. The minute Braca arrived, he told Dr. Klajman: "I have been informed that Zemun Jews are going to be arrested in a few days, so I have come to take you to a Partisan unit. This pass I have with me will save your life." Dr. Klajman thought over what Braca had said and replied in a weary voice: "Braca, you are too late. Had you come yesterday, I might have gone with you. I have learned from my friends that my mother and sister were deported to a camp and killed there. Life has no meaning for me any longer." Once he told him of his misery, Dr. Klajman was silent.

Braca stood, undecided what to do next. He asked Dr. Klajman if he knew of anyone whom the pass should be given to. It would be a Jewish life saved. Dr. Klajman took Braca to a house in Rajačić Street where the Jewish family Belah had found shelter. The Belahs were refugees from Stara Pazova and had settled into a humble flat. On entering the flat, the doctor and Braca came across mother and father Belah, their two daughters, Roza and Sara, and son, Pavle. Braca told them why they had come. Mr. Belah asked them to wait in the yard while the family decided what to do. Dr. Klajman returned home, but Braca waited for an answer standing by the garden well. "Save our son," was Mr. Belah's reply when he came outside after some ten minutes had passed. "This is our decision," he said as tears fell down his face. Braca had to go inside to take Pavle with him. Pavle was saying goodbye to his sisters and parents while Braca urged him on since they still had to reach a safe place for Pavle to stay. He took him to 5, Nikolajevska Street, to the house of Mirjana Uglješić, from where activists were

taken to Partisan units. Once at Mirjana's, Braca filled in Pavle's pass inserting Hinko Hilić on the name line. He forged the signature of the chief of police over the official stamp. After spending a couple of days at Mirjana's, Pavle was transferred to the Partisans.

Within just a few days a maximum number of Jews had to be hidden to avoid imprisonment and deportation to death-camps. The Jews were placed in a number of homes. Alfred Kačka, Miroslav Klopfer and Magda Frojdenfeld were hiding in the attic of the Benčević house. Food was scarce, but the little they had, was provided by the family with ingenuity. An angler, Braca often caught fish in the Danube. He had a fishing rod

and a sačma (a round fishing net with lead weights at the edges) at his side at all times. He brought the fish he caught to his grandmother, who then prepared it for all the house inmates adding a few potatoes, onions and cabbage that Braca obtained making rounds of gardens in Upper Zemun. When the first group of Jews was transferred from their house to the Partisans, new tenants sent by the party committee came to their attic. This went on up to September 1st, 1942, when Mira Cvijović was arrested. During the night between September 1st and 2nd, and in the next few days some 2500 young people, male and female, were arrested in Zemun and taken to Sremska Mitrovica and Vukovar prisons. Mira was killed by Viktor Tomić inside the prison during the night between 7th and 8th September. Evica Frlog was arrested as well for the theft of the passes. Tortured and finally killed, she never betrayed a single member of the Resistance. Braca joined the Partisans in 1944 and returned home



Mirjana Uglješić nee Barbulović



a year later. He immediately joined community service brigades. He picked corn, felled trees, provided and distributed fuel for hospitals and the general public. Productivity of work was raised by zealous achievers and unit competitiveness was encouraged, but there was not enough food to go around. A soup kitchen was opened for former Resistance



Mira Cvijović

activists and Partisans at the Central Hotel. Braca was queuing for his dinner when a uniformed Partisan officer with medals on his chest pulled him out of the queue and embraced him. “My dear Godfather, my friend”, he spoke with merriment. “It’s me, Hinko Hilić, the man whose life you saved”. Pavle Belah had returned from battle. He inquired about his parents and sisters, but all that Braca could tell him was that they had not returned from camp. Pavle wanted to know whether any family documents or photos had been saved, but Braca knew nothing that could be of help to Pavle. What Braca did remember was the Rajšić photo shop next to the house the Belah family had hidden in. They set off to check whether anything had been left with Mr. Rajšić. The photographer was overjoyed that they had come. “Thank God you’re here,” he exclaimed. He had negatives of the Belah family. He hadn’t dared make the pictures fearing that the occupiers might detect the Jews in the pictures. It was now revealed that when Pavle had gone off to the Partisans, old Mr. Belah had asked photographer Rajšić to take pictures of the whole

family. If Pavle should return from the war, Mr. Rajšić was instructed to hand them over to their son as a family keepsake. In the meantime Rajšić had developed the film with photos of the entire Belah family dressed in their finest attire. He had also taken individual photos of the two sisters, Roza and Sara. And that was all that remained of the Belah family. Pavle was overwhelmed with a deep sense of loneliness. Some years later he immigrated to Israel in order to forget the past and start a new life for himself. He never forgot his loved ones and managed to raise a family of his own. His marriage was blessed with two daughters who were named Roza and Sara after their aunts.

Antun Benčević and Mira Cvijović
both awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 1994



Hotel Central, Zemun, before the WW2 and today



A PARTING WITHOUT GOODBYE

“Have you heard that Szeged was bombarded?” Stevan Deneberg asked his wife, Hilda, visibly concerned.

Hilda, nee Hauser, responded by hugging her two sons closer. Mirko, a boy of 11, and Pavle, 8 years old, just looked at their speechless, grief-stricken mother.

Szeged was close to Subotica where the Deneberg family lived. World War Two was coming to its end and the German High Command was increasingly strained. Advancing from the East, the Red Army troops were pressing forward to Berlin. Russian troops were spreading out like a lady’s fan across Eastern Europe. It was obvious to a great many that the dream of a Third Reich was collapsing, but no one in Germany had the courage to admit it. Hitler’s plan to eradicate the entire Jewish population had not yet been completed. The millions of dead were still not enough for the Nazi fanatics and, as if in a frenzy, they continued with the obliteration of an innocent people. Unsatisfied with the performance of the Hungarian authorities in solving the Jewish question, German troops occupied their former ally, Hungary, at the beginning of 1944. Up to the German occupation, the Hungarian authorities had protected Jews who lived in large numbers in Budapest and other towns across the country. They considered Subotica - Szabadka as they called it - their own town. Before the war nearly six thousand Jews lived in Subotica.



Klara Baić with her daughter Margita

This fact could not escape the attention of the hardened Nazi, Eichmann. Acting on Himmler’s orders, he immediately began solving the Jewish question in Hungary. With the transport of Jews to death camps, mainly Auschwitz, the pogrom was set in motion.

The dentist Stevan and his wife, a doctor, both well liked among their community, were now forced to part. Stevan was deported to Bačka Topola and placed in a so-called labour camp, a phrase ironically coined by the Nazis for the last stage before dispatching people to their death. However, Pišta, which was Stevan’s accepted nickname, was in all probability connected with the Resistance movement and managed to make contact with someone who had him transferred back to

Subotica hospital, ostensibly for a gall bladder operation. The new occupational authorities banished all Subotica Jews to the recently founded ghetto in no time. It was in the spring month of May 1944 that Paralelna Street became the ghetto. The Deneberg’s house was also in Paralelna Street. Together with their children, Hilda remained in the ghetto where she awaited deportation to the Auschwitz death camp along with other Jews. Hilda knew nothing of Pišta’s whereabouts up to the moment the Nazis forced him out of the hospital into the ghetto. Thus, the Deneberg family was once again reunited.

“I must do something to save my brother’s family,” said Pišta’s brother, Janči, and turned to face Ruža, who was taking care of his mother. “I heard that the last transport of Jews from Subotica is tak-



ing place today.”

Janči was spared from the Anti-Jewish Laws. Before the onset of the war, he had married a Catholic. Blaško Rajić, a priest who befriended him, issued a false birth certificate in Janči's name pronouncing him a born Catholic. It was no big secret that Pišta's brother was a Jew, but the fake certificate and iron cross, which he had earned on the Eastern Front when he saved a Hungarian officer, were justification enough for him to move around the city freely.

There was no time to lose and he acted quickly. He found a cart, piled it with hay, and in no time arrived at the back entry of the ghetto. The conversation with the gate-guard didn't last long. Janči secretly handed him a bribe. Together with Ruža he entered the ghetto. There was no time to waste and it was clear to Janči right away that he could only take the children out of the ghetto. Even their mother had no time to say goodbye to them. Ruža took the children by their hands and walked briskly to catch up with Janči, who was hastily heading for the back gate. However, there were still problems ahead of them at the gate. The gate-guard would not let them take the children outside. It was Janči's turn now to remind him of the sum of money he had taken to turn a blind eye. As the guard was adamant, Janči simply waved Ruža on, signaling her to hold on to the children and take them out of the ghetto.

“If you say a word about this to anyone, be sure that I will find you and kill you personally,” Janči threatened



Pavle and Mirko Deneberg with their sister Ružica Hauser

the guard in a fit of unrestrained fury.

They quickly hid the children inside the pile of hay and disappeared from the guard's sight.

Everything was happening so quickly and the children's uncle had little time to find a safe place for them to stay. There was no way he could take them to his home. He rightfully assumed that once it was established from the deportation list that Hilda's children were missing, his house would be the first place they would look for them. His friend, a Hungarian lady, was persuaded to take the children in but only till nightfall when her fiancé, a policeman, was due back from work. While Janči was searching for a safe house, the last transport of Jews from Subotica left for Auschwitz. Night was approaching

and Janči had yet to find a place for the children. Some friends of his took the children in for two days, giving him time to continue his pursuit round Subotica for another safe house. He heard of a widow of a Jew, herself a non-Jew, who rented rooms. A boy of fourteen was already staying with her. However, the lady had pushed up the price to a rate which the children's uncle could not afford. She was asking for 200 pengo per child, i.e., 80 dollars for the two of them. Although it was a considerable sum for those times, Janči was left with no alternative but to place the children with her for a few days.

It seemed that Lady Luck had not yet abandoned him. Events started to unroll when he came across a house



where an exceptionally loquacious woman rented rooms. Janči frowned at the abundance of words flowing from her; however, the children were already well coached to tell no one that they were Jews.

“Have no fear for the children,” the landlady said. Bragging before strangers she went on: “They will be safe with me. My husband to be is an agent of the Special Police.”

“Is this a policed city?” Janči mused, aware that yet another possibility to hide the children had fallen through. To his knowledge there was no place left for him to seek refuge for his brother’s children. It was then that his thoughts finally turned to his old friend, Blaško Rajić, the priest.

“Take the children to Klara Baić, a *Bunjevka*,” he said, giving him the address.

At that moment Janči finally realized that the priest must be in liaison with the people from the Resistance movement, men operating undercover and in collaboration with the Partisan forces. On reaching the house, they learned that Klara Baić was not in Subotica. Her house was looked after by a relative called Ester. Hearing the purpose of their visit, she let the children inside to stay and wait for Klara’s return.

Klara returned on June 28th, and to her great surprise found two unknown boys living in her house. Janči was soon informed of her return and rushed to the house to talk and plead with her to let the children stay there.

“It is out of the question,” Klara Baić protested vehemently.

“I have nowhere else to place them,” Janči replied raising his voice. “If they cannot stay with you, then it would have been better to let them be taken to the death camp.”

“Do you want to see ME taken to a death camp?” Klara was fully conscious of the imminent threat to her life if

she gave shelter to the Jewish children. “Maybe you’d prefer the Germans to shoot me on the spot.”

“You’re on the very edge of the town and no one will find them here,” Janči persisted searching for plausible reasons to convince her to let the children stay.

“Have you any idea how expensive food is these days? It is paid in gold.”

Klara let the children remain in her house out of decency, but one could sense the rage pent up inside her.

“I’ll pay for the food,” Janči persisted, resolved to leave the children with Klara.

When Klara approached the children, the first and only thing she could see was the fear of an uncertain destiny in their eyes. Klara’s daughter Margita was sitting beside Mirko and Pavao. She and Mirko were the same age. Klara looked from one child to the other and, resting her eyes on Margita, sensed the child’s apprehension for her friends as if her own fate was threatened. Whether her motherly instincts had been aroused or something completely different won over, Klara finally decided to let the children stay with her.

The priest’s good word may have been decisive for Klara’s humane choice. However, the children’s ordeals were far from over. It was a hard time for both adults and children. Word got round that there were Jews still living in Subotica. The search for Jews who had escaped deportation began. Klara’s home was also searched. By contacting Anica and Ruža, who, like her, were members of the Resistance movement, Ester came to the rescue once again. They hid Mirko and Pavao in the pigsty; this was far from kosher but saved the children from the heartless slayers.

During the summer, while the children were playing in the yard, word got round that a search of houses was underway once again.

“So Klara has two more children now, hasn’t she?” a



Pavle, Ružica and Mirko

soldier asked while searching Klara's next-door neighbour's house. From afar he saw Mirko and Pavao enter Klara's house.

"They're children of a distant relative," the neighbour answered. "Their mother died in the Szeged bombardment and their father was captured in Russia."

The soldier shuddered at the mere mention of Russia and Russians. He never even entered Klara's house.

On October 10th, 1944, the Russians liberated Subotica. There were those who cheered and others less enthusiastic. Mirko and Pavao had reason to rejoice a few weeks later when their mother returned from Auschwitz. Although spiritually broken, Hilda's joy at seeing her healthy and well kept children was unrestrained. She could not find words enough to thank Klara for selflessly saving two innocent lives, those of her children.

Klara Baić

awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 2007



PANTS OFF

The German Army Command in occupied Serbia had little concern for the clashes between high ranking officials in the collaborative government of Milan Aćimović that came into power in the aftermath of the capitulation of the Kingdom Yugoslavia. The only thing of importance to the Germans was that the chosen representatives of the Serbian people be loyal to the Third Reich. Before handing over the leading position to General Nedić, Milan Aćimović decided to remain in his successor's government as Secretary of internal affairs, and deal a final blow to his old rival, Dragi Jovanović. Belgrade Chief of police, Dragi Jovanović, concurrently held the post of Mayor of Belgrade. In Milan Aćimović's opinion that meant too much power in the hands of one person. In June 1941 he suggested to the Chief of German Administration in Serbia, Dr. Harald Turner, to appoint a new man to the post of City Mayor. The choice of Mayor of Belgrade was of little importance to Turner provided that the future man in office unquestionably fulfilled orders received from the German commissar appointed to the city government. Milan Aćimović appointed Dr. Miloslav Stojadinović acting Mayor of Belgrade.

It soon transpired that Miloslav lacked leadership qualities; his creativity ostensibly failed him when it came to maximizing his efficiency in protecting German interests. His understanding of policing matters was pronounced insufficient so that as early as September 1941, he was removed from the post of Mayor and once again Dragi Jovanović had absolute power in Belgrade.

Miloslav Stojadinović, however, possessed traits that even under threat of death he dared not unveil before the enemy. He was a humane man, always ready to help his friends, persecuted Jews. Owing to friends in the city's administration, he could, without difficulty, ob-

tain information on request. Jews were arrested together with Communists and often held as hostages. The price of one killed German was 100 hostage lives while 50 Serbian citizens were shot for a wounded German. A rumour reached Miloslav that new lists of Jews were being prepared. They were to be arrested for impending executions. Among them was Helena Lovrić, the wife of his friend.

The Special police department for Jews had been moved to Džordža Vašingtona Street (George Washington Street) together with the complete data registry of all Belgrade Jews. Deciding that Helena's registration



Dr. Miloslav Stojadinović



card must disappear from German records, Miloslav unearthed a Serbian clerk, who worked in the registry alongside a German major. He asked the clerk to help him. The clerk was petrified on hearing him out. Miloslav's insistence finally made him agree to disclose where the data files were kept. They arranged for Miloslav to come early in the morning before the major's office hours, to take out the required card himself, and destroy it.

As agreed, Miloslav arrived early at the office. The clerk sat at his desk, and, without saying a word, he pointed to the cupboard containing the meticulously assembled card files. It did not take Miloslav long to find Helena's card. Once in his possession, Miloslav quickly folded and pocketed the card. With a fleeting smile of acknowledgement to the clerk, he was heading for the door when the German major burst into the office. The major took a close look at Miloslav, summing him up from head to foot, before asking what he was doing there. Miloslav answered that he had come to ask for some information. Before he could finish his sentence, the major was all over him again for entering the registry office which was strictly prohibited to persons who did not work there. Finally, the major hollered: "Get out!" Helena was never singled out again right up to the end of the war.

Helena's husband, Milan Lovrić, a Jew by his mother's lineage, was less fortunate. He was denounced three times; Miloslav saved his friend each time. On all three occasions, the informers had reported that Milan was a Jew and a Communist. The first time Miloslav got word that his friend had been arrested, Milan was taken to the Special police for Jews. Miloslav came to the police station straight away bearing fake documents in evidence that Milan was a full-blooded Serb. The same happened when Milan was held prisoner by the Gestapo. Milan's life was most threatened when he was apprehended by the Nedić police. Once more Miloslav brought the fake

documents, but this time the police insisted that Milan take his pants off and prove that he was not circumcised in accordance with Jewish religious tradition. Miloslav would not consent to such a thing since both his and his friend's honour were at stake. He further contested that his word was evidence enough, and after a prolonged debate, the police finally released Milan.

This is the story of Milan Lovrić's family. That Miloslav saved many other Jewish lives using fake documents was a fact well known among Jews. Miloslav also spoke of how he had tried to rescue Dr. Bukić Pijade from the Banjica concentration camp. Bukić had declined the offered assistance believing that the Fascists were humane and would not kill a doctor. But they were never humane in their treatment of Jews or, for that matter, of many other people, regardless of the religion they practiced.

Dr. Miloslav Stojadinović
awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 1966



TO THE HILLS FOR SALVATION

Before World War Two a large Jewish Community lived in the territory of Sandžak and its town, Novi Pazar. Isak Papo was a successful merchant, who, in keeping with Jewish norms, married Rena of the Bahar family in 1937. When their first daughter, Lea was born, Isak, decided to move to Raška with his family. His mother and father, four sisters, and three brothers stayed in Novi Pazar, at the time a multi-ethnic environment where Muslims, Serbs, Jews, and others lived together. Rena's parents and sister also stayed behind in Novi Pazar. Lea's sister, Rahela, was born in Raška just before the war. When in April 1941 German troops invaded Sandžak after the capitulation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the first to feel the brunt of Nazi ideology and brutality were Jews. They were marked with yellow bands. The more prosperous among them were immediately persecuted. Unprecedented plundering of Jewish property was under way. Isak dared not open his store; even if he had wanted to, there was no point to it. The store was of little use to him now and he and his family were soon forced to seek shelter outside Raška.

For several days Isak had lived in fear of leaving the house when one night an ox-drawn cart stopped in front of it. The neighbours had learned that the Germans were coming to seize Isak; therefore, he had to be taken out of Raška. He was moved to Jošanička Banja. The Orthodox Church parish priest there, valuing the life of the persecuted above his own safety, received him in his home. Rena and the chil-

dren arrived the next day. Only a few days passed when someone informed the priest that the Germans were on the trail of the Papo family and were moments away from Jošanička Banja. The priest called a villager, who took Isak to the dense forests of mountain Kopaonik. When the Germans arrived, they only found Rena and the children in the priest's house. At the time, Germans were only searching for Jewish men and did not inquire about the women-folk, so they left. However, a solution for the Papo family had to be found quickly. Once shelter was provided in the village of Jelakce, the priest organized the transfer of the Papo family to the village.



Isak Papo alias Jovan Kosić dressed as a Serbian peasant

In Jelakce, rather its hamlet Protići, sited at the very summit of mountain Željina, stood the family house of Simeon - Sima Protić. The house could only be reached by ox or horse-drawn carts. It took more than an hour to reach the hamlet from the dirt road. If a stranger were to appear in the neighbourhood, he would be noticed immediately. As Sima led Rena with the baby in her arms, and little Lea, worn out from the steep climb to the house, the perceptive villagers asked no questions. That evening Isak also arrived at Sima's house bringing their luggage with him. However, when the Papo family ventured from the house the next morning, they were all dressed in country clothes identical to

those worn by the villagers. The clothes, made of wool and a stout home-made fabric made from hemp, were prepared by Sima's wife, Miroslava, and her mother replaced the town clothes the fugitives had arrived in. Overnight the family Papo had acquired a new surname and was now the Kosić family. The villagers, who had seen them the previous day, were told that the Kosićs



were Serbian refugees. Additionally, to explain the clothes they had arrived in, they were told that the refugees were tailors, come from the town. Apart from the new surname, that day the entire Papo family obtained new names; Isak was now Jovan, Rahela became Rajka, and the girls were Buca (chubs) and Beba (baby). Isak and Rena immediately took to helping their host with the farm chores. Although they collected hay somewhat ineptly, they also picked plums, tended to the cattle and very soon were accepted and fondly looked upon by the villagers.

Soon after the Papo family obtained fake documents under the name of Kosić. However, they shortly realized that the documents were of little help when one day Germans appeared at the base of the mountain in search of a Jewish family of four members called Papo, fugitives from Raška. More than six months had passed in safety within the shelter of the Protić family. Seeing that the Germans were determined to find them and would not leave, Sima decided to take his wanted guests to a safer place. In his ox-driven cart he moved the Papo family to the village of Veliko Borje near Aleksandrovac. He took them to his house where the family stayed during the field work seasons and which was also used for storing wine. Although they had fled more than 30 kilometres from Jelakce, they immediately realized that the place they had come to was precarious. It was too close to the road frequented by German troops.

A few days later, the chieftain of the village Drenča, Milovan Simić, told Mijajlo Bogičević that he would like to talk to him. Present at their meeting was also the prefect of the Župa county. Since they were all friends, they spoke openly of the issue that had to be settled. Thus Mijajlo learned of the four members of a Jewish family from Raška who were in grave danger and had to be hidden from the Nazis. Although the Papo family was completely unknown to him, Mijajlo agreed to help, no questions asked. When the Kosićs arrived in Drenča,

only the three friends knew who they really were.

The newcomers seemed somewhat strange to Mijajlo's wife, Milica. And Milica was not the only one who thought so; however, the truth about the Jewish family had to remain a secret. Mijajlo was at odds how to answer Milica's many questions and finally told her what was going on. The wise and educated man who had come to seek shelter in their home did not have to hide his Jewish ancestry any more. From then on, Milica took meticulous care of the Jewish family Papo that Mijajlo had brought to their house in Poljana.

Drenče was also visited by many armies. All village



Family of Miroslava (first on the left) and Simeon (first on the right) Protić

men who could be mobilized or taken to Germany as slave labourers would run for shelter each time an army came to the village. They would hide in the woods, in attics of deserted houses. Isak Papo was always among them. Mijajlo's son, Živadin – Žika, also fled with them. Although still a youngster, he had reached the age when he could easily be taken with the others. Žika liked to be near Isak best of all since he had heard many a wise word spoken from him. With the men gone, it was up to Milica to take care of Rena and her girls down in the



village. On one occasion Bulgarian soldiers stormed the village. The men managed to escape but soon received word from Milica to stay away from Drenče as the Bulgarians had stationed themselves in the village. The days passed and the men kept moving from one shelter to another. When Partisans came upon their camp in hiding, they had a hard time to convince them that they could go home as the Bulgarians had left the village some time ago. The fugitives realized that Milica had no way of informing them that the danger had passed as she, too, had lost track of where they had gone to. They returned to the village.

Isak spoke wisely of life's intricacies to Žika. He also



From left to right sitting: Milica Bogičević, Rena Papo - alias Rajka Kosić dressed in peasant clothes holding in her lap little Rahel Papo. First on right to left Mijajlo Bogičević, standing above Isak Papo

told him of his family that had stayed in Novi Pazar and of how none of them had listened to him when he begged them to leave town on all account. At the time, Isak was still unaware that the entire Papo and Bahar families had been deported to camp Sajmište in Zemun and that all of them had perished. On the other hand, Žika helped Isak as much as he could. It was winter and the Papo family had run out of firewood. Žika harnessed his father's oxen and drove to the forest with Isak to bring some wood. With Žika, still a youngster, and Isak still unused to country life, they could not collect enough wood between them to keep the family warm. And then they heard gunfire. It was the Partisans in the hill above them fighting the Chetniks on the opposite hill. Isak and Žika were stranded in the valley below. With bullets hissing and flying around them they quickly collected the wood, which suddenly turned out to be more than enough, and hastily headed for home.

Right up to the end of the war the Papo family shared both the good and bad with the villagers of Drenče. When the war finally ended, the Papo family returned to Raška. Isak's store had been destroyed, but with the help of the town folk, Isak rebuilt it in no time. However, much had changed. Both Isak and Rena had to deal with the tragic fate of their families. In 1949 the Papo family emigrated to Israel. Although the friendship they shared with their saviours was left behind them, their descendants, little Lea and Rahela, as well as their brother, Asher, born a year after the war, have kept it alive to this day.

**Miroslava and Simeon Protić,
Milica and Mijajlo Bogičević**
all awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 2009





TO BE A SERB IS NO EASY THING

It seemed that the compulsory yellow star worn on the upper arm was not enough to fulfill the order to separate Jewish people from their surroundings. The occupying forces in Belgrade, in collaboration with the instated quisling establishment, drew up lists of Jewish inhabitants and from mid 1941 the rounding up and incarceration of Jews in the Banjica and Topovske šupe concentration camps began. The day came when Danilo Semnitz and his father, Albert, found themselves among the arrested Jews of Sava-mala. Many of the detainees were never to see the streets of Belgrade again, Danilo's father among them. The line of interned Jews walked down Karadjordjeva Str., entered Kamenička Str. and climbing up Balkanska Str. arrived at Terazije square. From there they went straight down Kralja Milana Street to the collection centre. It was a round, dilapidated building fronted by a heavy metal gate.

Although Danilo was sixteen at the time, he was of slight stature, more like a child than an adolescent. They were on the brink of entering the yard of no return when Danilo decided, there and then, that he was not going inside. The guard, whether soft at heart or simply too lazy to chase a child, let him run away. While his father was being taken to the Topovske šupe camp, Danilo's sole option was to return to their home in Karadjordjeva Street. His brother, Rihard, had been imprisoned at the start of the war and taken to Germany, while his second brother, Gideon, was arrested in Zagreb and sent to the concentration camp in Gradiška where he was subsequently killed. Two of his sisters were married while the third had relocated to Palestine back in 1937. Danilo was now completely alone in their home. Despite the fact that Danilo's father, Albert, was a bank clerk, they had been deprived of all means of living once the anti-Jewish law prohibiting work to Jews was enforced. In

order to survive, Danilo began selling things from their household. He sold them to those neighbours he considered trustworthy and who would not betray him by reporting him to the authorities.

However, such conditions could not last long. When October came, Danilo was forced to ask his sister Mira for help. Mira, married to a Serb, Dejan Janković, also lived in Belgrade with her family. Well aware of the fact that death was the punishment for harbouring a Jew, Danilo's brother-in-law agreed to take him into his home, dismissing the danger of being found out. In his turn, Danilo could not forsake his father. Disregarding the threat of being discovered, he went to Topovske šupe each day to take him some food. The ration of bread apportioned to a prisoner when taken to forced labour duties had been reduced to the minimum and hunger reigned inside the camp. One day his father was not there to take the food. There was no doubt as to what had happened, but deep down in his heart Danilo could not come to terms with the fact that he would never see his father again.

Each day regular armed sentries, the Special police unit for Jews, as well as other collaborators in the service of the German occupying forces, were making it harder to stay undetected in Belgrade. Dejan thought it was time to transfer Danilo to a safer place. At the start of December 1941, Dejan's brother, Vladan Janković, a furniture merchant from Kragujevac, took Danilo into his house. As the city of Kragujevac was at that time run by the occupying armies and Chetniks, Danilo's second sister, Slobodanka, who at the time maintained close contact with her brother, was herself searching for a way to bring him nearer to her own home.

Slobodanka was married to Milan Stefanović. In the years before the war, Milan had been a member of the King's Army elite forces and was currently employed in the Gendarmerie. They lived in a house in Donja



Cruća while Milan held a post in Vračješnica. Slobodanka and Milan decided that Danilo would stay with Milan's grandfather Andrija Pantelić who lived in the same village. In the aftermath of December 7th, 1941, while the Germans were celebrating the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Danilo moved in with grandfather Andrija in Donja Cruća.

Grandpa Andrija was himself a farmer in need, so that eventually Milan approached his friend Radovan Djonović for help. Radovan, who also lived in Donja Cruća, was the postmaster in Vračješnica.

"I don't know what to do with the boy from Belgrade," Milan told him. "At grandpa Andrija's food is getting scarcer by the day, there are just too many of them living there."

"I must speak with my wife first," Radovan replied understandingly.

On returning home Radovan told his wife about Danilo's pitiful existence and the situation he was now in and suggested that he come and stay with them. Aware of the imminent danger of Danilo's presence in their home, she nevertheless decided to take the boy in.

Radovan Djonović had built his house at the foot of a mountain. The mountain slope with its dense forest began its ascent right behind the house. It was an ideal place to seek shelter from approaching enemy forces. Thus by mid 1942 an unkempt Danilo, dressed in rags, was brought to the farmstead where Mistress

Rosa was in charge. Her house was spotless and orderly and Danilo's first task was to scrub himself thoroughly and adorn the farmer's shirt and pants handed him. The only piece of garment he was allowed to keep was his old sheepskin vest. Now no one could tell him apart from the other villagers.

Although the village houses were scattered over the range of the mountainside, the arrival of a new, young man into the neighbourhood could not remain undetected.

"The best thing for all of us, my boy, would be for you to play deaf-mute", a solution Radovan had come to after some thought. "If anyone tries to speak to you, you just wave your hands and mumble and I will tell them that we have taken in a servant." The idea was basically good but could hardly fool the quick-witted

Serbian peasant of Šumadija. So it was not surprising that one day a villager returning home from his field approached Danilo and asked him what his name was. Danilo began mumbling and gesticulating but the man simply replied:

"I find it hard to understand you. A straight answer might be useful."

"What's the matter with you," Danilo burst out. "Can't you see I'm dumb?"

The village kept its secret. However, Radovan was busy trying to find a way to solve the problem. Many refugees from Bosnia had come to Serbia. Radovan decided to ask his friend Veljko, a book-keeper in the Vračješnica



Radovan and Rosa Djonović



borough council, if there was a way to register Danilo as a refugee. Veljko had a friend employed in the administration of Gornji Milanovac who in 1943 managed to obtain an identity card for Danilo. Foregoing any religious ceremony, he was then renamed to Danilo Simić, a Serbian refugee from Bosnia.

Danilo was overjoyed. For the first time since the start of the war he felt free. The first thing he did was to get hold of a bicycle and rush off to Kragujevac to visit Vladan Janković with whom he had spent a whole week before he was transferred to Donja Crnuća. While in Kragujevac he went to the cinema, slept over at Vladan's and headed home the next day. However, it was not as easy as he had thought it would be. He was stopped by the Feld gendarmerie and commanded to show his travelling permit (ausweiss). Once again playing dumb, Danilo feigned confusion. Showing any sign of comprehension of what was being said to him would have given rise to suspicion for it was not expected of a simple farmer to understand a foreign soldier's language. He showed them his identity card. The ensuing rigorous inspection of the bilingual card, partly written in German, and then of his person made Danilo realize how being a Serb was no easy thing either.

The tranquil life in Donja Crnuća was often interrupted by the arrival of different troops. Some of them were on the look-out for Partisans, while in turn those armed groups would be searching for Chetniks. Finally, there were regular inspections of the village by German soldiers. Radovan's younger brother, Milić, had befriended Danilo. Each day Radovan would leave for work in Vračešnica while the two boys stayed home and saw to household chores. They ploughed the land and tended to the livestock: 16 sheep, 3 goats and 2 cows milked for making dairy products and on occasion harnessed for transport. Whenever the alarm of approaching soldiers was raised in the village, Milić and Danilo, in fear of compulsory drafting, would run for shelter. They would



Danilo Semnic, neighbour and Radovan Djonović

sporadically hide in the outhouse or the barn and only in dire necessity in the least agreeable option, the humid, chilly and mould-infested cellar. At times, when Danilo fell ill, he would go unattended by a doctor for a number of days out of fear of being discovered. Members of the household took care of him and, thank God, nursed him back to health.

Radovan took care of Danilo as if he were his own son. When the village chieftains, i.e., 'kmets' of the Takovo region were commanded to round up people for labour in the Bor copper mine, the chieftain of Donja Crnuća placed Danilo on the list. It was a known fact that once gone hardly anyone survived the conditions of mine labour. In the spirit of a true Serb, Radovan cursed the hell out of the chieftain and thus Danilo remained home. However, some time before the end of the war Milić was drafted and had to join up with the Partisans. The entire household chores now fell to Danilo. Being young and by now well acquainted with farm work, he took on the responsibility effortlessly. During his stay



on the farm he had even learned to distill plum brandy. No household in Šumadija could be found without an ample supply of this spirit.

The war was reaching its end and the breath of freedom in the air was also felt in Donja Crnuća. Over the years Danilo had fallen in love with Zora. However, when his brother Rihard, a POW survivor, came to collect him, he had to take his leave. Danilo left for Belgrade, but almost immediately came back to the village and the farm. Work on the farm had not been completed, the harvest had to be gathered and Danilo was well aware that apart from him, there was no one else to carry out the work. Zora may also have been the reason for his return, but that was to remain a secret forever, since Danilo eventually immigrated to Israel and ultimately settled there.

Rosa and Radovan Djonović

both awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 1983



GRANDFATHER SVETA AND MOTHER ANKA

There are those who contend that mixed marriages are not good for either body or soul while others think differently. In any case, once a course is taken, there can be no going back. We have this one life and whether we shall venerate this great gift God has given us depends solely upon ourselves. Do you agree? Yes? Well, you are wrong. It also depends on those determined to convince us to the contrary, to those set to belittle us, to eradicate all our faith in humankind, kill us and finally throw us into nameless ditches.

Prior to World War Two the Jewess Renica, an elegant, tall woman, married a Serb, Dr. Ilija Popadić, a well-known dentist from Subotica. Their love surpassed all prejudices and to their great joy, Renica gave birth to a son, Branko, in 1940.

In the aftermath of the short-lived April war of 1941, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia capitulated before the largest military force in Europe - Germany. The Germans and their allies soon divided the spoils of war. The greater part of Vojvodina went to the Hungarians. Being loyal allies, they in turn passed a number of restricting laws, among them anti-Jewish regulations. They owed it to their big brother. However, the situation in Vojvodina differed from one region to another. In the territories the Hungarians considered as unlawfully taken from them upon World War I their

conduct toward Jews was to some degree more lenient, comparable to that in Hungary. Novi Sad took the brunt of their aggression. In the great raid in January 1942 thousands of Jews were killed. Their demise was terrifying. Powerless and defenseless they were thrown and sunk beneath the ice of the frozen Danube. It was then that the Jewish population in the entire territory of Vojvodina realized that their lives were worthless.

Angelina, Anka for short, and Dr. Svetozar Panić, a distinguished attorney, were close friends with the Popadić family. They were neighbours living across the street from each other, in one of the main Sombor streets. They could fully comprehend the fear that Renica was succumbing to. She was married to a prominent Serb; however, Serbs were almost equally ostracized by the Hungarian aggressor. Renica thought that if she were to convert to her husband's Orthodox faith, her son would be less exposed. Anka accepted the role of god-mother and Renica took a new name, Vera. Vera (Faith) was



Angelina, sons Vladimir and Jovan, Dr. Svetozar and daughter Vera



what everybody needed in times of war. No one was spared from the harsh conditions that had transpired, their neighbours and now god-parents included. The Panić's younger son, Vladimir, a student and prewar leftist, was under constant surveillance of the Sombor occupying forces. He was suffering from tuberculosis. Nonetheless, he underwent repeated interrogations by the police. His parents kept fighting for his life indefatigably. After undergoing an extensive operation, the Panićs reckoned that he would at least be left alone to recuperate. They were wrong. A police agent regularly came to check on the convalescent. The police had decided to arrest Vladimir and bring him before a court which meant only one thing: the death penalty. His parents managed somehow to appease the Sombor authorities to at least leave Vladimir at home until he was better. Each day the diligent policeman visited, he would demand the bandages to be removed so that he could personally ascertain Vladimir's healing progress. He did not get his chance to arrest Vladimir. The illness was by far more relentless than he was. Vladimir died of natural causes.

The situation in Sombor and the entire territory of Vojvodina drastically changed in 1944 when the Germans entered Budapest. They occupied their former allies and naturally all the territories held by Hungarians up till then. It may sound incredible, but certain sources say that the Germans invaded Hungary displeased with the way they had handled the question of Jews. Although Hitler was losing ground on numerous battlefields, his ideological cohorts were still engaged in eradicating Jews from the map of Europe. An unrelenting process of persecution, imprisonment and deportation of Jews to death camps was set in motion. The same process was put into operation in Vojvodina.

Renica and her husband had agreed to ask the Panić's to take in the infant Branko. The imprisonment of Jews in Sombor was approaching. Renica sensed that neither

she and Branko nor her husband could escape internment. The fact that he was a Serb no longer warranted his freedom; his wife was Jewish, the child was a Jewish offspring. To take the boy in was a great responsibility for Anka and Svetozar since Sombor was a small town with a close knit population. Where could they hide him? Svetozar's completely white hair was a constant reminder of how his life had been ultimately spared by a fellow townsman, now a Hungarian soldier and prison guard, whom he had once defended in court free of charge. The attorney had been imprisoned as a hostage after an action carried out by members of the Resistance. The morning after his interment, the Sombor inmates were to be placed before a firing squad. The Hungarian guard, who was on duty the night before the execution, released him from prison. In that one night Svetozar's hair had turned completely white. Anka and Svetozar now lived alone in Sombor since their older son lived in Belgrade with his family. Despite the danger they were exposing themselves to, they decided to take Branko in. One night Branko was moved to their house.

Soon enough, Renica and Ilija were deported to a camp. Fortunately, the war was, in fact, nearing its end. Anka and Svetozar lovingly hid Branko as if he were their very own grandchild. Only Branko could call them grandfather Sveta and mother Anka. From their own children they expected to be addressed by name only.

The war ended. When Renica and Ilija came back from captivity, there was no end to their joy. Beside his parents, Branko now had another grandfather and mother.

Angelina and Dr. Svetozar Panić
both awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 1993



JELENA GLAVAŠKI'S LOFT

“Well, aren’t you just what I needed at this hour,” commented Jelena Glavaški once the two of them were alone. She glared at the receding back of the bulky gendarme who had brought Jennie to her “auntie” Jelena. Jennie was about to head back to the railway station from which she had just come, when Jelena put her arms round her.

“Everything is going to be fine,” Jelena spoke. “You’ll see what I was on about.” Jelena took Jennie to her flat on the fourth floor. “I thought they had come to arrest me,” she almost whispered afraid that the neighbours might hear them.

Before she had gone down to open the gate, Jelena had looked out of her window and seen the uniformed man. In her exasperation she had failed to recognize Jennie Lebl, therefore failing to see the reason why she was wanted so late at night.

The Lebl family had lived in Aleksinac where father Lebl, an engineer, was the manager of the Aleksinac coal mines. Jennie was born there and Jelena Glavaški had been her kindergarten teacher. The Lebl family became close friends with Jelena and the friendship continued even upon their transfer to Belgrade. Jelena Glavaški also moved to a new post in Niš.

When in 1941 Belgrade was bombed, the Lebl family was living in Crveni krst (a part of town named after its Red Cross). Father Lebl had been drafted just before the war and was a

lieutenant colonel when the Army of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia capitulated. He was imprisoned and sent to a prison camp in Germany. Jennie’s brother Alexander, with false identification papers, had managed to flee to Split, which was under Italian administration and was therefore, a safer place for Jews.

Jennie remained behind in their flat with her mother. They were soon joined by grandma Regina. Not long after the arrival of her grandmother, aunt Šarika and aunt Mina, who had been evicted from her flat, came to live with them in the house. Additionally, some refugees from the Banat region were housed with them by order of the Representative office of the Jewish Community in Belgrade. The Representative office was an establishment controlled by the occupying administration.



. Jelena Glavaški and Jennie Lebl

Once the country had been invaded, the Fascists immediately put into operation their plan for eliminating Jews. Lists of Jews and their belongings were made with the aid of domestic collaborationists. Countless Jewish men were arrested and taken to death camps. Once there, they were taken to points of execution and killed. On the Zemunian bank of the river Sava a death camp was opened at Sajmište (the Fairground). From December 8th to 12th, in just five days, the majority of the Jewish women, children and the old were taken to the new prison. The Jews from Banat, living in the Lebl house, were among the first who had to report to the Special police, stationed in Džordža Vašingtona Street (George Washington Street). Grandmother Regina received notice to report on December 10th. She was taken to the Judenlager Zemlin Camp, the official



name for the Sajmište. No notice had been delivered to Jennie and her mother and they were left alone in their house. Mother tried to reason why they had been spared, but soon enough, when they returned home after seeing grandma Regina and aunt Šarika off, the Nedić gendarmes came and handed them their summons. It stated that they were to report two days later, on the 12th, to the same address from where grandmother had been taken to camp. The following day, one day before they were supposed to report to the Special police, Wehrmacht soldiers appeared to seal up the part of the house in which grandma Regina had lived. Their Alsatian dog - Lady as they called her - went wild and tried to attack them. A Wehrmacht soldier took out his gun, fired, and Lady was dead.

“This is how we too, shall end,” Jennie told her mother. Mother was of a different opinion.

“The Germans are a civilized people, it won’t happen.”

Jennie had no desire to wait and see whether her mother was right. She took the knapsack she had already prepared and left the house. Unfortunately, it was Jennie who was proved right. Her mother and grandmother were gassed inside the truck specially designed for killing Jews. It was on one of the “suffocating” truck’s rounds from the camp to Jajinci. On the truck’s arrival in Jajinci, they were thrown into a mass grave with the other dead, innocent Jews.

Once outside the house, Jennie went straight to the railway station. A train full of Serbian refugees from Bačka, mainly Sombor, was stationed on one of the platforms. Jennie was just a slight, braided girl of fourteen. She blended into the mass of refugees and disappeared into one of the netted luggage racks. Travelling in this manner, she reached Niš round midnight. Refugees were instructed to report to the authorities and state where they would be staying. On the spur of the moment, Jennie pronounced Jelena Glavaški as her aunt. However, she

seemed to have forgotten her address. It was well past midnight when they finally managed to locate her aunt’s address. Thus, Jennie finally reached Jelena Glavaški’s house, attended by the bulky gendarme. Jelena lived in a house where most of the flats had been requisitioned for German requirements. Her flat was in the loft of the building and on entering it, Jennie found it stifling hot.

“When I saw the two of you in front of the house, I hastily burnt all the leaflets I had in the flat,” Jelena told her, explaining the temperature inside the flat and why it was airless. “I shall have to reprint them all tonight.”

Jelena did not hide the fact that she was an active member of the Resistance from Jennie. She had hidden her typewriter, duplicator and the paper on which she printed illegal bulletins, leaflets and other material within a walled partition in the attic. Although she could hardly keep her eyes open, Jennie helped Jelena to reprint the wasted leaflets.

“I don’t know how I shall enter you into the list of tenants,” Jelena said on hearing that Jennie had no identification with her.

Next morning, when Jelena left to deliver the leaflets, Jennie decided to go to the Commissariat for refugees and ask for a refugee card. In the Commissariat she was informed that children under sixteen could not obtain a card. Through her tears, Jennie explained how both her parents had been killed by Hungarians. Suddenly orphaned like that, she continued, she had scarcely had any food to eat. In consequence she had stopped growing. She was in fact older than sixteen. In all probability the Commissariat clerk must have been perplexed with her story and knew not how to deal with her. So Jennie was given a temporary refugee card. Now, in possession of a refugee card, she could go to the police and obtain an identity card. At the police station, expecting no further setbacks, Jennie presented her card under her new name and surname, Jovanka Lazić. However, here



too, they suspected that she was younger than sixteen. The scene from the Commissariat was repeated right up to an equal ending; Jovanka set off to get the two photos required for a permanent document. Her eyes nearly popped out when in front of the photographer's she encountered a Belgrade neighbour. Facing her was a man clad in a Kosta Pećanac's Chetnik uniform. He had



Jennie Lebl's fake documents

recognized her by her braids. Thankfully, her neighbour felt sorry for her and suggested that they both best forget that unexpected meeting.

“As far as anyone is concerned, we never met nor spoke to one another,” he told her. Then they went their separate ways.

When Jelena came back from work, Jennie, now Jovanka Lazić, recounted her startling encounter with the Belgrade neighbour. The outcome was excruciating. The braids had to go! They ended up in the furnace and Jovanka suddenly stopped being a child. She looked older. A few days later Jovanka got her identity card photos. The shocked look in her wide opened eyes spoke evidently of her fear at having met the Chetnik neighbour. Jelena forbade Jovanka to venture into the

city. From then on, Jovanka stayed at home and acted as liaison when Jelena was at work. Jelena's best friend, Darinka, lived close by with her son, Racko. Darinka was aware of Jelena's engagement in the Resistance so that Jovanka could spend time with them without fear. She appreciated the small talk that she and the slightly older Racko exchanged. She was not permitted to tell that she remembered him back from the time she had lived in Aleksinac. Jelena and Darinka had decided that it would be best if she kept quiet about it. The friendship between the youngsters became deeper after Jovanka, despite the ban, decided to tell Racko that they actually knew each other in days past.

There were other contacts, too. Partisans and undercover members of the Resistance, in Niš on special assignments, frequented the loft. It crossed no one's mind that there could be resistance activity in a house requisitioned by the Germans, or that the loft functioned frequently both as a place of refuge and for holding meetings. One frequenter was Miša Obradović, alias Zoran, the active secretary of the Party's county committee. Jovanka could not bring herself to like him and she openly spoke of her misgivings to Jelena. Her friend, on the other hand, tried to convince her that Miša was indispensable for the Movement and that she must be civil to him.

Dr. Uroš Jekić, who was head of the hospital for mentally ill patients at this time, used to send medical supplies for Partisan units to Jelena's loft. Once, when Jelena was at work, Jovanka was assigned to wait for Partisan Aca scheduled to come and pick up the sanitary material. On seeing the bulk of his sack after he had packed the material, she candidly asked him whether he had any fear of being searched. Aca calmly advised Jovanka not to worry as he had been extra observant. He was certain that no one had followed him on his way there.

When they came out of the flat together, Aca went his



way and Jovanka decided to pay a visit to her neighbour, seamstress Goka. It was wintertime and while Jelena's supply of fire wood and coal was scarce, it was comfortably warm at the neighbour's. Once she felt warm, Jovanka came to stand beside the window. Looking out she saw that the entire street had been blocked off all of a sudden. All passageways had been shut off by Bulgarian soldiers with bayonets drawn. While Jovanka was telling Goka what was happening outside, three Bulgarian soldiers charged into the house.

Prepared to shoot, one soldier bellowed at them, "Is Jovanka Lazić here?"

"Just as long as they are not asking for Jennie Lebl, 'the Jewess'", was Jovanka Lazić's first thought.

From Goka's house Jovanka Lazić was taken out into the street. At the same time, heavily guarded by Bulgarian soldiers, Jelena Glavaški was approaching from the direction of the city. She had been arrested at work. Encircled by Bulgarian soldiers the two of them could not approach one another. They were taken to the house they lived in.

The courtyard of the house was packed with Bulgarian officers and soldiers. There in good spirits, talking to the officers, stood Miša Obradović – Zoran! When questioned whether they knew Zoran, both replied with a "No". Zoran kept on grinning.

"Since you haven't met me before, you shall now have your chance to get to know me well," he said cynically.

The Bulgarian soldiers ransacked the apartment but found nothing. The compromising material had been hidden in the attic. However, as instructed, both Jelena and Jovanka were taken to prison.

Isolated in opposite ends of the corridor, they waited to be questioned. Suddenly, from one of the offices a man was dragged out, beaten to a pulp. A bloody trail flowed behind him and he could not keep his head up. Nevertheless, Jovanka recognized him. It was Partisan Aca. He hadn't been followed coming to Jelena Glavaški's home, that part was true. They had been lying in wait to arrest him the instant he left the house carrying the compromising material. Once he was at an ample distance from the house where he had received the material, he was arrested instantly. Zoran had informed on the entire Party organization of Niš. The Bulgarian Fascists had known the exact place where to wait for Partisan Aca. The same happened to quite a number of others. Some ninety Resistance members were arrested. Only a handful of them managed to survive Zoran's betrayal. The liaisons with the Partisans were compromised. Partisan units in the field were very soon surrounded and attacked; those of their members who were left alive retreated into Bosnia.

Jelena Glavaški and Jovanka Lazić were to be interrogated next, Jelena first. They beat her up so brutally that she could not stand on her feet. She barely made it to the prison cell. Refusing to speak, she betrayed no one. The same happened to Jovanka Lazić. The Bulgarian aggressors failed to obtain any information from the battered women. They handed them over to the Germans.

Jovanka Lazić was sent to a forced labour camp in Germany with the other arrested Resistance members. A frail and ailing Jelena Glavaški ended up in the Crveni Krst (Red Cross) concentration camp in Niš.



Jennie Lebl beside a photograph of Jelena Glavaški in the Niš Museum



In a letter sent to her sister from the camp she wrote:

“My very own ... the only sorrow I feel is when I think of you all. Were there no such thoughts, my dears, none of this would be so hard.”

From the beginning of 1944 camp prisoners were taken to the Bubanj place of execution every day. All of those taken out of Crveni Krst camp never returned. Jelena was aware of what was happening, but hope did not leave her. In her letters to her sister she wrote: “I might yet live to see you once more.” But they were never to see each other again. In retaliation for the death of August Rogale, a German, Jelena was shot with a group of “active Communist bandits” at Bubanj on June 12th, 1944.

The war was nearing its end. Parading the streets on his white horse was the Commissar of the newly-founded Partisan division. When the rare survivor Partisans returned home from Bosnia, the new Commissar was recognized almost immediately: Miša Obradović – Zoran! The traitor was promptly court marshaled and, after certain checks had been made, shot dead.

In a Gestapo prison in Berlin Jovanka Lazić lived to see the end of the war. She was in line for execution when the Russian soldiers entered Berlin. Jennie Lebl, alias Jovanka Lazić, was once again free. She returned to Belgrade on June 1st, 1945.

Jelena Glavaški
awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 1987





THE LICE BIT MY EARS OFF

Negotin, a small town in east Serbia, where the sun is somewhat late in coming out atop the high mountain peaks, was that morning bathed in sunlight. It seemed that the sun itself was eager to brighten the morning before the Negotin town folk were besieged by the occupation. Soon all eyes were turned toward the dusty uniforms of the Wehrmacht, the black SS ones and a number of others that marched past. It was the uniformed men who knew exactly what was to be done with an occupied town. The citizens, on the other hand, knew nothing of what awaited them.

Mita Todorović, a masonry worker when there was construction work to be done, a farmer when mouths had to be fed, came to town that morning to hear the latest news. There were more uniformed men in the streets than civilians. No bans for the civilians had yet been imposed although the process of listing Jews was already under way. Mita always had a coin to spare in his pocket. One had to spend a few dinars in the local inn for a drink if one wanted to hear the news.

On entering the inn, Mita saw Miroslav Schomlo, an engineer who hired him from time to time for construction work. The engineer was sitting at a table with some friends when Mita came up to him and asked him about his family.

“I don’t know where to hide my children,” Miroslav uttered, visibly concerned. The look on his face spoke of the gravity of his predicament. “Lists of Jews and Communists are being made right now. It is only a matter of days when arrests will begin.”

“Come to my farm in Dubrava,” Mita replied with assurance as if there was nothing left to discuss.

Miroslav’s smile was faint, but he thanked him for the offer. He was still hoping that the situation would calm

down and that he would begin to work again.

It was not long before the Schomlo family was thrown out of the house they lived in. The house was requisitioned for German requirements. They found shelter in engineer Pantić’s garden-house which had neither electricity nor water.

When Mita heard of the engineer’s arrest and that he had been taken to the Jewish collection centre for their district in Zaječar, he immediately set out to find his family. At the beginning of 1942, taking turns with his son Žika, Mita brought food to the garden-house for the engineer’s wife and children: Milana - nine, and Ana - seven years old. When engineer Miroslav was released from camp, Budimka decided to send the children to her brother in Vršac, thinking they would be safer there. However, the situation was no better there with *volksdeutchers* parading round town in new German uniforms.

Miroslav was arrested once again and taken to the same camp. Help came from a *volksdeutscher*, and former pupil of the grammar school literature teacher, Budimka Smederevac. The soldier cautioned him: “If they bring you back here once again, you’re dead.”

Miroslav Schomlo, a decent man, respected in Negotin and throughout eastern Serbia, would not abandon his wife and leave her on her own. As if unaware of the imminent danger he was facing, he stayed with Budimka in the garden-house. It was not long before he was arrested for the third time, but the prediction that he would be killed did not come true. In the meantime, the camp had been shut down and he was taken to Belgrade. God only knows how he managed to escape from there. On returning to Negotin, he finally realized that he had only one choice left. Danilo Nikolić, a road supervisor from Braćevac, took him to Dubrava. Making his way along unmapped roads deep in snow, Miroslav finally found shelter in Dubrava on Mita’s farm. The farm was situ-



ated between Štubik and Malajnica, two villages some twenty kilometres apart. Miroslav did not live with the Todorović family all the time, but changed farms and moved from house to house, always on guard, keeping under surveillance (from small attic windows) roads and lanes that could bring the enemy to his door.

It was hard for the children to stay with their uncle, so they returned to Negotin at the beginning 1943. Both Milana and Ana felt that there was no place safer for them than by their mother's side. However, only a few months later Budimka met one of her colleagues from work who told her in confidence that Jewish children and wives would be rounded up next morning. She immediately rushed to the market to find any villager who could pass on a message to Mita to come and take the children away. So far no one had yet bothered Budimka since she was a Serb. However, the fact that she was married to a Jew was a constant threat to her safety. In her message to Mita she said that she would wait for him at the inn on the outskirts of the town.

Milana and Ana were unwilling to part with their mother again. However, this time their father would be waiting for them at the farm. Their mother hurriedly packed some bare essentials and with first nightfall, taking her children down obscure paths and over garden hedges she made it to the designated inn on the town's edge. Dawn had already broken when Mita's son, Žika, arrived with the horse-driven cart. They got in right away and set out for Dubrava.

Together with his two infant children and wife Rada, Žika lived in cohabitation with his parents. Rada and Mita's

wife, Kruna, took the two girls, Milana and Ana in, treating them as if they were their own. The Todorović family was poor, but everything they had was shared between them like next of kin should do. A few other families also lived on the farm and all of them knew that a Jewish family was hiding on it. Needless to say, their mother was not with them; she remained in Negotin as their connection with life in the world outside. German troops passed frequently by the farm, but not one of the farmers reported the existence of a Jewish family in their midst.

Round the middle of 1944, a neighbour's barn was set on fire. It signaled imminent danger. Everyone living on the farm rushed down a ravine and from there into the woods of mountain Miroč. Once the alarm was over, the farm folk returned home, but the Schomlo family moved to Malajnica where the schoolteacher Žika took them in. They would have stayed there if German troops had not appeared in the village a couple of days later. Once again they were forced to run to the mountain forests. They wandered over the mountainous ground between Miroč and Deli Jovan. They could not return to Mita Todorović's house since a multitude of armies operating in the area after the fire incident frequently checked the farm out.

The Schomlo family moved sporadically from one place to another in search of food. On Deli Jovan they met another Jewish family. Together with his kinfolk, Jacques Levi was also hiding from Fascists and local collaborators. Finally, as winter was approaching, the Schomlo family made a home for themselves inside a cave on mountain Miroč.



Mita Todorović



It was warm inside the cave, but it was also full of lice. The engineer found it hard to explain to his children why there was not enough food; when it snowed they went without food for a couple of days. They mainly ate different herbs and some corn, which was hard to come by. Fortunately, flocks of sheep were still grazing the hillside and the children usually got some corn bread and cheese from the shepherds.

It was November 1944. Tucked deep inside the cave, sitting close to each other, they listened to the roar of the cannons. At times it seemed as if the fighting was in progress right in front of their cave. Since the greater part of their days was spent in exterminating the pestering lice, despite the ongoing cannonade that momentous day, they were again preoccupied with the same task. All at once, Ana was on her feet.

“Father, can you hear the bleating of sheep?” asked Ana, hoping she might once again eat some corn bread or cheese.

“No, it’s just your imagination,” father replied. Nevertheless, he decided to stretch his legs and walked out of the cave.

Close by the cave a shepherd was driving his sheep downhill into the village where they would spend the winter. The engineer hurriedly caught up with him to bid him farewell for the season. The children rushed out of the cave. The shepherd was perplexed by their appearance, as if they were a wonder unheard of.

“Can you spare us some food?” father asked. “We haven’t eaten anything for some days now.”

The shepherd took some bread and cheese out of his

bag, the leftovers from his breakfast, and finally asked them what they were doing there.

“We’re Jews,” the engineer replied. “We are hiding and trying to save our lives from the Fascists.”

“But the war is over,” the shepherd said, astonished that they had not heard about it. “Negotin was liberated two months ago!”

“So what is this cannonade we are hearing?” asked the engineer.

“The Russians are advancing from Romania, they are fighting off the remnants of German forces,” replied the shepherd. “There is also fighting between the Partisans and Chetniks.

The Schomlo family started off for home immediately. It was a long journey to Negotin. Along the road they came across dead German soldiers, slain horses with swollen bellies, overturned vehicles. But all that those hungry eyes were on the lookout for was some food.

“We won’t find any food until we get home,” father said sternly. He was afraid of poisoning and forbade the children to pickup anything along the way.

Budimka took little pleasure in the fact that the war had ended. Word had reached her that her entire family had perished and her days were spent in silence and mourning. The war had taken the one thing most dear to her, her children and her husband. The school was full of children, but each day she returned to an empty home.

When Budimka saw them, unkempt and ragged, her head reeled.

“I thought you were all dead.” She hugged the children



Milana and Ana Schomlo



close to her.

Joy at their reunion mingled with rage at the hardships they had all gone through, but gradually a profound sense of happiness that the family was together once again prevailed over all.

“How is it possible that you haven’t sent word till now?” Budimka had so many questions to ask although she was only half-conscious of their replies.

When the first excitement of their reunion had somewhat subsided, mother asked her children: “What was it like living inside a cave?”

“Fine,” Ana replied. “However, it was not nice of the lice to bite my ears off!”



Radmila and Živojin Todorović at the Righteous among Nations award reception

**Kruna and Mita Todorović,
Radmila and Živojin Todorović**
all awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 1995



TO FREEDOM WITH SLOBODAN

In the general mayhem generated by the capitulation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the veterinary Dr. Josip Fenje, returned to Raška. Shortly before World War Two began, he had been transferred from Užice and posted to Raška where he was appointed county veterinary. Josip's wife, Hermina, and daughters, Magda and Ilonka, were still in Užice awaiting their departure for Raška. After invading Užice, the Nazis began their persecution of Jews. Josip undertook steps to hasten his family's flight from Užice.

Dr. Josip had worked for many years in the Užice region of Serbia and was a household name throughout the local countryside. He had made many friends but never imagined that the first to come to his rescue would be the occupiers. As planned, the doctor's family placed their luggage inside the cargo wagon and were about to enter the train that would take them out of Užice when the county prefect Aleksić, nicknamed Kurjak, issued an order to seal the wagon and stopped the departure of Fenje family members. Kurjak was unaware of the fact that the German military veterinary, indebted to a colleague from Vojvodina - the amenable Dr. Krajtner - had granted permission for the Fenje family to leave for Raška forthwith. On learning that the Fenje family had, nevertheless, been detained in Užice, Dr. Krajtner took Ilonka, nicknamed Ica, to the German veterinary. Ica appealed to the army veterinary to intervene with the authorities and influence them to allow the family to go to Raška. Not even Dr. Krajtner was aware of the fact that his German colleague could order the release of the detained luggage and approve the departure of the Fenje family from Užice on his own authority. The German veterinary consoled Ica, who could not contain her tears. He told her to give a message to his colleague Fenje, whom he had never met, to hold on just a little

longer since Hitler's demise was imminent and he would soon be history!

In Raška Dr. Fenje went about his business as if there were no occupation. The family was reunited and had hardly any perception of the fate awaiting Jews. This went on up to June 22nd, 1941, when Hitler attacked the Soviet Union. With the Belgrade March 27th demonstrations still fresh in their minds, the Germans hastened to prevent renewed rebellion in Serbia. People were taken to prison. In Raška all prominent citizens and Communist supporters were apprehended. Dr. Fenje was among the prisoners on their way to the Banjica camp. The only reason why Dr. Fenje was providentially released from camp after spending some time there was that he had been arrested with this group of people and not because he was Jewish.

In south-east Serbia where Raška is located, the Resistance movement was growing stronger and in November 1941 the Germans sent a punitive expedition to deal with the rebellious people of Raška. By that time, the persecution of Jews was already well under way in Belgrade and the greater part of Serbia. The time had come to settle this issue in Raška, too. Dr. Fenje and his family were evicted from their flat, ordered to wear the yellow band and to report daily to the German command. They were forbidden to leave Raška and found themselves in the street without a roof over their heads. Although welcomed in many homes up to that moment, Dr. Fenje was at a loss what to do next. Help first came from the priest's wife, Vida, and her husband, priest Milan Milenković. Vida sent her brother, Alexander - Aca Petrović, to go and fetch the Fenjes and help them settle in the Milenković house, together with their belongings. Unfortunately, their stay with the priest was very short. News had reached Raška that Germans were arresting Jews and deporting them to camps. The country folk were fond of Dr. Fenje and respected him. They would not let their veterinary down nor allow him to be taken



by the Germans. All were eager to help. The problem how to leave Raška had to be overcome. The railwaymen organised their departure. On a winter Saturday, a market day in the Serbian countryside by tradition, many people thronged the streets of Raška, despite the dense snow. One at a time, the members of the Fenje family arrived at the railway station and boarded a carriage provided just for them. A few stations down the track, near the village of Biljanovac, railway workers uncoupled the Fenje's carriage while the rest of the train continued on its way.

Waiting for them in Biljanovac was a dilapidated, damp house in which they were to stay for a few months. The Fenjes settled into the unsuitable house as best they could with the few belongings they had been able to take with them. Magda had managed to bring along her Alsatian. She had not had the heart to leave the dog behind.

Dr. Fenje was not wealthy enough to sustain his family without the monthly earnings he received in Raška. Aware of the fact that he would be recognized and arrested the moment he arrived in Raška, he dared not go to collect his wages. It was February 2nd, 1942, when his wife, Hermina, and daughter, Ica, went to Raška for the money. Father and Magda stayed in Biljanovac. Once Hermina received the money, the two women set off to find transport to Biljanovac. As they stood beside a cart waiting for its driver to come, a man came up to them and told them to run from there as fast as they could. The cart stood in wait for Jews who were being rounded up! Hermina and Ica had no one to

turn to but the priest's wife, Vida. Again Vida's brother, Aca Petrović, accompanied by a villager, came to the rescue. They led Hermina and Ica out of Raška. The two women had come to Raška in their peasant's wear and had stayed undetected. This proved to be a crucial fact for their safe exit from the town. Aca took them to Kruševica where he placed them with his relative, Jovan Petrović.



Ilonka - Ica Fenje

In the meantime, two villagers had come to the door of Dr. Josip's house in Biljanovac to warn the doctor that the Germans had just passed through the village on their way to Jošanička Banja where a number of Jewish families from Belgrade had found shelter. Once they picked them up, the Germans were returning to Biljanovac for the Fenjes. The doctor and his daughter Magda, who had up to then been waiting for Hermina and Ica's return, immediately left the house. They climbed a hill from which they could observe the house they had been staying in. They saw the Germans enter it. The Germans were already furious since they had been unable to find a single Jew in Jošanička Banja. Their inquiries as to the whereabouts of the doctor were also in vain; not a single villager was willing to help them.

They finally sealed the house up and left, without having completed their task. It was extremely cold. Perched on the hill they had run to, Josip and Magda waited in the deep snow for someone to come for them and take them to another shelter. Aca Petrović, brother of the priest's wife from Raška, came as night was falling. He told



Ica, Hermina, Slobodan Mičić and Magda

them how Hermina and Ica were in a safe place and that he now wanted to take father and daughter to Kruševica to join them. But Magda could not walk. In the process of fleeing from the house and running uphill, she had twisted her ankle. Aca took Josip to Kruševica while the villagers transferred Magda to Ušće, near the Studenica monastery. They placed her with the innkeeper, Prokić. The house contained both dwelling quarters and the inn dining-cum-buffet premises, frequented by Germans. Magda dared not show her face beyond her small, isolated room. A physician was also brought to check on Magda's foot. After a while it became too risky for Magda to remain in the inn, so Prokić took her away to his friend Vojvodić's home, as far as possible from the Germans.

Jovan Petrović was a forest ranger on mountain Kopaonik. Each night he returned to his home in Kruševica where his wife Rada looked after their guests. Jovan and

Rada had a son, Milan, and three daughters. The Fenjes joined their efforts with Rada and her children in the fieldwork that had to be done. It was a remote village, on a road that Germans rarely took. Nevertheless, one day, on returning to the village from work, Jovan learned that someone had reported the Jewish family hiding in his house to the Schwaben. He immediately took Josip, Hermina and Ica to his friend Buda Pavlović in Krljane, a village some 4-5 kilometres away from Kruševica.

At the same time, Magda had settled down in the Vojvodić house. Her stay there was cut short when one night the Germans came to the house to arrest her host's younger brother. Since they could not find the brother, they apprehended her host. Frozen to the bone, Magda spent the night outside with a villager who had helped her escape from the Vojvodić home. When the information that the Germans had left the house reached Magda, she had already made up her mind not to return there. Again she found herself staying with innkeeper Prokić. As before, it was unsafe for her to stay there long, so she



Dušan Mičić, Magda Fenje, hosts, Ilonka Fenje and father Josip Fenje – 1943.



was eventually transferred to Krljane where her mother, father and sister were already staying. The Fenje family was finally reunited.

Buda Pavlović and his family took care of the Fenjes. They protected them and fed them up to the moment word got round that the Germans were on the trail of the Fenje family. The family had to move once again. This time help came from a peasant and from the archimandrite of Studenica monastery. The Fenje family was moved to Djakovo to stay in the home of the borough council chairman, Kostić. Throughout her life Magda never forgot the chairman's good wife, Marija Kostić. To ease the constant anxiety about their safety, the family found a way to obtain fake documents. Actually, the documents were genuine, but the names on them were aliases. Magda chose the name Marija, after her benefactress from Djakovo. The Fenjes had their photos taken for the new documents. Once the pictures were ready, they were handed over to a peasant, who took them to Raška. Although they were wearing their peasants' clothes in the photos and the women had covered their hair with scarves, the officers in the Raška town hall recognized them all the same. They issued the documents, sending word to the Fenjes to be on their guard. Just as they were familiar with the whereabouts of another Jewish family from Raška, the Papos, in hiding on the slopes of mountain Kopaonik, many knew where the Fenje family had escaped to, but kept quiet



Magda Mičić in front of the Synagogue in Dubrovnik - 1948

about it. No one from Raška ever betrayed the two families.

In Djakovo Magda met Dušan Mičić, a young mechanical engineer from Ivanjica. The love that flared between them was so passionate that it pushed all the hardship aside. They got married in Studenica. The priest knew that Magda, alias Marija, was a Jewess. However, owing to the papers she had from Raška stating her name as Marija, they entered her into the church books under her assumed name. The pair's life together was brief as the Chetniks mobilized Dušan soon after their wedding.

When in spring 1943 the Germans appeared one day in Djakovo searching for Jews and Partisans, Magda, alias Marija, was pregnant. Angered by their failure to find those they were looking for, the Germans set the town hall on fire in reprisal. The Fenje family had to move on.

Their escape route took them through the village of Ponore where they stayed for some time. However, they were soon forced to flee to the mountains due to unexpected raids. The mountains were farthest from enemy forces. The Fenjes settled into a mountain shack above Rudine. The shack belonged to Desimir Andjelković. At the time, their hostess was staying inside the shack where she habitually prepared cheese and kajmak – a kind of Serbian cream cheese. She told them that they could stay in the other room since beside the dairy room,



there was no other in the shack; there also were no beds, just straw strewn over the room floor. It was here that Magda gave birth to her son on July 14th, 1943. For miles around there was not a doctor or a midwife to be found. Ica, Magda's older sister, cut the umbilical cord. Despite all the privation, a smile lit up the faces of both sisters. Desperate to be free again, they named the boy Slobodan. (Sloboda means freedom.)

Desimir's shack had become too small for the Fenje family. Since it was safest to stay in the mountains, they had to remain there. In the end, Mirosljub Koturović came to their rescue. He let them stay in his shack in the hamlet of Manča and it was somewhat more comfortable than the one they had left. It was there that the Fenje family with baby Slobodan received news of the liberation. After the war they returned to their Raška townsmen. In the hope that he could somehow repay the people they owed so much to, Dr. Josip resumed his veterinary work for some time. He was well aware that he would not have managed to keep his family together in the darkest hours of their lives nor preserve their lives had it not been for the people of Raška.



Studenica monastery

**Vidosava and Svetozar Milenković,
Aleksandar Petrović**
all awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 2002





TAKE CARE OF MY CHILD UNTIL I RETURN

In 1941, at the onset of the invasion of Subotica by Hungarian forces, a Jewish family by the name of Weiss – Josip, Piroshka (nee Spitze), and their son Mirko, born just before the war - lived in the town. Their first neighbours were Katarina and Bela Kudlik. After completing his military service in Prizren, Bela returned to his craft; namely, he was renowned for his skill of making the little “tambura” - a string instrument similar to a mandolin - and the fact that he would often take the opportunity to play his favourite instrument. Katarina and Piroshka were acquainted since their youth but did not have occasion to meet each other often after both had got married. However, Bela’s sister, Tereza, helped the Weiss family with the household chores and this gave the Kudliks an opportunity to meet little Mirko almost every day; a special friendship sprung up between the two families. The Kudliks had no children of their own and they amply bestowed their love on Mirko and on Tereza’s children. Tereza Sabo had six children of her own. In the hard living conditions brought about by the war, the Kudliks decided to help Tereza by adopting her daughter, Julijana – Juca. On moving in to live with the Kudliks, Juca found a new home and enjoyed the love of her newly-adopted parents. Although Jews were relatively safe in Hungary, Hungarian occupying forces were obliged to enforce anti-Jewish regulations, dictated by the Nazi regime in Germany, in the zones that came under their authority upon the

capitulation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. In actions undertaken by Hungarian Fascists, Serbian patriots, Communists, and all those considered undesirables by the new regime perished side by side. When it came to Jews, the aim of the Nazi ideology was to exterminate them to the last. Upon the occupation, Mirko’s father, Josip, was immediately sent to forced labour, while Piroshka was left at home alone with her little child. She neither had any knowledge of what was happening to her husband, nor of his whereabouts.

Up to 1943, Piroshka somehow managed to protect herself and her son Mirko from Fascist raids. When she received a summons to report to the occupying authorities on a daily basis, she was filled with dread that something terrible was about to happen and decided to ask the Kudliks to take Mirko in.

“I have brought you what I hold most dear in my life,” Piroshka told Katarina, placing little Mirko in front of her. “Please, look after him as you see fit; take him to be baptized in the church...name him Pista,” Piroshka was having increasing difficulty to find the right words. “Give him all the love you can instead of me,” she said. Her hand went up to her throat as if she could stop her tears by doing so; then she turned around and left.

Caught unaware, Katarina started: Juca was already living with them and the threat of Bela being drafted and sent to the front was growing with each day. She hurried out to catch up with Piroshka, but when she reached the street, Piroshka was nowhere to be seen. That was the last time Katarina



Bela and Katarina Kudlik with Uri on lake Palić (1945)



ever saw Mirko's mother.

Piroshka had written a letter, which she left behind with Mirko, asking the Kudliks to keep the child in their care and not to give him away to anyone else; she promised to return, firmly believing that her husband would come back as well, and that they would both be once again reunited with their son, Mirko.

The Kudliks took the child in, looking after him as if he were their own child. Firstly, Katarina and Bela decided to change Mirko's identity. Katarina told everyone that they had taken in her brother's daughter! So all of a sudden, Mirko became Marika. However, when a Hungarian officer was temporarily stationed in their house, they were faced with a new problem. After returning from work, the officer would ask for Marika's company; he enjoyed playing with "her", perhaps to relax after his mentally exhausting job, or maybe "she" reminded him of a child left home behind, waiting for his return. Therefore, he gave all his attention to this other child before him. The Kudliks realized that they could not pass Mirko off as a girl much longer. Through their connections, they baptized Mirko in a Catholic church. According to Piroshka's wish, he was christened Stevan – Pista. Although Katarina had no idea why Piroshka had chosen that particular name, she was, nevertheless, satisfied to have fulfilled her request.

During the raids and ransacking of homes, the Kudliks used to hide Mirko in the shelter they had made

in their backyard. Mirko was an obedient child; he never made a sound while search of the premises was being conducted, nor did he ever speak to strangers. His life went on, seemingly unperturbed, as he was swathed by the attention and affection of the two people who were not akin to him, but whom he had, nevertheless, come to love as his parents.

By the beginning of May 1944, a ghetto was established in their town in Paralelna Street. Jews were moved to the enclosed town area. Even in the hardest times, risking his own life, Bela continued to take five litres of milk to the imprisoned Jews each day. While he persisted in his efforts to help the wronged, the occupying authorities daily hunted for Jews who hadn't given themselves up voluntarily. The Fascists were in a hurry to complete their monstrous task: soon the final transport of Jews from Subotica was dispatched to Nazi camps, predominantly to Auschwitz, via Hungary.

The imminent end of the war presented no deterrent to the extinction of Jews. There were still many of those who thought they were fulfilling a sacred duty by reporting Jews who had managed to escape the last transportation train. The destiny of the persecuted people, the uncertainty of their existence, or even their death was of no consequence to them. It became very hard for the Kudliks to continue their life in these conditions. Their neighbours were well aware of their family status, i.e., that they had no children of their own. The identity of the child, evidently not a baby, they



Bela Kudlik with a Hawaiian guitar of his own make



*Bela Kudlik in the uniform of
the Kingdom Yugoslavia
Army forces*

had recently taken in, was obvious to all, but no one spoke about it. It was, unfortunately, also clear to those who spared no time to make known to the authorities that they knew of another Jewish child in hiding and to report the people who were giving him shelter. The Kudliks fled from their own house taking Mirko with them and began to hide on the farmsteads around Subotica, mostly on the farmstead of Ka-

tarina's brother Ruf in Verušić. They spent the whole summer staying with him. From time to time, they would return home only to learn that someone had zealously reported them again and that they had to flee town once more.

During the bombardment of Subotica in 1944, when household objects and furniture were blown out of the house by the detonations and little Mirko believed it was fireworks that were causing all the commotion, the Kudliks lived out their fear for the safety of Juca and Mirko for the last time. Subotica was finally liberated and the Kudliks no longer had to keep Mirko in hiding. Mirko's parents never came back; it is believed that Piroshka perished in Auschwitz, while Josip was sent to the Ukrainian front to clear the minefields.

Mirko's life continued under the loving, parental care of the Kudliks. Once freedom was proclaimed, his childhood became carefree and playful, in no way different

from that of other children. Soon he was old enough to start school and had just begun to attend classes when, without any prior notice, his aunt Adela arrived at the Kudliks' door. She had spent the whole war in hiding in Subotica and no one knew whether she was alive or had ended her life in one of the Fascist camps. The Kudliks gave the letter that Mirko's mother had left with them to Adela. It was a hard moment for Bela and Katarina when they had to give Mirko up: they felt they were losing their own son. Together with Adela, they grieved over the violent death of Mirko's parents in the war. However, they knew that despite everything, they had to hand the child over to his closest relatives. The bitter memories of their wartime days made Adela and her husband leave for Israel without any second thoughts and resettle there. Of course, they took Mirko with them and he was renamed Uri in Israel. He took along his mother's letter and the selfless love of the Kudliks, his second parents, with him.

Katarina and Bela Kudlik

both awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 1987





OPERATION TONSILS

The Schefer family - father, mother and little Pista - were among the many Jews that had sought refuge in Hungary at the beginning of the war. The Schefers had run away from Novi Sad and found a provisional home in the village of Baja. Residing with them was also Pista's maternal grandmother. They lived relatively peacefully up to 1943. Then, once again, the Hungarian regime had to carry the full weight of their alliance with the Third Reich. At the time, German soldiers were fighting gruesome battles on the Eastern Front; Stalingrad was defending itself heroically. The German army was running short of manpower necessary for their aspired conquests. The Hungarian government was ordered to send new reinforcement units. Mr. Schefer, still relatively young, was on the list of men destined for the Eastern Front. Going to war meant that he would have to leave his young wife Magda and their child, as well as Magda's aging mother. All that aside, he personally had no ambition to fight this war. He was already mobilized when he decided to desert. However, he didn't get very far. His intentions were discovered and the Hungarian Fascists killed him in the course of the attempted escape.

At the time, Mileta Lepčević, a fellow citizen from Novi Sad, was also in Baja, just like the Schefer's. Although an internee in Baja, obliged to report daily to the police, Mileta was still regarded by relevant authorities as suitable for high-position employment in the Hungarian establishment. He lived in an apartment rented by a Jewish family. Through his host he met many Jews from Baja and was on very friendly terms with the Schefer family.

The war was nearing its end and the German High Command, disgruntled by Hungarian inefficiency and results regarding the Jewish question, i.e., the termination of

Jews, occupied Hungary in the first days of spring 1944. Being a Serb, Mileta was, in all probability, deemed above suspicion by Hungarian authorities, as far as information on the impending outcome of the Jewish agenda was concerned. He soon learnt that a ghetto, from which Jews would be transported to death camps, was being set up in Baja. He immediately informed his friends about the details.

Once the fate of those destined for the ghetto became clear to all, Magda asked Mileta to save her little boy, Pista. What Mileta wanted was to save them all, but that was impossible. The internment of Jews inside the ghetto and transportation to the death camps lasted over two weeks. However, Mileta had previously taken Pista into hiding. He had gone to a doctor friend who worked in the local hospital and told him that Pista had tonsillitis and that he had to be operated on. The physician immediately understood what was under way and admitted the boy to hospital. Mileta also took Magda home to stay with him, but after spending the one night in hiding, she knew that she could not leave her mother on her own. The two women were led to the ghetto and transported from there to Auschwitz. It was discovered later that together with many other Jews, they too had been taken on the journey of no return.

Before entering the ghetto, Magda had handed over all her money and valuables to Mileta - all in all, a small fortune. Mileta had never suspected that his friends were so wealthy. By the end of September 1944, at the time these events were taking place, Mileta's life was also increasingly threatened. The last transport for camp Auschwitz had departed and the time had come for Pista to leave the hospital. Mileta somehow managed to inform and ask Dr. Tabaković from Subotica to look after Pista prior to the beginning of his trial before the Martial court of the III Segedin army. The boy, who in the meantime had had his healthy tonsils removed, was to be discharged from hospital.



Pista was staying in Dr.Tabaković's country house on Lake Palić when the war ended. The end of the war also saved Mileta's life; the court proceedings were never concluded. Two years later, one of Pista's uncles came for him. All the money and valuables Mileta had received from Magda were given to the uncle, who in due course emigrated to Israel with Pista.

Mileta Lepčević and Dr. Pavle Tabaković
both awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 1978



SCHOOL HEADMASTER

As far back as 1838, the First Belgrade Gymnasium was founded. The name of the establishment was somewhat different at the time since it was the only grammar school in Belgrade; the title "First" came later when other grammar schools began to open up in Belgrade. It was only after a whole century, in 1939, that the school acquired its own building, which to this day houses the institution. As an education centre of repute, the First Belgrade Gymnasium relentlessly strove towards a high level of academic standard. Many imminent scientists, artists, ministers, and military dignitaries received their education in the classrooms of this school. In 1940 the school headmaster, Spasenije Prica, was faced with a perplexing dilemma. He was obliged to put into effect the Regulation on the enrollment of persons of Jewish origin into schools.

Numerus clausus, as the Regulation was popularly named, referred to the numerical threshold of pupils of Jewish religion enrolled into the first grade of schools throughout the Kingdom of Yugoslavia for the year 1940/41. Although initiated by the minister of education, Dr. Anton Korošec, the Regulation did not apply to the Banovina of Croatia. Once put forward, it was upheld by the entire Yugoslav Government which, in greater part, favoured coalition with Hitler. The passing of the anti-Jewish decree regarding limited admittance of Jewish children into schools and the prohibition of trade of foodstuff was just the first concession made to the future aggressor. Headmaster Prica bore no disregard toward Jews but at the same time knew not how to be of help to them once the conditions instituted by

the decree had been put into effect.

The decree did not apply to the Jewish fourth grade student Gerschon Kapon. In the school year of 1940, eleven students of Jewish confession were admitted into the first grade of the First Gymnasium. Twelve more Jewish children were enrolled in the remaining nine schools; all in all, twenty-three of them. Some seventy Jewish children, who could not enter state schools, continued their education in the hastily established Jewish Gymnasium (grammar school). Intellectuals and public personas, in Belgrade particularly, protested openly against the inhuman and discriminatory decree. But no positive effect was achieved. In the final instance, out of the total of nine, six professors, non-Jews, asserted solidarity with the Jewish children by accepting to teach them in the newly-founded Jewish school.

Prince Pavle Karadjordjević, the Royal Regent, favoured relations with Great Britain, but after a meeting with Hitler in 1939, he actually came to believe that Germany had no territorial pretensions toward the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and granted permission for signing the accession to the Three Partite Pact. The affixed signature to the Pact provoked an unprecedented protest in the streets of Belgrade on March 27th, 1941. A coup d'état was implemented and the Government was overthrown. The illusion of amicable relations with the mightiest force in Europe, Germany, abruptly came to an end. The protest also brought about the end of the school year for all students. Hitler's retaliation for the rejection of the Pact was merciless. Belgrade, an open city, was bombarded heavily on April 6th, 1941. Very shortly upon the initial strike, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia capitulated and Germany established a military regime. The pogrom of Jews and Commu-



Gerschon Kaponi



nists, who were charged with all the evils of this world, was set in motion. Jews, in particular, were afflicted by anti-Jewish laws which led to incarceration into camps, followed by mass executions. The Fascist effort to resolve the Jewish question as quickly as possible and bring a whole people to its extinction was progressing.

Gerschon's brother, Rahamin, did not waste time. He managed to flee to Split immediately upon the capitulation. Split was under Italian authority and the Italians were much more lenient toward Jews. Many Jews ventured the journey to the lifesaving territories under Italian administration. By covert liaison Rahamin managed to send information to his brother that there was talk of how Jews born in the territory under Italian occupying forces might be repatriated to Italy.

Gerschon wore the yellow band on his sleeve and each day went to his forced labour assignment. The only document he possessed was his pupil report card which stated that he was born in Belgrade and was of the Jewish faith. He decided he would make some data amendment by deleting Belgrade as his birth-town and entering Split instead. However, when he began to obliterate his confession, he realized that he had blotted the document to a degree visible from outer space.

One day, on his way home from forced labour to the Dorćol apartment his family had moved into after having been evicted from their own home, he was passing by his school, the First Gymnasium for boys. On the spur of the moment he decided his next move. Once he had ascertained that there was no one in sight, he rushed into the school. For a moment he hesitated, not knowing who to turn to, but then he resolved to approach the school headmaster, Spasenije Prica, directly. He found Mr. Prica and his assistant, professor Pijuk, in the headmaster's office. Gerschon proffered his ruined report card and kindly asked the headmaster for a new one.

"Please," Gerschon added, "if you could just write down

that I was born in Split and not in Belgrade."

Headmaster Prica immediately understood what was at stake.

"Go and bring me a new card," he told him.



Spasenije Prica (1940)

"Where could I buy a new report card," Gerschon stammered, pointing to the yellow band, "now, at the end of the school year?"

The headmaster gently placed his hand on Gerschon's wavy hair and looked questioningly at his assistant. Professor Pijuk immediately delved into his table-drawer and soon brought out a new, blue-covered report card.

"Sit down and write," the headmaster said. "Kaponi Georgio. That should seem more veritable to Italians than Gerschon Kapon. Continue writing: fourth grade pupil, born in Split, of Catholic faith."

The assistant entered Gerschon's grades next, stamped the document and handed it over to the headmaster for signature.



“Here my boy, the best of luck to you. Please take care of yourself!” Handing the signed document to their pupil, the headmaster and his assistant saw Kapon off. Holding on to the lifesaving document, Gerschon left the school building.

The document proved to be Gerschon’s salvation. He reached Split without any trouble. Escaping Fascist terror, Gerschon managed to stay alive. In memory of his headmaster’s benevolent act Gerschon held on to the surname Prica had given him: Kaponi.

Spasenije Prica

awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 1991



*The aspiration of every Jew was to reach the Italian occupation zone.
Split - seen from mount Marjan*



I WOULD HAVE HELPED YOU, TOO, IN SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES

Back in 1929 a Lazarist priest, Andrej Tumpej, came from Slovenia to Belgrade. He was summoned by the Catholic Church to take a post in the city. The Church seat was in the centre of Belgrade and parishioners on the outskirts of the town found it difficult to come to mass regularly. Permission was obtained to build a church on Čukarica, in Požeška Street. The parishioners themselves had already bought a house next to the property envisaged for the new church in 1927. At that time, the house temporarily served for holding mass. Once the land was purchased, the architect Blaž Katušić from Zemun was engaged to design the building. Construction work was soon under way and that same year the church was completed. On December 30th, 1929, Andrej Tumpej was appointed first priest of the parish church dedicated to St. Cyril and St. Methodius. The old house and the new building of the St. Cyril and St. Methodius church now became a small monastery complex.

Antonija Ograjenšek, a Slovene, met Avram Kalef, a well-to-do Jewish merchant of Belgrade, in the late twenties of the last century. Avram was the proprietor of a fashion salon in Kolarčeva Street where the latest Paris designer clothes could be bought. They were soon in love and, in order to get married, Antonija passed the giur, i.e., she forsook her Catholic faith and converted to the Jewish. This done, she married Avram Kalef under her new name - Dona. Soon their two daughters, Matilda and Rahela, were

born.

Matilda and Rahela were raised in accordance with the Jewish tradition. The large Kalef family used to gather at the time of Jewish holidays. Beside her standard school education, Rahela regularly attended religion classes and could recite religious and Jewish poems at these family events. The future opera diva's career began with these first creative exploits. Unfortunately, Avram became gravely ill in his thirties and from then on, lived his life as a physically handicapped person, tied to his wheelchair.



Andrej Tumpej

After the disastrous bombing of Belgrade in April 1941, the city was soon occupied by German troops. The occupying forces began their persecution of Jews and Communists, aided by the Quisling government. The men from the copious Kalef family, along with other Jews, were first driven to forced labour, then imprisoned into camps from which, day after day, inmates were taken to execution sites and shot. Avram remained at home in his invalid chair. At first the Nazis left the women and children alone. However, their attention soon turned toward them. The Nazi ideology preached that the entire Jewish people had to be eradicated. Avram Kalef's apartment was sequestered by the Germans and the family thrown out into the street. A commis-

sar was appointed to conduct business in his shop and all at once, the Kalef family was stripped of all means of making a living. Dona Kalef committed both her husband and his aging mother to the care of a home for elderly people, but they were soon moved from there to the Jewish hospital in Visokog Stefana Street.



Before the Nazis deported the majority of Belgrade Jews to the death camp Sajmište, Dona and her two daughters moved to a wooden shack in Košutnjak where her brother lived and where they were relatively safe. The Nazis left the staff and the patients of the Jewish hospital in Dorćol for the final act of their monstrous spree. In March 1942 they took all of them from the hospital and placed them inside the truck body of their specially designed “suffocating” truck. The passengers were all gassed on the way to Jajinci. Afterwards, the dead Jews were thrown into a mass grave in Jajinci. Both Avram Kalef and his mother died inside the truck’s gas-chamber. Twenty-six members of the Kalef family were dead before the war ended.

At the same time, Dona Kalef was trying to find a way to secure means of living for her daughters and herself. Her brother moved from Belgrade, so Dona was forced to leave the shack with her daughters. She turned to the parish priest, Andrej Tumpej, for help. She had kept her old birth certificate which stated she was a Slovene, but she dared not show her children’s papers to anyone. Andrej Tumpej was aware that the children’s father was a Jew, but being a man of heart, he gave them shelter and the means to stay alive. The girls moved from the shack in Košutnjak to the monastery house where they remained until Andrej procured fake documents for them. Actually, he himself issued them false birth certificates; Matilda became Lidija, and Rahela - Breda. He omitted the name of the father in the documents so that the girls were deemed fatherless, born out of wedlock.

Once shelter had been provided for the girls in the par-

ish home where they stayed with the nuns, Dona could remain in the shack for a little longer. After spending three months in the monastery, the girls were moved to an attic in a building beside the horse-race track where their mother had found new accommodation for them. The children named the flat “pigeon hole”. Dona, who had reverted to her old name Antonija, found work in the village of Draževac. She was accepted into a village household, but her wages could only be paid out in corn meal and potatoes. The children would remain alone for days at a time, awaiting their mother’s arrival and the “wages” she would bring with her. Both girls learned



Matilda, Dona and Rahela Kalef

how to cook. Nettle grew in abundance near their building and they picked other leaves as well, which they cooked with the corn meal. In this way they managed to alleviate the gnawing sense of hunger. When on one occasion their mother brought with her a demijohn of brandy to sell, Breda’s hunger was replaced with a deep slumber after she drank a single glass of the spirit.

One day, when their mother was at home, someone started pounding on the door. Fearing the worst, mother opened it. There, in front of her, stood a German officer. She managed to compose herself once she realized that the uniformed man was their former apprentice, Karlo Gutman, a *volksdeutscher*. Karlo had not forgotten his master’s cordial rapport with both him and the other workers. They had always taken their meals together at the same table

and no harsh words had ever been uttered. It had taken Karlo some effort to find Dona and the children; all he wanted to do was offer them his help. Dona thanked him, telling him that they had enough to pass by. Karlo turned around and left, never to show up again; nor, for that matter, did any other German.



Andrej Tumpej did not forget the children when they left the parish house.

He enrolled both Lidija and Breda into the “Matija Ban” high school, located across the street from the monastery. Although the locals knew almost nothing about the girls, the school principle, Orthaber, a *volksdeutscher*, knew they were Jews by birth. He could not reject Tumpej’s request and kept the girls’ secret to himself up to the end of the war. He was killed in the battles for the liberation of Belgrade and thus took the secret to his grave.

The Kalef girls were living in the attic of the building which belonged to Mr. Lukić, who also owned a handbag shop in Balkanska Street. Breda asked him to take her in as an apprentice. She was willing to work and earn some money to ease their struggle for survival. Looking at the frail damsel, a term he used for the girls, before him, landlord Lukić took pity on Breda and told her to come to work. Each day, early in the morning, Breda would set off from Čukarica to Balkanska Street on foot, and hurry back at noon in order to be on time for her afternoon school classes.

One day, word went round the neighbourhood that Andrej Tumpej had been arrested. Only then was it discovered that Tumpej had assisted other Jews, too. He had issued fake papers to two young Jewish ladies who were planning to go to Germany to work there. Unfortunately, they never got beyond Belgrade railway station. The women were recognized at the station by a *volksdeutscher* who knew them from before the war. They were arrested and under heavy beatings, they disclosed who had provided them with fake documents. When he was arrested, Andrej firmly stated he had not known that the women were Jewish but had believed their story that they were of Catholic faith and had lost their papers in the turmoil of war. The Germans kept insisting that he had aided Jews, to which Andrej simply replied that he

would have helped them, too, had they approached him in the same manner. Inside the Gestapo prison Andrej Tumpej underwent the same ordeal as the Jewish girls he had wanted to spare; beaten and terrorized, he was, nevertheless, eventually released.

Mother regularly came to see how her daughters were faring. The girls stayed in the attic beside the race track nearly up to the end of the war. When the Allies began to bomb Belgrade in 1944, their mother was staying with them in the attic flat. She was so scared of bombs that the instant she heard sirens, she fainted. At such times, when a split second saved lives, Matilda, already 16 by then, and Breda, who was two years younger, managed with great difficulty to heave their mother outside. On one occasion they had only just managed to get outside and slump into the nearby trench, left from a previous bombing, when their building sustained a direct hit. Earth flew over mother and daughters, but they remained alive. All the tenants, who believed that a bomb was not likely to fall on their house and had stayed behind, perished. It was impossible to live in the attic any more.

Dona, Matilda and Rahela were staying with a woman from Radnička Street when liberation day finally arrived. The woman had taken pity on the three homeless females. They shared a room with her daughters. Andrej Tumpej, the priest who had re-christened Rahela into Breda, also survived the war. As a sign of gratitude for all his care, Breda kept the name bestowed on her by her saviour.

Andrej Tumpej
awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 2001





SAVED BY THE VINEYARD

In 1941 a prominent Jewish Community existed in Novi Sad and the Stern family - father Arie, mother Rosa and their son Mordechai, five years old at the time - was one of its members. Arie was the proprietor of a delicatessen store in the very centre of the town just across the street from the Jewish Community home. They lived in a large house and Mordechai enjoyed a happy and privileged childhood.

With the capitulation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Novi Sad came under Hungarian rule. On January 21st, 1942, when the raid of Hungarian Fascists began, word of atrocities unthinkable spread round town promptly. At a temperature of minus 30 degrees Celsius people



Julijana, Danilo, Olga and Stevan Kozarski

stood in line waiting for their turn to be killed. The plan was to liquidate all Jews in Novi Sad as well as those Serbs with whom the Hungarian aggressor found fault. Together that day they all met their death on the banks

of the frozen Danube; the Fascists broke a hole through the ice and threw the lifeless bodies into the opening. Once under the ice the bodies floated down the waters of the Danube, some even as far as Zemun.

Mordechai's aunt, Leonora, was married to Djula Bražjan, a tailor of Christian faith. The instant she heard what was happening to Jews, Leonora pleaded with her husband to let her try and save her brother and his family. Djula rushed off to the Stern household, but managed to take only Mordechai away with him. Moreover, he dared not take him home since the fact that his wife was Jewish presented a threat to their own household, too. Pressed for time, Djula thought of his friend Steva Kozarski, a Serb from Stari Bečej. Steva took Mordechai into his home without a second thought.

As he took leave of the boy, Djula warned him: "Never piss in front of other children; if anyone should see you doing it, you'll be in danger."

Since Mordechai had been circumcised as required by Jewish religious norms, any child seeing him would immediately notice that he was different. Once revealed, the story could easily spread and arouse unwanted attention.

The Kozarski's were farmers. Apart from the fields they ploughed, they also kept a vineyard. In it they had built a small outhouse to which they could retreat and find shade in the scorching high-noon sun. However, in wartime the building acquired a completely different purpose. That a Jewish child was hiding in the Kozarski home was soon enough reported to relevant authorities. Not wasting any time, Steva's son, Danilo - Bata, took Mordechai to the vineyard to hide him there. Although night was approaching, no one came from the house to tell them they could return. Mordechai was six at the time but nevertheless too small to be left alone in unfamiliar surroundings at night. He openly admitted that he was scared and Bata decided to stay with him.



They spent a couple of days in the vineyard on that occasion. Concerned that she might be seen, Olga, Bata's older sister, brought food to them from the house surreptitiously. They eventually learned who had notified the authorities of Mordechai's presence in the Kozarski home. It was the Old Malicious Hungarian, as the children used to call him, who kept an inn across the street from the Kozarski house. Word went round that he was an informer, but nothing could be done about it. Consequently, every so often Mordechai had to run and seek shelter in the vineyard. Each time Bata would go with him.

The end of the war was approaching when German troops invaded Hungary and concurrently took control of all territories occupied and thus far held under Hungarian authority. Extermination of undesirable Jews recommenced and intensified. In the wake of a report made once again by the Old Malicious Hungarian, Mordechai had to run and seek shelter in the vineyard. Bata fled along with him. The years spent in wartime together had formed a bond between them. Bata's eagerness to help his friend in need never faltered and he refused to leave Mordechai to fend for himself. In time, the entire Kozarski family, as well as many other Novi Bečej inhabitants, were aware of the fact that there was a Jewish child in hiding in Steva and Julijana's home. Despite the Old Malicious Hungarian's repeated reports, they did everything possible to help Steva and Julijana keep Mordechai safe.

However, a time came when Mordechai dared not return to the Kozarski house any more. He and Bata spent month after month hiding inside the vineyard house. One autumn day in 1944, news that the Russians had arrived and liberated the town came together with the food Olga brought them. Older and faster, Bata was the first to see the Russians. Following close behind, Mordechai caught up with him the very moment Bata was telling a Russian officer of their prolonged exile

in the vineyard and life in hiding to keep Mordechai out of the hands of the Fascists; all this because of the Old Malicious Hungarian's repeated reports. Mordechai witnessed the execution.



Stevan and Julijana Kozarski

Thus, the war ended for Mordechai. He took leave of the Kozarski family and, hoping to find his aunt and uncle, set off for Novi Sad on foot. Bata took to the road with his friend. Along the way Mordechai learnt that uncle Djula had been in Stari Bečej on several occasions to inquire how he was faring, whether he needed anything. Nevertheless, he had not let Mordechai see him, afraid that it might upset the boy and make it harder for him to carry on. Both aunt and uncle were overjoyed to see Mordechai.

During the war there was no way Mordechai could attend school. Now the war was over, his aunt and uncle enrolled him into elementary school and he started attending classes regularly. One day, a few months after school had started, aunt Leonora burst into Mordechai's classroom, out of breath and visibly excited. She whispered something into the teacher's ear and Mordechai



was immediately freed from further classes for the day. Sensing his aunt's agitation, he became tense. Arie Stern, Mordechai's father was home again. No one had ever really learnt of what had happened to the Sterns. In view of the circumstances under which they had parted it was generally thought that they had been killed during the raid on the bank of the Danube. However, his father had been sent to a forced labour camp on the Eastern Front where he had miraculously stayed alive and been saved. Father and son took the first opportunity that came their way to set off for Stari Bečej. Father Stern wanted to personally thank the Kozarski family for saving his child. Mordechai longed for his mother Rosa's return. He kept waiting for her, but she never came. One gloomy, rainy day Mordechai's silent tears fell in accord with the raindrops. He had at last come to terms with the fact that his mother would never come back to him.



Old Bečej

**Julijana, Stevan and
son Danilo-Bata and daughter Olga Kozarski**
all awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 1994





BEWARE OF HOW YOU CROSS YOURSELF

“Please come to the police station immediately,” from the very threshold of the room an agitated and out of breath Zora pleaded with Mirko’s parents to accompany her. “You have to explain that Mirko has been arrested by mistake, that he is not a Jew!”

The numerous Baruch family had found shelter in the laundering outhouse behind the Stamenković residence in Niš. The family members exchanged subtle looks deciding what to tell Zora. It was clear both to father Avram and all the others that they could no longer hide their Jewish descent from her.

When, in the aftermath of the bombing of Belgrade on April 6th, 1941, German troops entered the city and established a military regime throughout the territory of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, their prime target became the Jewish residents. Prior to initiating the process of exterminating the Jewish population, Jews were sent to forced labour tasks. The rubble that the bombing had left behind had to be cleared away and the dead, disintegrating bodies pulled out of the ruins. Once that was done, the killing of Jews could commence, right up to the last one, until the Jewish question in Serbia was resolved. Ezra Baruch was one of the many forced labour workers. His wife Rina stayed at home with their two-month-old baby. One day Ezra did not return home from forced labour duty. He had been taken to the Topovske šupe death camp. With a group of other inmates, he was taken to an unknown destination in October 1941; no one ever found out where his life had



Zora Stojadinović, husband’s family name Budjić

come to an end. When his wife Rina received a summons to report to the Special police together with her baby and to bring the keys of her flat along with her, her father-in-law, Avram Baruch, decided that all of them should flee from Belgrade.

He had long been acquainted with Mr. Stamenković; occasionally he had done business with him and so the Baruchs came to Niš. The Stamenkovics were the only ones aware of the fact that the Baruchs were Jews. The Baruchs rented the Stamenkovićs’ laundry outhouse and the ten of them settled into it; Avram and his wife, Riki, Ezra’s wife with the baby, Avram’s son and daughter with their families and Schalom, now old enough to be married.

They managed to acquire false identity cards in Niš stating they were refugees from Pirot. With the new documents they acquired Serbian names and their surname became Borić. Schalom’s documents gave him the new name - Mirko, as friends frequently called him, since Shalom translated meant mir (peace). He soon found employment in the Andrić bookshop and moved to another flat. Mirko met Zora Stojadinović in his new neighbourhood and soon their friendship developed into something more serious. Although deeply in love with Mirko, Zora never learned of his and his family’s Jewish origin. According to their documents, they all had new Serbian names. It was only in 1943 after

Mirko’s arrest, when in panic she came to the outhouse to plead with his family to hurry and explain to the police that he was not Jewish, that she learnt the truth. It never transpired who had denounced Mirko to the Ljotić company, a band of fervent Fascists who formed the greater part of the Nedić Serbian Volunteers corps.



On learning that her loved one was a Jew, Zora seemed to gain a new strength. With great difficulty, exposing herself to grave danger, she managed to locate Mirko and bring food to him in prison. One week upon his arrest, Mirko was transferred to Belgrade to the Sajmište camp from which he never returned.

From that moment on, Zora devoted herself to the Baruch family. It was clear to her now why they rarely ventured from their home. Zora brought them food, medicine, and everything else they needed. Rena was an established lay seamstress, but dared not bring customers to the outhouse. She started teaching Zora sewing basics and soon Zora was experienced enough to make customer rounds; Rena sewed in the outhouse, while delivery and everything else beyond its walls was entrusted to Zora.

As newfangled Serbs, the Baruch's had to blend into the milieu they were now living in and its popular tradition. False documents were worthless if one failed to observe Orthodox Church customs. Zora taught them how to prepare customary meals for religious holidays, what to wear on these occasions, when to light candles, how to behave in church, all in all, everything needed



Ezra Baruch



*Schalom Baruch alias
Mirko Borić*

to prove their Serbian ethnicity. They didn't find it hard since a story told by Delisia Baruch, alias Desanka Borić at the time, was always on their minds. It was about a little girl who, instead of opening her mouth to receive "the body of Christ" in a Catholic church, had extended her hand. The child's Jewish origin was immediately revealed and she was taken to a death camp. Since they were obligated to attend church on holidays, besides learning new prayers, the Baruchs had to know how to cross themselves with three fingers. What they had to memorize was to group their three fingers together keeping them bent, contrary to the Catholic practice of making the sign of the cross with outstretched fingers. To err inside the church would draw attention, even end in disaster. The smallest mistake often meant loss of life. Zora was there every step of the way equally assiduous and caring.

As war was coming to its close in 1944, announcements decreeing the denouncement of Jews in hiding were once again plastered all over the city. Zora bravely stood by the Baruchs right up to the final liberation of Niš. The Baruchs duly returned to Belgrade. Zora met a new partner for life, Mr. Budjić, and remained with him in Niš.



*Delisia Baruch alias
Desanka Borić*

Zora Stojadinović , married Budjić
awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 2001



ON THE SLOPES OF MOUNTAIN KOPAONIK

Round mid November 1941, the Jewish family of Rahamim-Raka Ruben, a photo-journalist of the daily "Politika", came from Belgrade to Kuršumljija. Heading for Albania they were to learn that the border with Albania had by then been sealed off and that Kuršumljija was their last stop. As they left the train they found themselves in a completely strange town. Fortunately, standing at the station, Raka saw his old acquaintance, Mika "Smederevac", in the company of Pesah, the proprietor of the Takovo cinema house, and brightened up a little. Each day Mika "Smederevac" came to the Kuršumljija station to wait for the train from Belgrade and help Jewish refugees find a place to stay. Raka told them how, in the south bound train with no lights on, he had lit up a match in the darkness of the night and in an instant recognized a number of faces. Taken aback, he had exclaimed: "Why, this carriage is full of Jews!" On hearing from Raka that there was such a number of Jews inside the train, Mika suggested that Raka, his wife, Flora, and daughters, Rahela and Bojana, find accommodation at the "Evropa" Hotel, owned by Živorad – Žika Arsenijević, along with the rest of the newly arrived Jews. Kuršumljija was under Bulgarian occupation and at the time, it was much safer for Jews to stay there than in Belgrade. Each family had its own shattering story of the misfortunes that befell Jews immediately upon the arrival of German troops into Belgrade. From day one Jewish men were taken to forced labour and in a short while, they stopped returning home. They were placed in camps from which they were systematically taken to execution sites and shot. The practice of death by hanging was also frequently exercised.

Raka had been drafted into the Drina division some time before the war broke out. The division was sent in the direction of Šabac. On April 6th, 1941, the house the

Rubens lived in sustained a direct hit in the bombing of Belgrade. For anyone to continue living there was hazardous. Subsequently to taking refuge from the bombs in the neighbouring villages of Belgrade, Flora returned to the city with her daughters and settled into an attic in Molerova Street. The women had to register with the authorities and were ordered to wear the yellow band on their arms. Each day they went to forced labour duty. Concurrently, after being taken prisoner in the short April war, Raka was marched to Pančevo from where prisoners were to be transported to camps in Germany. Passing through Belgrade on foot, Raka's long, drawn-out line kept going round in circles since the German officer in charge of the prisoners could not find his way to Pančevo Bridge. On their second march down Kneza Pavla Street, Raka's colleague, a typographer in "Politika", who was standing in the doorway of his house and observing what was happening in the street, recognized him among the prisoners.

"Raka, make a run for it to my house," he shouted to him.

For a moment Raka was of two minds what to do, but when a group of soldiers blocked the view of the German guard escorting the line, he ran to the printer's house. The typographer gave Raka civilian clothes to change into, but as Raka was of sturdier build, the items were some two to three sizes smaller. Lastly, the typographer threw an overcoat over him to conceal the unbuttoned trousers and shirt. Soon Raka was with his family again. He too, had to wear the yellow band and was taken to labour duty. Like others, he was assigned to clearing debris. Day by day the number of Jews on Belgrade streets diminished; it was a matter of days before Raka would also be taken to one of the Belgrade camps.

For a long time the Rubens had been friends with Dr. Djordje Marinković, a surgeon at the Belgrade clinic for orthopedics, and his wife, Stanka, an operating-theatre



nurse at the same clinic. When Raka appealed to Dr. Marinković for help, he immediately checked him into his ward and put his healthy leg in plaster. It was a temporary solution that bought time. Through her contacts Stanka obtained fake documents for Raka and his family. When the papers came through, the family acquired new Serbian names. The document issued to Raka under the name of Radovan Rosić was a fairly passable forgery. It arrived not a moment too soon. The Germans had begun searching the hospitals for Jews and arresting the ones they found. Raka fled from the hospital at the very last moment. The occupiers had not yet initiated the process of implementing their final solution to the Jewish question - to apprehend all remaining Jews in Belgrade, mostly women and children, who had up to then been spared from persecution, and take them to camp Zemlin, i.e., Sajmište. Flora was still at home with the children. Raka dared not go home. He spent the night in Isak's abandoned shop and in the morning, as prearranged, met his family at the railway station. Stanka had accompanied Flora and the girls to the station and thus witnessed the family's reunion. Raka's document withstood the first test. Showing little interest in women and children at that time, the Germans hardly looked at their fake documents. It was Raka's papers that they checked out since they were looking out for Jewish men and Communists fleeing from the city. Radovan Rosić was not on their list.

In short, that is how the family reached Kuršumljija. Once there, the Rubens settled in hotel "Evropa". However, at the end of 1941 and beginning of 1942, fierce battles between the Partisans and Chetniks were fought

in the vicinity of Kuršumljija. Germans headed out to assist the Chetniks, who were losing command of the territory. Although the town was governed by Bulgarians, a German punitive expedition was on its way to Kuršumljija and Jews from the "Evropa" Hotel had to find new accommodation without delay. Their retreat in the direction of mountain Kopaonik was initiated. The scattered villages on the mountain slopes offered relative safety.

Raša Nikolić, a native of village Konjuva, was also in Kuršumljija. Before the war Raša had been employed in a small business, owned by a Jew, inside the Belgrade General Bazaar on Terazije. His employer had been kind to him and he believed that the time had come to repay the generosity extended to him by helping Jews in their time of need. By then, the Ruben family had already left hotel "Evropa" and was staying in a room of a thatched hut near the cattle market.



Raša Nikolić

A sense of danger of the forthcoming persecution of the Jewish refugees in Kuršumljija could be felt in the air. Together with Predrag Vasić from the village of Dankovići, Raša drove a group of Jews out of the town. A race against time commenced. A group of thirty-seven Jews, among them the Rubens, were taken prisoner before anything could be done to save them. The prisoners were to be transported to the Crveni Krst camp in Niš the same day they were arrested the instant the commanded

train was ready at Kuršumljija station. A group, led by Predrag Vasić, was organized to set the Jewish prisoners free. On learning that the transport for Niš would be leaving within eight hours, there was no time to make detailed plans. The group decided to eliminate the guard



although they feared that in an ensuing barrage of bullets some of the prisoners might get shot. Fortunately, by the time night had fallen, the prisoners were still in Kuršumlija and the guard had left his post to have his dinner. The doors of the premises were broken into and one of the saviours exclaimed:

“Rise up Jews, Moses has come to lead you to the Holy Land!”

Despite their anguish, the saved Jews laughed. Predrag took the entire group to his house in village Dankovići. Although he came from a well-to-do Serbian family who owned a substantial house, he found it difficult to accommodate the large group of refugees. Some were placed inside rooms, others in the corridors; there were even some sleeping in the pantry. For a month the Jews stayed and were boarded by Predrag. Although the community they now lived in was large, only some of the Jews staying with Predrag knew that in the days that followed their escape, Predrag had provided shelter for some sixty Jews who had subsequently arrived from Belgrade. It transpired that Dr. Pijade had begun to send Jews from Belgrade to Predrag’s address. However, the newly arrived Jews did not want to stay in the villages on the slopes of Kopaonik. Their principal goal was to reach Albania. But the presence of Germans in the territory had disrupted all liaisons and it had taken Predrag some time to renew contact. For the time it took to find reliable Albanians, Predrag had provided shelter for the newly arrived Jews in neighbouring villages. At last, two Albanians from Podujevo, willing to take on the assignment, came forth. In a matter of days, all the Jews were transferred to Al-

bania, in groups or one by one, along roads known only to the men from Podujevo.

Predrag took care of “his” Jews, but when a new German expedition was launched, the group had to be divided and urgently transferred further on into Kopaonik since the village Dankovići was only four kilometres from Kuršumlija. It was left to the Jews to decide which route they would take. The Rubens chose to go with Raša Nikolić to the hamlet of Preskoće, actually a part of village Konjuva. They rented a house from Ljuba Nikolić near the market and stayed there up to the autumn of 1942. On learning that a search for Jews and Partisans was again initiated by the Germans, the Rubens moved on to villages in county Blace. For a couple of months they shifted from one house to another until they could return to Preskoće. Although not a wealthy Jew, Raka Ruben still possessed a



Predrag Vasić with his wife

camera and photo equipment, tools of trade he could not part with. People came to him to have their picture taken for identity papers, both false and proper; he was asked to take pictures of funerals, weddings, etc. Each photo was compensated with a *šajkača* i.e., a cap of wheat. With his stock of photo material running out, Flora, who over time had shed her city garments and wore only peasant clothing, went to Belgrade to ask Raka’s colleagues from “Politika” for help. “Uncle” Diša Stevanović, his son, Mire, and daughter-in-law, Vida, Jure Isakov and other “Politika” co-workers generously donated to the survival of their friend Raka. While the material for Raka was being prepared, Flora stayed with Stanka and Dr. Djordje Marinković. A chauffeur from



“Politika” must have recognized Flora and reported her to the police. A comprehensive search for Flora was set in motion. A friend of Stanka’s, employed at the railway station, sent word to her that Flora’s photos were posted all over the railway station. Flora had to leave Stanka’s flat and Belgrade instantly. They went to the station in Topčider and Flora reached Kuršumljija safely. Before long, Gestapo men came to Stanka’s flat. Stanka insisted that she had never harboured any Jewess. She was, nevertheless, taken to headquarters for interrogation. A search of the flat produced no evidence of Flora’s presence in it. After prolonged and severe torture, Stanka was released.

In the summer of 1943, on July 7th, the Bulgarian police arrested Flora and her two daughters. Žika’s two friends rushed to hotel “Evropa” to tell him what had happened. When the Bulgarian gendarmes came, Raka was not at home; Flora and their daughters ended up in Bulgarian prison. Over time Žika and his wife, Živka, had become friends with Flora and were trying desperately to find a way to free her and the children from prison. Two Bulgarian officers, Dičev and Bakalov came to Žika’s establishment regularly every morning. Left with no alternative, Žika went up to Dičev and said: “Come now, Dičev, those people you apprehended...”

“I know,” Dičev interrupted, “you are looking after them.”

“We Serbs have an old saying,” Žika replied, “do good and you will be rewarded; evil deeds are repaid with evil.”

Dičev and Žika set off for the prison together. Dičev opened the door and said:

”Go on, get out of my sight!”

Flora returned to Preskoće with her daughters. After the incident, the Rubens realized that they were not safe there any longer. Once again they started off for county Blace and on October 14th, 1943, settled down in village



Priest Milosav Popović, Sava Bradić, Raka Ruben and the teacher of village Grgure

Grgure. Sava Bradić provided shelter for them in his house. There were fifteen people living in the house: Sava’s wife, Jovana, nine children, and the elders. The Rubin family was given one bed and all four of them slept in it. However, they were safe under uncle Sava’s wings. Uncle Sava was an excellent woodworker and made a perfect dark chamber out of wood boards. Raka would mount the lens of his camera on to the box and place it in the window. In the bright sunlight that shone throughout the day, the paper he used was subjected to



exposure. At night, when everyone had gone to bed, he would develop the pictures. A large quantity of fresh, clear water was needed for the process and the children would go to fetch the water from a spring a couple of kilometres from the house during the day.

At the beginning of 1944, the Chetniks advanced towards Grgure in their search for Jews and Communists. Raka decided they should move on, but uncle Sava was adamant. He stood before Raka and told him:

“Raka, you are not going anywhere, you are safe in this house. They will have to kill me and my nine children first before they can get to you.”

The Chetniks reached uncle Sava’s house. By then, they were aware that some people were hiding there although no one from the village had betrayed the secret. They stubbornly stuck to the assumption that the people were Partisan supporters. The Chetniks insisted that Sava hand them over or tell them where these people were hiding so they could take them away.

“Over my dead body,” Sava replied. “It is an honest family that we have taken in. To us they are family and we are prepared to defend them, at any cost, from everyone, including you.”

What uncle Sava did not know, was that, in the past, Bojana and Rahela had sewn underwear from parachute cloth for Drinka Pavlović, the national hero, who was taken to Jajince and shot in 1943 after she had been subjected to extreme torture in the Belgrade camp Banjica. When, in the spring of 1944, a new German search expedition for Communists and Jews on mountain Kopaonik was launched, uncle Sava transferred the family to his *kum* in hamlet Muadžeri. The Rubens spent a month there and returned to Grgure. The end of the war found them staying with uncle Sava. The exceptional friendship that had grown between the families during the war was crowned in liberated Belgrade when the friends became *kums*. Uncle Sava was *kum* - best man at Bojana’s

wedding, while Flora was *kuma* – chief bridesmaid both at Milan’s and at his younger brother, Tomislav’s, weddings. Flora was also god-mother to Milan’s daughter. She named her Olga in memory of her sister, who had been shot on Bubanj in Niš.

Predrag Vasić, Jovana and Sava Bradić

all awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 1994

Raša Nikolić

awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 1995

Stanka and Djordje Marinković

both awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 1996





MILORAD TOŠIĆ'S TESTIMONY

“Prior to the war I was a devout Royalist, ready to sacrifice my life for King and Country.”

This would be a good starting point for telling the life-story of Milorad Tošić. At the time of Hitler's assault on Belgrade, Milorad found himself within the nightmare of the city. “Although I was a Royalist, I was never an extreme nationalist, my wife being Jewish. Naturally, so were both of her parents: Klara and Julius Gutman. I had already moved the Gutmans to my parents' home on the outskirts of Belgrade in July 1941. However, the noose encircling persecuted Jews was tightening by the day and in November 1941 the decision to relocate Klara and Julius to Budapest was reached unanimously. I procured false documents for them and taking out-of-the-way roads, I transferred them to Budapest. They could have travelled by train, but were too frightened of being caught. The first person I helped to move from Belgrade to Budapest by train directly was our family friend Josef Eingenacht. Sometime at the beginning of June 1941, I obtained a conductor's cap which made it easier for me to venture with Josef through the railway station. At the station a friend of mine, working in the sleeping cars, stood waiting for us. He immediately took Josef to a berth he had prepared for him. Josef reached Budapest safely. Von Ribbentrop, Reich minister of foreign affairs, arrived at the same destination that very day. Josef must have really wondered where I had sent him to!”

From the earliest days of enemy occupation Milorad Tošić operated undercover in the Resistance movement. In July 1943 his work was detected and he was taken to the Gestapo prison.

“That I found my way out of there was a miracle,” Milorad recalls. “Evidently, the moment had come for others to help me and they did. Once outside prison, my wife and I packed and immediately set off for Budapest. We

got together with her parents in Budapest; they were living in hiding like so many other Jews. In Budapest I met Ilonka Kemeny, whom I had relocated to a village in the vicinity of Belgrade together with her family when the harassment of Jews in Belgrade began. When the Fascists started making rounds of the village, I took Ilonka and the others to the railway station in my car. I had beforehand secured false identity papers for them. I sent them off to Budapest. Once there, Ilonka got in touch with her father Isak Sandorne. Sometime upon my arrival in Budapest, Isak asked me why I was helping Jews to such a point that I was in constant danger of being arrested. I told him that the brutal persecution of Jews compelled me to engage myself hands-on in their rescue. And that was how things really stood. Before I left Belgrade, I had made it possible for Ilonka's father to flee from Belgrade; also Aldar and Olga Arany, Vilmosch Tilberger and others. I find it hard to recall all their names, but seventeen of them have testified that I saved them; not only from occupied Belgrade, but from Poland, Slovakia and other countries. They all found refuge in Budapest. By installing Ferenz Szalashi, of pro Fascist orientation, as president of the Hungarian government, a ferocious persecution of Jews was mounted. I took the Gutmans to the hills where they stayed till the end of the war. I myself was engaged in rescuing Jews by way of the Swiss Consulate in Budapest. To what extent my efforts were of help I cannot tell as 430 thousand Jews were transported to Fascist death camps in a very short time. Could I have been satisfied with rescuing just one life? Probably yes, otherwise I never would have gone through it all and done what I truly believe had to be done. I helped Ilonka Kemeny and her family once more by obtaining a Swiss safety passport. They finally found shelter in Switzerland. Margita and Miška Kertesz followed them soon. If I were to say that many found the road to safety by way of the Swiss consulate, it would sound unjust to those who never had



that opportunity.”

When the war ended, Milorad Tošić was in Hungary. In 1945 the Gutmans returned to Belgrade. So did Milorad. However, his wife and child remained in Budapest since the new Yugoslav regime denied her right of return. Instead of being commended for deeds performed, as a prewar Royalist, Milorad landed in jail. It was only in 1953 after his mother, whose husband had perished in World War Two, appealed to President Tito, that Milorad was set free. However, his happiness was short lived. Agents of the Secret police UDBA requested that Milorad collaborate with them, i.e., become a spy, an informer for the service. Milorad refused, but managed to obtain political exile in Switzerland. He never returned to Yugoslavia.

Milorad Tošić

awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 1978



DEEP - ROOTED SCENES IN LITTLE ALEXANDER'S MEMORY

Following the enforcement of the general conscription, Dr. Herbert Kraus, a physician from Pecka near Valjevo, was sent to the front line facing the Bulgarian invader. The short lived April war of 1941 ended when the Kingdom of Yugoslavia speedily laid down its arms in defeat. Dr. Kraus returned to Pecka to his wife, Blanka, and son Alexander, a baby born in 1940. However, he did not stay at home for long. His patriotic sense of duty led him to the Partisan movement, acutely in need of physicians and their services. At the time, it never entered the doctor's mind that the health centre in Pecka would be named after him when the war ended.



Blanka and Dr. Herbert Kraus – 1938

Immediately upon the German invasion, the extinction of Jews began. Blanka and their son Alexander were taken to the camp in Šabac. Blanka spoke excellent German and ceaselessly claimed that she had been brought to the camp by mistake. She kept saying that they were Serbian refugees and that there could be no connection between them and the Partisan physician, Dr. Kraus.

The Chetniks, convinced that a Jewess with her child had been brought to camp where both of them belonged, shook their heads distrustfully. It took the Germans more than a month to concede to Blanka's story and release her and the baby from the camp.

Afraid of returning to Pecka, Blanka withdrew to the village of Gunjaci with her son, Alexander. She planned to stay with the wife of their friend Urošević. Unfortunately, a single young woman with a child could not stay undetected for long in a village. Their host's fear outweighed her sense of benevolence; all she could say to Blanka was:

“My dear woman, were you an apple, I would hide you inside my bosom; but things being what they are, I cannot help you, so go and find a way to save yourself.”

Collaborators of the Resistance movement took care of Partisans' families. Blanka moved to Šabac with her son, Alexander, where she met Vjeka Mihailović. Vjeka was assigned to look after the Krauses. She obtained false documents in the name of Branka Novaković, an alleged widow of a Serb from Bosanska Krajina. Once in possession of these documents, Blanka could leave Šabac. Soon Blanka and Alexander boarded a boat and sailed up to Belgrade to liaison with a Partisan waiting for them. However, when they reached the designated meeting-place, no one showed up.

It was the summer of 1942. The long journey and the “wait” for the failed connection had made Alexander hungry. Blanka entered the privacy of a passageway to a court house in Kosovska Street, sat down on a step and began to breast feed her child. Down the corridor of the house, a door to an apartment opened and, all of a sudden, there was a robust Montenegrin woman, with braids encircling her head, standing beside her. Realizing what was happening practically on her doorstep, she invited Blanka inside, so that she could feed the child in peace. Once the meal was over, Alexander, already a



seasoned toddler, next had need of a potty. The moment his underwear came down, all was revealed. That he was circumcised was evident to all, although no direct mention of “Jew” was made. There could be no doubt as to who Danica, better known as Keka, and her daughters, Olga and Mila, had let into their home.

Blanka had no idea where to go to next. Although the three women well knew the danger they were getting into if found harbouring Jews, they invited Blanka to stay with them in the flat. Through some friends of hers, Keka managed to find employment for Blanka almost immediately. A graduate of the Zagreb Faculty of Philosophy and professor, Blanka was to teach in a school in Dudovica near Ljig. Their departure was not to be a final parting from Keka and her daughters, who were, in fact, collaborators of the Resistance movement. Little Alexander came to stay with Keka each year when Blanka took her pupils to Valjevo for their final exams.

Blanka and Alexander stayed in the Vukašinović house in the village of Dudovica up to the end of the war. On one of her trips to Valjevo with her pupils, the train was stopped in the Lajkovac station. In response to an informer’s report that the wife of the Partisan physician, Dr. Kraus, was on the train, the Germans were on the look out for a woman with a red hat. Since Blanka’s knowledge of German was faultless, she instantly caught on that they were looking for her. The fake identity card from Šabac, coupled with her self-confident bearing, saved her once again.

Hardly anyone in Dudovica knew that Blanka and Alexander were Jews. Like it or not, they had to respect and live in accordance with Serbian customs. To kiss a burning oak branch on Christmas day for the first time

must have been as challenging for Serbian children as it was for little Alexander. He would remember Christmas of 1943 for the rest of his life. Still very babyish, with the stove reaching just up to his head, he stood beside the host who was setting fire to the oak branch inside the grate.



Zorka Djurović, Olga and Mileva Jovanović. Bottom row: Alexander Kraus, Jovanović Keka and Tanja, wife to Alexander

“Come on son, now you kiss the Christmas branch so that no harm comes to the livestock, no hardships to us...” Nothing of what was being said reached Alexander’s ears. He stood staring at the fire dancing to its very own tune. “As many sparks, that many coins...,” the host continued. Alexander’s tearful eyes were by now themselves sparkling. With the Christmas branch burning at one end and water sizzling from the snow brought in with it at the other, Alexander knew not where to kiss the offered bough. He could not let the family down and place a curse on it. He kissed the branch and rid himself of any guilt of the hard times the Serbian people would yet live through till liberation.



Little Alexander Kraus

The spring of 1944 found Alexander staying with Keka in Belgrade once again. A new bombardment of Belgrade again began, ironically enough, in April. This time Anglo-Saxon planes were bombing German strongholds in Rumania, Hungary and Serbia. Keka would not leave the flat, so Mila and Olga took Alexander to Banovo Brdo, then the remote periphery of Bel-

grade. They hastened to distance themselves from the ruined railway station and the stately downtown building, Palace Albania; all the people who had taken shelter in it were killed. Bombs fell on the city's centre square of Terazije, but the bulk of casualties were in the vicinity of the Bajloni market. All these city landmarks were in the neighbourhood of Kosovska Street where Keka and the girls lived. They had no way of knowing that Banovo Brdo, where they found shelter in a basement, would also be targeted. As Alexander sat in Mila's lap, he watched a small thread of light coming through the basement window grow larger with each second. When the explosion resounded, the light disappeared and the house next door was destroyed to its foundation. This would be the last scene of the horrific war to embed itself into little Alexander's memory.

**Danica Jovanović and
daughters Olga and Milena**

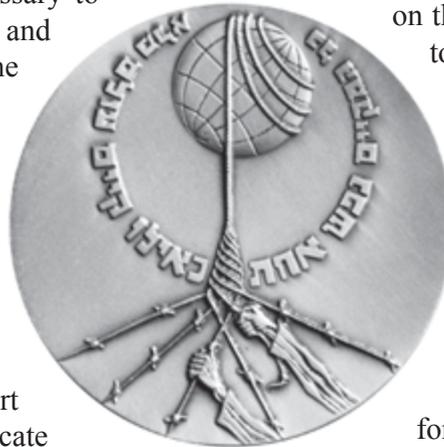
all awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 1993





ON PASHA'S HILL

German troops attacked the Kingdom of Yugoslavia unaware of the extent of resistance they were up against. When on March 27th, 1941, the masses explicitly said NO to the signed Three Partite Pact - and thus to Hitler himself - in an unprecedented rally that toppled the Yugoslav government, Hitler's unrelenting response was swift to come. Serbia almost instantly admitted defeat in the ensuing April war. The Fifth column already in existence in Serbia stood prepared. Well organized through bogus German trade missions, i.e., German intelligence organizations, and in collaboration with *volksdeuschers*, it began to dispense order in the overpowered Serbia. Still, it was necessary to appease the Serbian people somehow and convince them that occupation was the best solution for all since government would be returned and administration handed over to Serbian leaders (i.e., Quislings, enemy collaborators). The unfortunate prevailing state of affairs was proclaimed to be engendered by Jews and Communists, who were to be held liable. The solution to the Jewish question was already a part of the monstrous Fascist plan to eradicate a whole people within the territory of Europe; Jews were at fault simply because they were Jews. Arrests began almost immediately. The men-folk were to be apprehended first to prevent any eventual unrest, and subsequently, by the end of the same year children, women and the old were taken to the Sajmište death camp. Among the first to be taken to the Topovske šupe camp were Hana's father, Marko Nachmias, her brother Gavro and their grandfather, whom Gavro was named after, as well as uncle Isak Adoni and many other male



relatives.

Hana was only four-years-old at the time and completely unaware of what was happening. Why her sixteen-year-old sister Silvia pressed their mother to obtain false documents with Serbian names for them was incomprehensible to her. In despair over the fate of their father and brother inside Topovske šupe camp, Silvia had somehow managed to take food to them several times. On one occasion, they told her that the hanging and killing of Jews was under way. Gavro had insisted that they, mother, Hana and Silvia should evade apprehension and camp imprisonment at any cost. Soon after, Silvia stopped bringing food to Topovske šupe. Both her father and brother were dead. Both Silvia and Hana's mother were already marked and wearing the yellow star on their sleeves when mother finally decided to seek help from their Serbian friends. On obtaining false documents, mother, now Jelena Popović and daughter, re-christened Dana, could seek shelter where nobody knew them. They rented a flat in the centre of Belgrade.

Afraid that little Hana could not withstand the harsh conditions of living she and Silvia were exposed to, mother sought a more removed place of refuge for her. She ultimately came upon Veljko and Helena Rašić. The Rašićs lived on Pašino brdo, at the time on the outskirts of Belgrade. With no children of their own, they took Hana in and embraced her as their own daughter. The Rašićs had a house with a large garden. Despite the obtained document by which Hana had become and was to stay Jovanka Rašić, daughter of Veljko's brother, right up to the end of the war, she was not allowed to venture into the street. With a camp of German soldiers stationed in their Kralja Bodina Street, they were afraid that in her childish ignorance she might utter something which might jeopardize their



position. The reality of the soldiers' presence never rendered a moment's peace to the residents of Pašino brdo. Every so often Hana had visitors. A girl of her age, with an elder brother, would come to play, but such incidents were exceedingly rare. Veljko and Helena did everything possible to lessen her solitude. Veljko read fairytales to her; once in fantasyland, they were free to roam it at their heart's desire. He taught Hana how to draw and write. Helena was of French origin so Hana had French lessons, too. She would also indulge Hana and let her share the daily chores, whether in the kitchen or garden. They kept two goats, some chickens and a multitude of rabbits in a fenced-in part of the yard. Helena was an exemplary cook; however, problems arose whenever she prepared a rabbit dish typical of the French cuisine. Hana had made pets of all the household animals and grudgingly accepted the fact that in hard times one had to live on one's resources.

Mother paid weekly visits to Hana. The Rašićs selflessly left the two of them alone so that they could make the most of the little time they had together. These encounters were unique occasions when mother could bestow her love and care on Hana.

When the 1944 bombardment of Belgrade started, the Rašićs took Hana to Kumodraž. The war was nearing its end and their parting from Hana was imminent. When it came, it was hard on everyone. Over the years the two Nachmias women had experienced difficult times. For almost four years mother and daughter had lived a captive's life in the rented flat. To go outside was dangerous and thus, rare. Despite the inexorable sense of insecurity and stress, it was unparalleled to being taken to Sajmište where death was a certainty. Now, at long last, Hana was with them once again.

The Rašićs moved to their house in Dalmatia soon after, while the Nachmiases sailed by vessel Kefalos to Israel in 1948.

Helena and Veljko Rašić
both awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 2006



LOVE WITHOUT PREJUDICE

No bias could hinder their teenage love. It was in school that Dara Djošević, a Serb, fell in love with the Jew, Avram Adanja. Avram loved Dara with equal passion and the pair got engaged on the very threshold of World War Two. News of the mass obliteration of Jews throughout Europe, where Fascism was treading ferociously, could not hinder their wedding announcement. When German troops occupied Belgrade, all of a sudden, everything that had been happening somewhere far-off became a stark reality. The wedding was postponed for happier times. Among the first victims of the installed enemy administration was Avram's brother-in-law, Chaim Shalom. Chaim was married to Avram's sister, Stela, and had two daughters. The Gestapo came for him in the middle of the night, pulled him out of bed and took him as a hostage. Stela waited impatiently for him to return, but it was only Chaim's suit and shoes that came back to her. Her husband had been shot.

Jakov and Gizela Adanja's family knew that no time should be wasted in contemplation. The band on their upper arm, which marked them as Jews, restrained their movement round town. The enemy was taking men to forced labour duty on a daily basis. Some never returned home. The only person that could move about the city freely was their son's fiancée, Dara Djošević. She brought them food and provided other necessities, while the plan she had to take them out of the confines of the city became a priority. It was not only the Adanja family that Dara helped. She looked after other Jews, organizing groups of volunteers who helped all those in need, although their numbers were diminishing rapidly. However modest the results were, she did her utmost to impede the



Dara Djošević

Fascist plan to massacre the population of Jews in Serbia.

As early as May 1941, the Germans, assisted by Quislings, marched into Jewish homes, ransacked them and sometimes apprehended the men-folk; only a few of those captured in these actions ever came back. Other Jewish men still went to forced labour and returned home in the evening. Nevertheless, it was only a matter of days before all the male Jews of Belgrade would be rounded up and taken to death camps. Dara made every effort to obtain false identity papers for the Adanja family through her friends. However, since no time could be spent in waiting, she asked a doctor friend of the family for help and managed to take her future father-in-law, Jakov, and fiancé, Avram, out of the city. They were first on the list for forced labour and, consequently, for deportation to the so-called work camps. She placed them in the clinic for mentally ill patients on mountain Avala. While they underwent "treatment", Dara pressed her friends to secure the necessary documents on time.

The documents finally arrived at the beginning of November 1941. Jakov, Avram and Dara set off on their journey. They reached Priština, which was under Italian administration, by way of Niš. From there they undertook the final leg of their journey to Albania. Father Jakov and son Avram were now safe. Dara returned to Belgrade only to take the same road again at the end of November, this time with Avram's mother, Gizela, and his brother, Benko. Now, the only ones left in Belgrade were Stela and her two small children.

To reach the zone under Italian administration was the dream of the majority of Jews. On the way there many checks were made by various enemy formations of all kinds and colours; Germans, the Ljotić company,



collaborationists. All of them were on the look out for fugitive Jews to whom the Serbian people were amicably disposed. When Gizela and Benko finally reached Albania by way of Priština, Dara returned to Belgrade once more.

At that time, the beginning of December 1941, the last preparations for apprehending the remaining Jews and their incarceration at Sajmište camp were under way in Belgrade. From December 8th to 12th, 1941, Nedić gendarmes made a round of all Jewish homes that had outlasted the initial pogrom. The inhabitants were given written orders to register with the Special police. When Dara reached Belgrade on December 10th, Stela had already received her summons to come to the collection point with her two daughters Elsa, 5 years old, and Lilly, 4. In keeping with the monstrous plan of the Fascist aggressors to annihilate the Jewish population, next in line to take the final journey to the death camp Sajmište were Jewish women and children, and the old and ailing. Jews came to collection points under the threat of death for failing to obey the order. The irony of it was that complying to the summons in order to stay alive actually meant being imprisoned in the Sajmište death camp; from there on, they were destined to be executed in the gas chamber of the specially designed “suffocating” truck on their way from the camp to Jajinci where their bodies were thrown into mass graves.

Whether there was still a spark of hope in their hearts, Dara never stopped to contemplate. Time was short and called for decisive action. She ripped the yellow band off Stela’s sleeve and took her and the children to her house in the village of Vinča on the outskirts of Belgrade. Stela trembled with fear at the thought that someone in the street might discover that they were Jews and shoot her and the children on the spot for taking the band off. On December 12th, the remainder of Belgrade Jews, who had reported to the Special police were taken from the premises to the Sajmište death camp. Shortly after,

the Command of the Military occupation administration in Belgrade was able to report to their superiors in Berlin: “Belgrade Juden Frei!” However, they were wrong since Belgrade had not been freed of Jews. Like Dara, there were other Serbs who harboured and assisted Jews right up to the end of the war.

Meanwhile, Dara, accompanied by Stela and her children, was already on the way to Albania. Jews were relatively safe in Albania, but the fear of what they had lived through drove them to seek refuge beyond its borders. Although they were allies, the Italians did not support the German Fascist policy to massacre the entire Jewish nation. Once they were all together again, Dara reached out to her many contacts and finally came across some relatives living in Rome. By March 1942, all of them had new false documents and after leaving Albania, they arrived in Rome.

The Adanja family had a new family name. Elsa and Lilika started school and they settled into a calmer period of life. Although the children had been warned to tell no one that they were Jews, they thought it odd that only the two of them were excused from prayer in the Catholic school they attended. The Italians were aware who their students were, but the Fascists were no wiser right up to the end of the war.

Once the war was over, Avram and Dara recalled that the time for their wedding had come. With a deeply felt sense of both pride and merit, Dara took Avram’s family name, Adanja.

Dara Djošević married Adanja
awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 1998



MY WIFE IS A JEWESS

It is said of childhood friendships that they are made for life. Julie Kemeny, a Jew, made friends with Alexander Pejić, a Serb, in the first grade of elementary school when they sat together in the front desk of the classroom. Together they finished their elementary education, graduated from junior high-school and celebrated their first prom in Kikinda. Their friendship was to be resumed in Belgrade where fate brought them together again at the onset of World War Two. Almost overnight in Kikinda, the good neighbours of yesterday shed their civilian clothes and, being *volksdeutsche*s, put on black German uniforms. They were now in power, and power made them dangerous, but they failed to realize that terror breeds retaliation of equal measure; still, they had no time to waste on such thoughts. Long before the war began, they were prepared for this day to come, and now indigenous Germans received the German invader with wide open arms. Lists of Jews and their possessions were drawn up with their help in a short time.

Julie's family had settled in Kikinda in 1914 at the onset of World War I. His parents, Arnold and Etelka, nee Haas, were married for only a few months when Arnold was drafted. He fought on the Italian front by the river Isonco and after four years of warfare and being wounded several times, he returned home to Kikinda in the rank of captain. He had set off to war from Kikinda as a citizen of the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy. When he returned home, his town was in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Before the war, Arnold had graduated from the International Trade Academy in Vienna. As far back as 1899 Arnold and his brothers had renounced their family name Kohn and taken a new surname, Kemeny. In Kikinda Arnold opened a store for agricultural machinery. But things in life don't always turn out the way we want them to. Mother and father

took the hardest blow possible when their first-born son, Alexander, born during World War I, died of scarlet fever in 1921. Their second son, Paja, was born a year before Alexander died and another son, named Julie after his grandmother, Julia Kohn, came seven years later. During the world economic crisis (1929-1933), like many other traders, Arnold wrote off customer's debts for machines and tools delivered. Again like many others, his business suffered and he almost went bankrupt; eventually, trade picked up and Arnold managed to see the crisis through. His sudden unfortunate death in 1938 left Etelka with one option, to take charge of the business single-handed. In December 1940 she married a Serb, Dragomir Gašić. Alexander's father, Dr. Mirko Pejić, was the Royal public notary in Kikinda. Besides being neighbours, the two families also became friends while Alexander and Julie grew up to be inseparable mates for life.

When Julie's brother, Paja, graduated from his studies, he got his first job as a textiles' engineer in Novi Sad shortly before the war. Home for the weekend on April 6th, 1941, he turned the radio on early in the morning. That was how the Kemeny family learnt of the bombardment of Belgrade and that World War Two had come to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Paja immediately mounted his motorbike and rushed off to Novi Sad to sign up for recruitment. Due to the comprehensive chaos that beset the Royal army completely unprepared for war, Paja was not drafted. Once the country was invaded by allied enemy armies and the hunt for Jews began, Paja fled to Budapest. To round up Paja's story; during a raid in Budapest in 1944 the Nylashi – Hungarian Fascists-caught up with him in a street and ordered him to take his pants off. Since he was circumcised in keeping with Jewish religious tradition, they killed him on the spot.

On April 14th, 1941, German troops entered Kikinda. The Fifth column stood prepared. Notices announcing the enforcement of anti-Jewish regulations were plas-



tered throughout the city. Although Serbs, the Pejićs disappeared overnight and no one dared ask where they had gone to or what had happened to them. A prominent Serb in Kikinda and its surroundings, Dr. Mirko Pejić was too conspicuous to stay put in his home. Had he delayed his flight, he would surely have been among the first citizens to end up in German prison.

Like the majority of Jews in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Etelka Kemeny - Gašić had heard of the fatal destiny of Jews in occupied Europe. But like many others, she also believed that this could not happen both in her town or country. Shortly before the war she had stocked the store with agricultural machinery. Once the town fell into enemy hands, with no time wasted the *volksdeutsche*s came and meticulously listed every item in the store. Finally, they placed a commissar to run her shop. Concurrently, German officers moved into the house having no qualms about its being Jewish.

In addition to the officers, a cook also arrived at the house; he generously partook of the provisions kept in the larders and cellar.

“Run from here as far and as fast as you can,” he would tell them while making omelets of not less than 30 to 40 eggs. “This lot here will have your heads.”

Even so, Etelka and Julie failed to see the gravity of their situation. Whether reluctant to comprehend the cook’s warnings, who knew only too well what would happen, or unprepared for action, they let his last warning pass.

Only a few days later, the Germans began to round up and direct Jews, both women and men, to forced labour duties. They were marched to the army barracks some three to four kilometres from the city every morning. Once there, they cleaned the stables with their bare hands and carried horse manure to an outlying dump pile. Children and young men were also assigned the duty to clean the barrack latrines which enemy soldiers

grudgingly visited because of the unbearable stench. Compared to the abuse their elders were exposed to, the youngsters were content.

Etelka’s husband, Dragomir Gašić, and Bela Steiner were taken to prison and severely beaten on the allegation that Dragomir was a Chetnik, whilst Bela was accused of stating in public, during a game of cards in the Loyd club shortly before the war, that he would pay a million dinars to whoever killed Hitler. Dragomir insisted that he had nothing to do with the Chetniks and Bela that he had never said anything to that effect. They were released a couple of days later. However, Dragomir’s woes were far from over. Although he hadn’t fully recovered from the torture he had undergone, the Germans came and apprehended him for a second time along with five other citizens of Kikinda. Dragomir wondered where they were heading and why he was grouped together with citizens of standing; the answer came soon enough. He was there to witness an execution by firing squad and afterwards he had to dig out the graves and bury the dead. Visibly shaken, he returned home, but not for long. He was arrested again and beaten up once more. On his release, Etelka and Julie took him to a sanatorium to be patched up by the doctors there. Word got round that new arrests were in preparation and Dragomir fled to Belgrade to stay with his relatives.

In August 1941 all the Jews of Kikinda were taken to a transitory camp in Novi Bečej. There they were put inside an old mill. Etelka and her son, Julie, were among them. On hearing of their imprisonment and transfer to a camp, braved by several glasses of brandy, Dragomir went straight to the Gestapo.

“My Etelka, my Etelka”, he wailed at the top of his voice. “And my son Djordje, only four years old, there with her, too.”

Dragomir pleaded and managed to obtain a piece of paper with the names of his wife Etelka, and son, Djord-



je, as he wittingly christened him on the spot, written on it. The minute he left the Gestapo, he added the number one in front of the figure 4 and with this famous piece of paper he managed to take Etelka and Julie, then 14, out of the camp. At that time, Jews from mixed marriages were still relatively protected and this worked in favour of their release from prison. Dragomir took Etelka and Julie with him to Belgrade. They dared not return to Kikinda any more. After more than 150 years from the time the first Jewish families settled in Kikinda, there was not a single Jew left in the city.

Their first shelter in Belgrade was with Dragomir's brother in Cigan Mala, a Gypsy encampment near Autokomanda in Franche d'Epere Street. They were well received by their host, but also by the fleas, lice and other minute pests which made their lives miserable. However, they were alive and, therefore, content. The food they ate was shared with their hosts to the very last morsel which meant that they were hungry most of the time. Dragomir soon found a way to solve their problems. He became a pest exterminator! Together with Julie, he ventured into the business of disinfection. Dragomir had cyanide at his disposal, as well as various acids and "Ziklon", used in Auschwitz and other death camps for killing Jews. Of course, at that time no one was aware of the fact. Had it even been known - to what avail..?

The site of the Topovske šupe complex was close to their dwellings. Set up at the end of August 1941, it became the first death camp in Belgrade. The first prisoners placed inside were men, Jews from Julie's home town Kikinda, transferred there from the Novi Bečej transitory camp. The camp inmates waved excitedly at Julie from the trucks as they passed by him. Among them was Bela Steiner. But Julie failed to recognize him. As the trucks passed by, Julie could make out some of his fellow citizens of yesterday, and waving back, he wondered where they were being taken to. The first to learn

their destination were the prisoners. They were being driven to their death. All of them were shot in Jajinci, Jabuka and other sites of execution.

Once Dragomir started working, they could leave Cigan Mala. The first place they moved to was a laundry-room where, deprived of heating, they barely managed to live through the winter of 1941-42. Just before they moved to a kitchen outhouse, which acquaintances from Kikinda, the Palinkašes, placed at their disposal, Julie learnt that Dr. Mirko Pejić had moved from Kikinda to Belgrade with his family. They had a house in the Stari Djeram area and in the house a German officer for a lodger. Torn between life with mother and the safe and comfortable abode waiting for him at the Pejićs, Julie chose to remain with his mother. However, he gradually spent more and more time with Aca and his sister, Seka. The Pejićs told the German officer that Julie was their son. Because he had no applicable documents, except for the refugee identity card Dragomir had secured for the both of them and which expired in 1942, Julie could not enroll into any school. In order to keep up with his peers and continue his education, he used to study with Aca and, frequently, with Aca's friends, too.

On one occasion, a Gestapo patrol barged into the Pejićs' house. Dr. Mirko was not at home. Sitting inside one of the rooms Seka, Aca and Julie were studying English in the firm belief that it would be worth their while once the Americans landed in the Balkans and threw the Germans out - together with the Chetniks - before Russian troops arrived in Belgrade. Mrs. Nevenka produced her identity document, Seka and Aca their school report cards. Julie had nothing to show them.

"I've taken the child's report card to the school so that his marks could be entered".

Lying smoothly to the Gestapo men, Nevenka never flinched; she stared right back at them, so they left without taking Julie.



By routine, Julie was observant and always on the alert. Walking down a street he could tell from afar an approaching, on-the-spot inspection of citizens' documents even when the patrolmen were in plain clothes. There was always an alley nearby connecting two streets and making use of them, Julie managed to escape capture that would certainly have ended in his death. He could rely on his sense of dexterity in situations in which he knew what he was up against. Random elements of surprise were definite downfalls.

On one occasion, Dragomir had not returned home before curfew. While his mother fretted whether Dragomir had been arrested, Julie tried to get some sleep. Round midnight, a boisterous Dragomir entered the house in the company of two equally merry German soldiers. In his stupor Dragomir kept repeating:

“My wife is a Jewess!”

The Germans laughed heartily. Once they departed, exerting herself to the utmost, Etelka managed to put her drunken husband to bed. By that time, the last of the Belgrade Jews had been deported to the Sajmište camp. Even so, Dragomir continued his ways, unperturbed. The next time the same scene was enacted, upon repeatedly hearing that Etelka was a Jewess, Dragomir's drinking mates finally took in what he was telling them. On sobering up the next day, they brought Etelka a loaf of bread. By now everything was clear to them; however, the brotherhood bonded by alcohol surpassed the one of duty. They knew that a Jewess dared not venture into the streets of Belgrade. Furthermore, aware that Dragomir was tied up in his business, they had decided to come and lessen the hardships and hunger of his family as best they could.

In this manner Julie Kemeny spent the war days in Belgrade. Moving from one dwelling place to the next with his own family, he felt best protected in the company of his friend, Alexander, and the Pejić family. Although



Julie Kemeny, first on the right in Yad Vashem beside the plaque with the name of his saviours

there was not always enough food to go around even in their home, he often shared in whatever was served on the table either for lunch or dinner. He could never decide which enemy was greater; the Germans or hunger. His daily struggle for a mere crust of bread continued almost up to the end of the war. Occasionally, he would manage to get hold of a plate of cabbage with beans at the soup kitchen using his expired refugee card. Or, as the menu at times stated, beans with cabbage. Shortly before the liberation of Belgrade bread could at times



be bought openly in the market. The moment in time when the Russians arrived in Belgrade, in October 1944, was forever imbedded in Julie's memory owing to the immediate improvement of the food situation. Trucks loaded with food arrived together with liberation. One canned meal per person and half a litre of milk was distributed among the people. On sipping a whitish liquid which was eerily translucent, people learnt what vodka tasted like! Dragomir was contented. The Russians sang, shouted, drank vodka and, together with the Partisans, pushed the Germans out of Belgrade. For many, the streets of Belgrade became their final resting ground; the only difference between the dead bodies was in the uniform they wore. The war was finally over for both Dragomir Gašić and the Kemenys.



The Kikinda Temple

**Nevenka and Dr. Mirko Pejić and
son Alexander**
all awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 1986





THE EXECUTION SITE ON LAZAR'S FIELD

Ksenija, nicknamed Nena, loved to stay with her uncle and aunt in Temerin. Prior to World War Two Nena's family lived in Novi Sad; mother Nadežda, nee Pašćan, was glad of the children's close friendship. Nena's uncle was Oskar Schosberger, a wealthy trader from Temerin, who married Nadežda's sister, Ravica, a Serb. Ravica converted to the Jewish faith before their wedding. In the early autumn of 1941 their son, Tomislav – Tommy, was six years old, the same as Nena. When in September 1941 the Hungarian aggressor decided to deport all Jews from Temerin, Nena was staying with the Schosbergers. The entire Jewish population of the city was cast out of Temerin; they left under guard, walking single-file. Dark, heavy clouds covered the sky and soon it began to rain. The banished Jews had no idea where they were going next. They were boarded onto boats and dispatched by the Fascists into Srem on the opposite bank of the Danube. From there each went their own way. Some thought that the exploit was just a capricious act of Fascist Hungarians, their neighbours of yesterday, so they returned to Temerin. What they were unaware of was the fact that plan "Raid" had already been prepared and stood waiting for the Fascists to carry it out. The infamous "Raid" began in January 1942. All the Jews remaining in Temerin were taken to Žabalj and shot. Hungarian Fascists meticulously kept lists of Jews and with the approach of the raid they dispatched letters instructing Jews staying out of the town to return home



Lazar and Milosava - Mila Ljubičić

directly. Three Jews who responded to the devious ploy returned only to be taken with the others to Žabalj. In the 'Raid' that spanned the plains of Vojvodina thousands of Jews, Gypsies, and "disloyal" Serbs were murdered. Oskar Schosberger had no intention of returning to Temerin and determinedly moved further from it. Crossing the river Sava the few Jewish families that had fled together found themselves in the hamlet of Zasavica near Šabac. For many Jews the road to salvation passed

through Zasavica although the territory was held by the Ustashi and German Fascists. Persecuted Jews would stop in front of well-to-do houses hoping that the head of the household would take them in. Oskar with his family and Nena, who had had no other option but to go along with them, stopped in front of Mila and Lazar Ljubičić's house. Deliberating what to do, Mila and Lazar took the fate of the newcomers into their hands.

"Maybe we could try to help them?" Mila asked, taking Lazar's hand.

In response Lazar came out into the road leaving the front gate open.

"Slowly, one by one, walk into the house while nobody is looking," Lazar whispered to Oskar.

Soon all of them were sitting inside a room not often used by the Ljubičićs. With no time lost Mila brought them food pressing them to eat and restore their strength. Blankets were brought to warm them up.

It wasn't only the Ljubičić household that hid Jews. Other villagers were doing the same thing. Soon the



Fascists learned that there were Jewish families staying in the village. Gendarmes were ordered to make a list of all Jews staying in Zasavica. In the process of registering their names the gendarmes simultaneously handed out yellow bands ordering Jews to put them on and wear them so that they could be tracked at all times. The gendarmes arrived at the Ljubičić home with the same intention.

“They are relatives of mine,” Lazar replied when asked who the people staying with him were.

“They are Jews,” insisted the gendarmes as instructed by their German-Ustashi superiors. “They have to wear these yellow bands on their sleeves.”

“Well, if you must put the yellow band on someone, here then, put it on me.” Lazar was adamant in his decision to thwart their intentions.

Oskar Schosberger opened his wallet brimming with banknotes, hoping to pay the gendarmes off and be left alone. Lazar, a council member and friend of the borough council chairman, would not allow a single

note to be paid to the gendarmes. Failing to carry out their assignment, the gendarmes left Lazar’s house. Under Lazar’s protection the Schosbergers remained in his house for the time being.

One October day a large group of people arrived from Šabac under heavy German and Ustashi guard. They were taken to Lazar’s field by the river Sava and ordered to dig out a trench some 150 meters long. Round eight hundred Jews from the so-called Kladovo transport, refugees from Austria, Germany, and Czechoslovakia were digging their own grave unaware of the fact right

up to the very end.

On hearing what had happened in his field, a visibly shaken Lazar could only say:

“That field will never be ploughed by anyone again.”

In the meantime, Nadežda had learned where the Schosbergers were staying and immediately set off for Zasavica. However, before starting on her journey, she obtained a fake document for Tommy resolved to save him at least if she couldn’t save Oskar and her sister, Ravica.



Nadežda Pašćan

On his part, Oskar well knew that they could not stay in Zasavica much longer. Common sense told him that they would fare better if they followed in the steps of pursuit. To be ahead meant only to be constantly on the run. Together with the Jews brought from Šabac, a number of Jews that had found shelter in Zasavica had already been executed. Since Oskar had with him a special liquid solution that effectively erased ink from documents, his next move was to enter the name Obrad Šljivić in his identity card and head for Šabac

with his family. It was then that Nadežda suggested Tommy come with her. With no time to spare in contemplation the Schosbergers agreed, convinced that Tommy would be in safe hands and that they could evade pursuit more easily without him.

It was November 1941 when Oskar thanked Mila and Lazar for their hospitality. The Ljubičićs would not take a single banknote for the expenses they had had during the Schosbergers stay with them. The Schosbergers set out for Šabac while Nadežda and the two children left for Novi Sad.



On the way to Novi Sad, Nadežda and the children had to pass a number of check points. Her stay with the Ljubičić family and getting to know them well helped Nadežda explain the presence of the two children. As if coached, she simply said that the children had been staying with some relatives and that she was now taking them back home to Novi Sad.

Tommy's fake documents served them well and they managed to pass all controls. However, fearful of her Novi Sad neighbours, Nadežda remembered their farmstead in Čenej and sent Tommy there. He stayed in Čenej right up to the end of the war and came home alive and well.

Oskar and Ravica managed to elude each and every pursuit of Jews in hiding and lived to see the end of the war. They never forgot the kind-hearted people of Zasavica who had risked their lives to save a Jewish family.

**Milosava Mila and Lazar Ljubičić,
Nadežda Pašćan**

all awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 1994





AMIR WAS LOVED BY TWO MOTHERS

The Szagmeister and Engler families lived in the same house in Subotica in flats next door to each other. Laszlo Szagmeister and Janos Engler were both jurists employed in the Attorney offices of Sekely Zoltan. When in 1941 Yugoslavia capitulated, Subotica became part of Hungary upon the division of Yugoslav territories among the German allies. Jews were the first to feel the brunt of war. Persecuted and taken to work camps, they were assigned forced labour work and, very frequently, were never seen again.

Janos could consider himself lucky since he would sometimes manage to return home from camp. Janos's wife, Magda, gave birth to son Amir-Paul in February 1944. Ten days earlier, Laszlo's wife, Juliana, had also borne a son, whom they christened Sandor. Juliana had given birth to her first son, Eugen, in 1941.

Nazi Germany was dissatisfied with the relatively lenient conduct of the Hungarians toward Jews. When the Germans realized that the war was coming to an end and that the "Jewish Question" in Europe had not yet been resolved, they occupied their former ally, Hungary. From then on the fiercest persecution of Jews, who hitherto had not felt the full horror of the anti-Jewish Fascist ideology, began in Hungary and territories under its control. In a very short time, hundreds of thousands of Jews were deported to death camps and only a handful of them managed to survive the immense atrocities in store for them. In May 1944 the Jewish ghetto was instituted in Sub-

otica. Janos was slave labouring when Magda and the baby were sent to the ghetto. By that time, Laszlo was already unemployed since the Attorney Offices in which he had worked had been closed for some time. Sekely had also been taken to forced labour. Never shy of any work, Laszlo now got down to helping Magda and the child live through the situation they had found themselves in. He had connections in the police force where he had, prior to the war, worked as a jurist. From the moment Magda and her baby Amir were driven into the ghetto, he made a point of visiting them every day. He travelled a distance of 20 kilometres on his bicycle in order to bring Amir the day to day supply of fresh milk.



Juliana and Laszlo Szagmeister and children Amir, Eugen and Sandor

Finally, he suggested to Magda that he and his wife, Juliana, take Amir in with them. One day he and Juliana entered the ghetto with a baby-stroller. As agreed, they found the baby beside the wall of the building Magda and the child lived in. Magda dared not show herself



for fear that the guards might see them together. The Szagmeisters took the child to their home.

Round the middle of June the last transport of Jews for Bačalmaš and from there on to Auschwitz was in preparation. Magda found a man she could trust to ask Laszlo to come to the ghetto once more so that she could learn how Amir was doing. When Laszlo came home that evening he found Juliana in tears. The police had taken Amir. The “trustworthy” man had gone straight to the police to report that Magda’s son was not with her in the ghetto. Pressure was put on Magda to return the child back into the ghetto. There was no alternative since all lies to the effect that the child was not hers were futile. From that moment a ferocious race with time began. Laszlo and Juliana sold all the books and paintings they had. They obtained 800 pengos, by no means a measly sum at the time and enough for Laszlo to initiate further action. He obtained fake documents stating that he and Juliana had adopted Amir, whom they had named Palika. Armed with these papers, he strode into the ghetto in search of his adoptive son. When the introductory entreaties developed into harsh words and subsequently into a fight, it was finally money that once again won the battle. Laszlo managed to walk out of the ghetto with Amir a second time. Magda was taken to Auschwitz together with the other Jews.

Juliana would go for a walk twice each day; once to take out Sandor, and the second time with Palika. When Laszlo started to bring home larger quantities of milk than the neighbours thought was needed, the feeling that

something was amiss permeated the neighbourhood. The Szagmeisters contemplated what could be said to the neighbours to appease their curiosity; to announce that Juliana had borne twins was belated and therefore farfetched. Still, in spite of everything, no one from the neighbourhood went to the police to report on the new tenant. Palika grew up beside his new mother. He became very close to Sandor, as if they were true twins.

Janos turned up in Subotica after it had been liberated in October 1944. There had been no news of him for quite some time. His joy at seeing how well his son was faring was mixed with sadness for not knowing what had become of his wife, Magda. As a jurist, he was recalled to Belgrade and given employment in the Court for War Crimes. He left Amir - Palika with his provisional parents.

When almost a year later Magda returned from Auschwitz, there was no end to their astonishment. Magda was worn out and the destructive effects of the mental and physical abuse and torture she had been exposed to during her internment in the camp could not

disappear overnight. By that time, Laszlo and Juliana had assumed that the adoption of the child had become conclusive. Magda would not hear of it. In order to make them better understand her present situation, she made an effort to recount everything that she had gone through in camp. Finally, she only had strength enough to describe an incident when the capo, a woman from the camp supervising the inmates, had ordered Magda to feed her watchdog, an Alsatian. Magda had refused. “I don’t know whether my child is hungry, whether he



Laszlo Szagmeister



is alive. You tell me to feed your dog? Feed it yourself.” From that moment on, she was exposed to immense torture; that she had managed to stay alive was in itself a wonder. However, she agreed that Amir should stay with the Szagmeisters a little longer until she regained her strength.

Amir had no knowledge of his mother Magda and likewise was unable to live without his mother Juliana. When the time came for Amir to go and live with his natural mother, Sandor became ill. The Szagmeisters consulted a physician who concluded that Sandor was ailing because he had been separated from his brother.

“You saved my child when he was in danger, now it is my turn to help Sandor regain his health,” Magda said and with a heavy heart, parted with Amir once again.

Magda and Amir resettled in Israel in 1949. Once the trials of war criminals were, for the greater part, over in 1951, Janos was given permission by Yugoslav authorities to join his family in Israel.

Juliana and Laszlo Szagmeister
both awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 1988





IS THIS YOUR MOTHER?

In 1938 Germany completed its invasion of those parts of Czechoslovakia that were predominantly inhabited by Germans. While giving protection to their ethnic group, they very soon adopted Anti-Semitic laws detrimental to the life of Jews. Engineer Leon Avramović and his wife, Nora, nee Weiss, with their baby, Borivoje, decided to leave and settle in Pirot where Leon's parents lived. Thus the boy, nicknamed Borko, left his native country, Czechoslovakia.

Once in Pirot, Borko grew up in pastoral surroundings. His grandfather owned vineyards with grapes that once squashed, offered wines of highest quality. There was food in abundance. Borko soon became their neighbour's pet. The neighbour, Vera Čoaš, was a close friend of the Avramović family. Borko was only three when in April 1941 his happy childhood ended abruptly. The Bulgarian occupying forces marched into Pirot and established their authority in the area. According to the agreement made with their German allies, Pirot and the greater part of east Serbia and Macedonia were handed over to the Bulgarian Empire. Loyal to their allies, the Bulgarians made a register of the entire Jewish population in Pirot without delay. Jews were ordered to report daily to the new authorities.

Then the winter's day of March 11th, 1943, dawned. Vera Čoaš woke to the heavy tread of soldier's boots. "This is not a good sign," Vera thought. That same moment she heard a muffled sound of knocking on her door. She opened it and there stood a disconcerted Nora, holding Borko tightly in her arms.

While lowering a small suitcase with Borko's things to the ground, Nora spoke, her voice trembling: "Vera, I beseech you, take the boy to my sister in Kočane." With no time to spare she handed Borko to Vera and hastily left the room.

At first Vera could not take in what had just occurred. Each day Jews, men and women, every one physically able to work, were rounded up for forced labour: to load and unload wagons at the railway station, to clean and tend to the city's streets, and generally, carry out exceedingly rough and grimy jobs allotted to them. Completely aware of this, Vera could still not begin to fathom what was happening at that particular moment.

Holding Borko in her arms, Vera came up to the window and looking through the lowered shutters, instantly realized that this time Jews were not heading for forced labour jobs. Borko was only five and failed to understand Vera's apprehension as she watched his parents and grandmother being rounded up and taken to the Sokolana collective centre for Jews inside the grammar school grounds. To Borko, Vera was one more family member and he felt safe in her arms.

As Vera grasped the gravity of the situation, she realized that there was no time to spare and she hastily began preparing for the journey which would take Borko to the safety of Kočane and his aunt Melita. Nora's sister, Melita, was a pharmacist by profession. The occupation authorities had sent her to Kočane to head the town's pharmacy. In the process of packing for the journey ahead, Vera heard loud voices in front of her flat, followed by fierce pounding on the door. Before Vera could reach the door and open it, a callous Bulgarian officer, holding Borko's mother firmly by the upper





arm, burst into the room.

“Is this your mother?” he questioned brutally, placing Nora in front of Borko. Piercing Borko with her eyes, Nora signaled a tacit NO to her son.

Borko burst into tears holding Vera tightly. The tears turned to a frenzied wail, thwarting the crudeness of the Bulgarian soldier, who finally put an end to further probing. The man took Nora outside. She could not hold back her tears anymore.

Borko was never to see his mother again. The end of the war found him living with his aunt, Melita.

Vera Čoaš, married Arandjelović
awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 1991



A BITTER TASTE OF CAKES

In his glassware store Mr. Teodor Danon employed young Janković from Vizić as a trade assistant. The experienced Teodor, nicknamed Toša for short, taught the youth the skills of trading. In Toša's store one could purchase everything ranging from plain glass to the finest crystal ware. The store was located in Belgrade in Prestolonaslednika Petra Street - today Maksim Gorki Street - in the vicinity of the Kalenić open market. Generally, Jews lived in enclaves in the quarters of the city they had settled in from times dating back to Turkish rule. Well-to-do Jews lived in the town centre within the Serbian environment, Toša's family among them. His wife Beatrisa, nee Rahmilović, had given birth to their three children: Jehuda, Cadok and Amada. Growing up in a Serbian neighbourhood, the children were well acquainted with Serbian customs and differed very little from the surrounding community they lived in. From April 1941, when the Kingdom of Yugoslavia capitulated, all this changed. The invader arrived, bringing along anti-Jewish regulations. The Danons were always open about their Jewish origin; therefore, the head of



Petar Stefanović and Teodor Danon husbands to the Rahmilović sisters

the family was given the yellow band for his sleeve the moment Belgrade was occupied. He became a marked man and soon a commissioner was delegated to the shop, who practically took over his long-standing, prosperous business.

From the very first days following capitulation Jews were ordered to report for forced labour duty. At first, their job was to clear the ruins caused by the German bombardment of the city, to excavate and remove dead bodies. The jobs they were given were both excruciating and filthy. At the time, they were still unaware that, in keeping with Hitler's ideology, this was only an introduction to the extinction of their people in Serbia. It did not take long for the arrests and executions to be set in motion. Jews and Communists alike were blamed for everything that was happening; i.e., all the wrongs of this world. Toša could not escape imprisonment and was taken hostage twice. Both times he was miraculously saved. He soon realized that there was no place for Jews in Belgrade. What he had yet to learn was that in other towns throughout Serbia the situation was no better. He believed that if he distanced himself and his family as far as possible from Belgrade and reached the south of Serbia, he could find a safe place for them to hide.

The summer of 1941 was coming to its end when Toša finally acquired dearly paid for, fake documents and with his family started off on the journey south. Apart from fake identity cards, he had also obtained forged birth certificates. He had taken the surname of his assistant Janković and given members of his family the Christian names of the Jankovićs living on Fruška Gora. Beatrisa became Vera and the children Alexander, Jovica and Nadica. It was a long journey before the Danon family, alias Janković, reached Leskovac by way of Niš and Prokuplje.

On reaching Leskovac, with his family in tow, Toša began searching for adequate dwellings. They stopped



before the house of Randjel Stojanović located on the town periphery. They had noticed an outhouse in its back yard and hoped that it could be their new place of abode. Luckily, their hopes were answered. Randjel



Randjel Stojanović

had come out to meet them and ask who they were. Toša readily answered that they were refugees from Bosnia in need of lodgings. Randjel turned round to look at his wife, Caca, standing a little behind him. Caca nodded her head in consent and so the Danons were welcome to make themselves at home in the outhouse.

The next day, Randjel told Toša that as paying tenants, he was obliged to report them to the borough registry. They went off together; however, there was a crowd in front of the town hall building and Toša became nervous. As his anxiety grew, Toša kept leaving and rejoining the queue in front of the registration office as they drew near the entrance. When he finally came to stand before the clerk he was pale, perspiring and tremors ran down the hand that held the forged birth certificates. On his part, Randjel was perplexed with Toša's behaviour but did not say anything. The Jankovićs were given refugee status, even the right to refugee aid. Once they were home again Randjel tried to soothe his still fretful tenant:

“See, everything is all right. You have nothing to worry about.”

Before leaving Belgrade, Toša had managed to collect all of his bank savings and now he had a large sum of money with him. However, he was afraid to own up to it for fear the money could give him and his story away.

He decided to start working as a confectioner since he had introduced himself as such around Leskovac. He and his wife began to bake cakes in the small house they lived in. However, Toša seldom ventured from the house while his family never left the yard. They needed someone to sell the cakes. He got acquainted with their next door neighbour, Dragi Odža, a Muslim who ignoring the teaching of the Koran was illiterate, a drunkard, and generally a bad person. At the time, Toša knew nothing of the neighbour's ways. Odža sold the sweets made in Toša's kitchen at the railway station. Soon word spread round Leskovac that these Bosnians had Jewish brains. Toša cared little for the confectionary they produced; his main aim was to find a way to explain the money with which they paid the rent and everyday expenses. He had to find a cover for the wealth he had brought with him.

It was nearing Saint Nicola's day in 1941 and they all gathered in Randjel's quarters. They were sitting round the stove keeping warm when, all of a sudden, patrolling Nedić policemen burst into the house. Vera fainted while Toša's hands began to shake visibly. Fortunately, this was interpreted as concern for his wife. However, when the patrol left, a seed of doubt had embedded itself in Randjel's mind. The next day he asked Toša directly



Amada Danon, alias Nadica Janković



what he was afraid of. Toša finally admitted that they were Jews on the run from Belgrade. He asked Randjel to let them stay on in the outhouse. Fear had left Randjel speechless; there was nothing he could say in answer to such an admission. For two days he was a man possessed, not knowing what to do or say to Toša. He was well aware of what would happen to him and his family if the truth that he was hiding Jews in his house was revealed. As he came upon Nadica, five at the time and still unable to pronounce the letter R properly, running round the yard, the decision was made in the moment she came up to him and uttered: "Uncle Landjel..."

Nadica was Randjel's favourite. How could he report her, where could he send them off to? So he finally came up to Toša and told him that they could stay.

"Please don't say a word to Caca, she is not capable of withstanding the strain", Randjel told him.

From that moment on, it was not only Toša who worried about what could happen to them all. Both families were now imbued with fear. It was Toša's turn to calm Randjel down. He spoke of how the war was nearing its end since the German advance had been stopped before Moscow, how the English had never lost a war in their history, that Americans would land in Europe... It soothed Randjel to hear such talk although he could not comprehend how Toša came by such information when the only papers he read were Fascist newspapers.

Just before Easter 1942 Randjel dropped by the *furnja* - baker's - where men from the neighbourhood gathered to exchange a word or two, savouring the smell of freshly baked bread. Živko Abisinac immediately took Randjel aside.

"Some ten minutes ago Odža was here bragging how he had discovered that Toša and his family were Jews and that he would report them right away," Živko informed him of the situation coming straight to the point. "He said that for this piece of information he would get

Toša's supply of flour, sugar and walnuts stored for the cakes."

Randjel ran home without a moment to lose. Within five minutes the Danon family was ready to walk out of Randjel's yard. At the gate Toša stopped, took Randjel's tattered hat off and placed his new one on Randjel's head. Toša had thought of everything except that Dragi Odža, whom he had provided with a living, would betray him. Randjel saw the Danons off to the railway station and returned home forthwith.

Less than 30 minutes later Pavle Herman, the indigenous German - *Schwaben*, a few gendarmes and Dragi Odža entered the yard. Sugar, flour and the little furniture the Danons had left behind were impounded on the spot. Randjel was escorted to the *Kreiskommandatur*.

When Pavle Herman asked Randjel what had made him take Jews into his house, Pavle seemed almost disinterested. Randjel replied that he had no knowledge of who they really were.

"They showed me their birth certificates," he said. "Who would have suspected that they could be Jews?"

Next morning a German officer took over from Pavle and conducted the interrogation. With the help of a translator, he asked the same questions and received identical answers. Round midday, another officer accompanied by a German soldier entered the room. Interrogation was renewed this time with the soldier beating Randjel with a whip for each answer that displeased the officer. If Randjel fell to the floor, the soldier would kick him with his heavy boots. Randjel kept insisting that he didn't know why the Jankovičs had suddenly left his house or where they had gone to.

When Caca realized that her husband was not coming home, she asked her neighbour, Miloš Rajković, for help. Miloš Rajković was well acquainted with the German language since he came from Kikinda and had served in the Austro-Hungarian army. Furthermore,



Miloš was the proprietor of almost all the flour mills in the district and therefore of importance to the Germans and their requirements. He immediately set off for the *Kreiskommandatur* and spoke on behalf of Randjel.



*Milutin Cane Stefanović,
professor of mathematics
from Trstenik*

“No one knew that the Jankoviés were Jews, so how could Randjel have known,” Miloš said.

Randjel returned home battered from the beatings he had sustained.

The Danons knew not where to turn to and they returned to Belgrade, but not to their house which had been requisitioned. They went to Beatriša’s sister, Vojislava, married to Petar Stefanović. By this time there were no more Jews left in Belgrade except

for those who were in the Resistance movement. The massive deportation of Jews to the death camp Sajmište had been completed in December 1941. However, the occupying authorities were still searching for those in hiding. A solution for the Danon family had to be found without delay.

Petar’s brother, Milutin Stefanović – Cane, lived in Trstenik with his family. Cane was a professor of mathematics and former headmaster of the public school in Kragujevac. Dismissed from the post immediately upon the German occupation of the town, he returned to Trstenik. In Trstenik Cane had friends dating back to his childhood. One of them was Miloš Malićanin – Miša, borough council chairman. Cane asked Miša to issue refugee papers to the Danon family. Miša sensed at once the true nature of the request and arranged for the papers to be ready when the Danons reached Trstenik.

Officially, the Janković family moved to Trstenik and Miša took the secret about who the persons hiding behind the Janković documents really were to his grave. Many famous revolutionaries, Djilas, Dobrica Ćosić and others stayed with Miša, a fact that could not stay undisclosed for long. Some months later, he was shot by the occupying forces as a collaborator of the Resistance movement. From then on, only Cane knew the true identity of the Janković family.

Milutin Stefanović – Cane moved the Danons in with the family of his *kumovi*. They were completely unaware that they had received Jews into their home. Cane made it known round Trstenik that Toša was a trader from Belgrade whose house had been destroyed in the bombardment of Belgrade on April 6th, 1941, and that, after wandering round Serbia from then on, they had finally found refuge in Trstenik. Soon Cane helped Toša to open a grocery store selling fruit, vegetables and other household items. On their part, the Danons also took care not to be discovered. Except for Toša, they rarely ventured into the street. The children did not go to school and the only one who kept them company was Cane’s son, Predrag. Cane guarded the Danons’ secret and their lives, even through a certain period of time when the German Command was situated in the vicinity of the house the Danons were living in. The Germans never suspected that the Jankoviés could be Jews.

When Belgrade and the greater part of Serbia were liberated in 1944, Toša returned to Belgrade with his family. The Danons immigrated to Israel in 1948. They never forgot the good people that had saved their lives.

Randjel Stojanović
awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 2009



A “GOODBYE” WITH A BIRTHDAY CAKE

The pro-German faction within the political establishment of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia won the battle over prudence and the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Dragiša Cvetković, signed in 1939 two disgraceful Acts restricting the rights of Jews to free trade and the right to education of Jewish children. The pro-Fascist government's terrorism on both the economic and intellectual plane became a reality for Jews overnight. The worst was yet to come and only rare individuals were able to fathom the impending fate of Jews in occupied Europe.

That same year of 1939 the acclaimed journalist Sigmund Bosković – Žiga was given notice from the German news agency for the Balkans after years of reporting for it. Žiga wrote columns for other newspapers too, but being a Jew he could no longer provide for his family as a journalist. His long-standing editors had to respect the *Fuhrer's* orders; however, they paid out a considerable settlement to Žiga as compensation for the mandatory notice.

Žiga was a member of the Hashomer Hatzair movement and, as a Zionist, was convinced that every Jew planning to move to the Palestine must have knowledge of at least one skill; he decided he would learn to make cheese. Braced with a heap of books about cheese manufacturing techniques, he was soon ready to start production. The only thing missing was a cow, space and vessels for making cheese. And that is how Žiga came to know Radojica Stevanović, the chieftain of Mali Požarevac village. In no time a dilapidated building in Radojica's yard was refurbished for Žiga's needs. The building had an additional room in which Žiga slept during his stays in the village. Žiga brought the necessary cheese-making vessels to the “plant”, hired a worker, paid villagers for regular milk supplies, and

began his cheese production.

From then on Žiga led a double life spending some of his time in Belgrade with his wife, Eugenia, and daughter, Vera, while the greater part of it was consumed by his cheese venture in Mali Požarevac. When the bombardment of Belgrade began on April 6th, 1941, Žiga was in Belgrade with his family in their Vračar apartment in Alekse Nenadovića Street. At the time, Žiga's mother, sister - Vilma, and youngest brother - Stevan, were stay-



Sigmund - Žiga, Vera and Eugenija Bosković

ing with the Bosković family in their home. They all hastened to the basement and once the initial onslaught of bombs subsided, Žiga decided that they should leave Belgrade immediately. They had a place to go to, i.e., to Žiga's small production plant in Mali Požarevac.



Along with his family, Žiga also took his mother, his sister Vilma and brother Franja with his wife Edita and son Tomi, only four-years old at the time, and his youngest brother Stevan, a student of agronomy and a Communist, to his village dwelling. In all, nine people started off on foot and covered the thirty kilometres from Belgrade to Mali Požarevac. Since they had no means of transport to reach Žiga's plant, they packed bare essentials only. It came down to taking as much as they could carry in their hands. A few things were placed in Tomi's pram whilst they took turns carrying the child or sat him on top of the pile of their chosen belongings.

As soon as they arrived in Mali Požarevac, Žiga reported to the army authorities to join up. In the general disarray prevailing within the army, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia very soon surrendered and Žiga returned to Mali Požarevac. Franja returned to Belgrade with his wife, Edita, and son. Žiga's mother and sister, Vilma, went back with them. Stevan joined the Resistance movement. The only ones left in the house were Žiga, Eugenia and their thirteen-year-old daughter, Vera.

In Belgrade Jews were taken to forced labour duty daily; many were imprisoned in Banjica and in Topovske šupe camps. Executions became an everyday event. One day Franja did not return home from forced labour. He had been taken to Topovske šupe.

It was nearing Yom Kippur, October 2nd, 1941, when Eugenia decided to journey to Belgrade with Vera so that they could attend prayers in the synagogue in Kosmajaska Street. They spent a few days before Jom Kipur in their apartment with Žiga's mother and Vilma. Once the religious ceremony was over, Eugenia and Vera returned to Mali Požarevac. Waiting for them at the station was Radojica's son-in-law. He told them how the Nazi occupiers had, with the collaboration of the Ljotić-followers, apprehended both Žiga and Radojica

and that it would be best for them to return to Belgrade at once. It later transpired that the soldiers had been looking for Žiga's brother, Stevan, a Communist, and Radojica's son, already a Partisan. Since it was the time of the fiercest persecution of Jews, they were pleased that they had at least placed Žiga under lock and key. Radojica was arrested on the charge that he had refused to cooperate with the Ljotić-followers. Eugenia and Vera returned to their home in Belgrade. When Žiga's friend and colleague, reporter Miša Milošević, learned of Žiga's imprisonment, he undertook every measure to free him from the hands of the Ljotić-followers. Despite his efforts, all he could accomplish was to prevent Žiga's immediate execution; instead, he was transferred to Belgrade and handed over to the Gestapo.

At the intervention of General Panta Draškić, father-in-law to Stanko Jovanović, a friend of Miša's and a fellow-journalist, the Ljotić-followers released Radojica Stevanović from prison. From then on, Radojica was taken into custody a number of times as his sons were in the Partisan movement. In May 1943 he was deported to Mauthausen in Austria. Mauthausen detainees were subjected to both physical and mental torture. Radojica could not hold out for long. He died in camp in October that same year.

All attempts made by Žiga's friends to free him from the Gestapo prison were fruitless. Žiga was transferred from prison to the camp Topovske šupe. When he arrived at the camp, his brother, Franjo, was no longer there. Like other Jews he had perished in enemy supervised executions that went on each day in Jajinci and other death sites. Eugenia and Vera visited Žiga in camp, bringing food and cigarettes. Žiga was a heavy smoker, but he had suddenly given up the habit. He told them of his disgust at seeing what a camp prisoner would do just to get a cigarette. In November, on Vera's birthday, the Bosković family unknowingly stood in front of the camp building for the last time. The women had brought



a cake which they shared with Žiga and his Jewish camp comrades. When they came to visit him again, he was no longer there. It was hard for both Eugenia and Vera to come to terms with the reality that they had said their last “goodbye” to husband and father over Vera’s birthday cake.

It was nearing December 1941. Romas, Serbs and all other insubordinates of the regime were deported to the recently established Sajmište camp. Preparations were well under way to deport Belgrade Jews, i.e., children, women, the old and all who had hitherto been exempted, to the new camp. One day Miša Milošević’s wife came to the Bosković home. She said to Eugenia: “My husband and I hope you will let us help you and your daughter since there was so little we could do for Sigmund. We have already asked our reporter friend, Stanko Jovanović, who also tried to save your husband, whether he could find a way to help you. We know that he has helped a number of people so far.”

Stanko Jovanović had a ready solution for Eugenia and Vera. His sister, Mira Veljić from Niš, had been living alone with her three children ever since her husband’s capture and detainment as POW. She desperately needed someone to help her with the daily chores and was willing to take in refugees who would lend her a hand in exchange for board and lodging. Aware that there were many refugees living in Belgrade, she had turned to him for help. Stanko promised he would write to his sister immediately and suggest that she should take Eugenia and Vera into her home. In his letter he wrote that they were Serbian refugees from Croatia. In

the meantime, Eugenia and Vera had to leave their flat and move to somewhere safer.

Their first accommodation was provided by Stevan, Žiga’s youngest brother. For the time being he had managed to find a flat near Kalemegdan for his sister-in-law and niece through his Communist connections. Through connections of his own, Stanko obtained new identity papers for them issued by the police since the only identification the two women possessed were Eugenia’s old passport and Vera’s certificate from Mali Požarevac. Their new Serbian surname, Bošković, stated in the papers, gave them claim to the Orthodox faith. They did not have to wait long to start on their journey. All the same, in the few days up to their departure, they moved from one flat to another. Stevan took care of everything. He, too, was preparing to join the Partisans again. Finally, on December 8th, 1941, mother and daughter left for Niš. On that same day the extensive deportation of Belgrade Jews to the Sajmište camp was set in motion.

As Stanko promised, his sister Mira Veljić gave shelter to the refugees from Croatia he had written to her about in his letter. Unfortunately, the situation in Niš was growing worse by the day. Food was becoming scarcer and Mira wrote to her brother that she could no longer provide shelter for both Vera and Eugenia. The Jovanovićs decided they would take Vera into their home. It was the beginning of February 1942 when Vera set off for Belgrade. The shawl she wrapped round her head and face protected her from being recognized by a chance acquaintance. Eugenia stayed on with Mira. Since Mira was unaware that Eugenia was



Stanko Jovanović



a Jew, she sent her lodger to buy supplies. Eugenia was terrified when, one day, she ran into an acquaintance of hers from Belgrade in the market. She decided to leave Mira's home and depart from Niš.

Seeking shelter in the boarding house of a Russian priest, Pavel Derkač, Eugenia arrived to Niška Banja spa in May 1942. Pavel kept a portrait of Hitler on the wall of his room. She introduced herself as a refugee in search of employment and lodgings. The priest hired Eugenia as domestic help.

Also in May 1942, the Jovanović family and Vera came to Niška Banja for a short holiday. Eugenia begged Stanko to take her back with them to Belgrade where she would work as a cook, but Stanko knew only too well how easily she could be recognized in Belgrade. He could not take the risk. During their stay Vera went to the boarding house to see her mother. Out of the group of Nazis staying there, one of them took a closer look at her and turning to his colleague said that Vera was certainly a Jewess. He could pick her out by the characteristic Jewish nose. His Nazi colleague was definitely more knowledgeable for he explained that they were in the Balkans and that the nose in question was a Greek feature?! Before the Jovanovićs returned to Belgrade with Vera, Stanko went to the head of the Niška Banja complex to tell him to take good care of Eugenia since she was a refugee from Croatia. What Stanko could not pre-empt was the subsequent requisitioning of the boarding house by Germans. The day the Germans entered the building all lodgers were obliged to leave the priest's house. The only ones allowed to stay were the priest and Eugenia. She was given a small

room in the basement. Consumed by fear of everyday encounters with the Nazis, she, nevertheless, managed to stay on the alert all the time.

Sometime later in the summer of 1942 Stanko helped Žarko Kalmić to come to Niška Banja with his wife and two children. His wife was Serbian and Žarko a Jew, a convert to the Orthodox faith. Eugenia was relieved when, at Stanko's recommendation, the Kalmićs took her in as a house maid. The day the Gestapo unexpectedly came and arrested Žarko, Eugenia was not at home. She had been with them for almost a year and was now once again left without lodging and employment. Žarko's wife and children immediately returned to Belgrade while Eugenia went to search for new dwellings. She managed to obtain a small room in the house of a Niška Banja villager.

Vera had no knowledge of what was happening to her mother. She could not write to her since all correspondence was closely censored by the enemy. She spent the days in her small room in the loft of the Jovanović house. Stanko and Ljubinka looked after her as if she were their own daughter. During the time spent in their house Vera had learnt that apart from Jews, Stanko was helping many others and was connected to the Resistance movement. The day Stanko was arrested the Gestapo burst into the house and made a thorough search of it. Caught unaware, Vera stood still. To go and hide in her room, something she always did when unknown visitors came to the house, was pointless. However, the Gestapo took little heed of Vera for they were searching for something much more important. Their search brought no results and taking Vera either for



*Ljubinka Jovanović with
her son Petar*



Stanko's daughter or house maid, they let her be. Irrespective of whatever the Gestapo might have thought of her, she immediately packed and left Belgrade. She went as far as the Ribarska Banja spa to stay with her aunt Edita and her son. They had fled to the spa to avoid being arrested by the Fascists.

When in February 1942 the Red Army dealt an irreparable blow to the Axis Forces at Stalingrad, a victory that anticipated the downfall of Nazi Germany, Vera celebrated the event in the company of her aunt's friends. A fine young boy of seventeen was also among the party. Love at first sight resulted in a stroll round Ribarska Banja. Pointing to a church, the boy told her they would be married there once the war was over. Suddenly, there was a lump in Vera's throat, but she kept quiet about her Jewish origin and the fact that she could not get married in an Orthodox church. Nevertheless, Vera went back to Belgrade to the Jovanović household in high spirits. She exchanged a few letters with the boy and when in due course she went to Ribarska Banja to visit her aunt again, she learned that her boyfriend had joined the Partisans. Back in Belgrade she waited to hear from him, but there were no more letters. Her sweetheart was killed in a battle with the enemy.

From time to time Stanko Jovanović paid visits to Niška Banja. He helped Eugenia to find employment again. Eugenia was aware that his visits were connected with helping Jews in hiding in Niš and its neighbourhood although no name was ever mentioned in front of her. Stanko knew that if apprehended, those who had information about names and the whereabouts of hiding places were a potential threat to all. Eugenia began to work in a restaurant where she toiled from 6 a.m. to midnight. It was hard for her to spend the whole day on her feet and then have to pass by the graveyard on her way home. She knew not whom she feared most: the dead buried in the graveyard or the live guests who frequented the restaurant, where someone unwelcome

could walk in any time and recognize her.

At the beginning of 1944, Stanko was arrested for the last time and deported to the Banjica camp. When the Allies bombarded Belgrade in April 1944, Stanko was still in camp. A bomb fell in front of the Jovanović house. Taking her children and Vera with her, Ljubinka left their home and sought shelter in the villages surrounding Belgrade. Vera did not want to be a burden to Ljubinka and decided to go and join her mother in Niška Banja.

It was a time when the Allies ceaselessly bombarded military and strategic targets in Serbia. When in September 1944 Niš and its surroundings were targeted, Eugenia and Vera had no place left to go and hide. Like many others they fled into the open fields and hoped that they would live through the assaults. Mother and daughter succeeded. Niš was liberated on October 14th, 1944.

Sometime round the end of 1944, after Belgrade was liberated, Eugenia started off for home. With their apartment demolished by bombs, it was an ill-fated homecoming. Once again she was homeless. She went to stay with a relative and when Vera returned to Belgrade, Stanko and Ljubinka came to their rescue for the hundredth time. They gave them a room in their house. Soon the Jovanovićs began to take in other Jews who were in the process of leaving for Israel. When the time came for them to resettle into Israel in 1949, Eugenia and Vera parted with the Jovanovićs as they would have from their closest family.

Ljubinka and Stanko Jovanović
both awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 1967





WE WON'T GIVE UP OUR JEWS

Moric Tajtacak and Rebeka, formerly Adut, from Belgrade, got married in Kruševac prior to World War I. Both were descendants of prosperous merchant families.



Moric Tajtacak

Moric inherited his father's grain trading business and managed concurrently his own silk production business. In their harmonious marriage Rebeka gave birth to three daughters: Sultana, Natalia and Sophia, and a son, David. As a true patriot, Moric fought in World War I alongside his brother Serbs. Following the army's retreat before an exceedingly stronger enemy, Moric found himself stationed on the island of

Corfu with tens of thousands of Serbian soldiers. After the deadly march through Montenegro and Albania, the many hunger-ridden, worn out, physically and mentally exhausted troops who reached the shores of Corfu were gravely impaired and ailing. Each day saw the death of wounded and sick soldiers. Moric was one of the sick. He was transferred to Switzerland where his sister Kalina lived, but there was no cure for him there, either. He died and was buried as a Serbian soldier in Zurich in 1917.

At the time, it was not customary for women to engage in commercial business, even less, in silk production. Alone with four small children, Rebeka decided to sell the silk production machinery, and with the proceeds reconstruct their dwellings into a building for flat rental. The rent she collected from lodgers was sufficient to sustain the Tajtacak family right up to the beginning

of World War Two. By then, all the children had completed their education; David was posted in Smederevo and was improving his trading skills. Living with him in Smederevo was his sister, Sultana. Natalia, a skilled teacher, found employment in Mladenovac. Sophia stayed in Kruševac with her mother.

When in 1941 the Kingdom of Yugoslavia surrendered to the enemy, the Germans established a military regime in occupied Serbia. They needed local men of standing, trusted by the general population to administer civic duties. However, the majority of the Kruševac leading individuals were imprisoned in the basement of the building of the *Kreiskommand*. Among them was Krsta Novaković, pre-war Kruševac borough council chairman and MP, an apothecary by profession. His pharmacy was in the very centre of Kruševac, well known to all in the city and its neighbourhood. From the moment the Germans entered Kruševac, the surveyor Goldner, a *volksdeutscher*, teamed up with the new regime, consequently flaunting both his services and German uniform round town. When the Germans asked who he thought should be given the position of borough council chairman, he replied without hesitating: "Krsta Novaković; he's down there in the cellar with the others." Krsta was brought before the *Kreiskommandant* and told what was expected of him. By then, Krsta was well acquainted with the *Kreiskommandant*, who had moved into his house; the commander was a professor at the University of Freiburg, a man of culture, but a Nazi by belief. Krsta was reluctant to give a direct answer and was therefore, sent back into the basement.



Krsta Novaković



Once there, Krsta asked the other detainees, all prominent men of Kruševac, for guidance. They told him to accept the offered position, the alternative being his and their own execution. An intelligence report addressed to the quisling government of Serbia stated that Krsta was “sitting on two chairs”, i.e., vacillating, and that he should be induced to cooperate because of the respect people had for him. Amenable to both enemy and quislings, he was given no choice. Krsta became the first wartime borough council chairman of Kruševac, but not for long. Deep down he could not bring himself to be of help to the enemy. A banker was instated as borough council chairman by the end of 1941 because of Krsta’s complaints of his deteriorating health. Relieved from duty, Krsta was simultaneously chosen for Refugee Relocation Committee president. Privately, he concurrently helped both Partisans and Jews, new arrivals to the city. In due course, he took to sending packages to Serbian soldiers taken to Germany as POWs.

The Tajtacak family was the only Jewish family in Kruševac up to the capitulation of Yugoslavia. From the moment the persecution of Jews was instituted in Belgrade and throughout Serbia, many Jews came to Kruševac to seek refuge; Kruševac was also a retreat for Jews who had fled from Muslim and Ustashi terror. Rebeka and Sophia’s secure world seemed to be vanishing; they were registered as Jews and given the yellow band. Invoking their long standing friendship, Rebeka turned for help to Krsta Novaković, at the time still borough council chairman. Without a second thought, Krsta approached his pre-war friends in the police and secured for both mother and daughter new identity papers under a Serbian surname, Andjelković. Rebeka became Ruža, while Sophia kept her name. The whole time their papers were being processed, Rebeka’s thoughts were with her other children. She knew nothing of what was happening to David and Sultana in Smederevo and worried about her daughter alone in Mladenovac. She knew



Natalia Andjelković, nee Tajtacak, identity card

that Natalia had to hide her Jewish origin and that she dared not get in touch with her family. Once again, she appealed to Krsta for help. Rebeka left for Mladenovac carrying a new identity card for Natalia. Before long, the two of them returned to Kruševac. Events were piling one upon another. With her two daughters living with her in Kruševac, Rebeka was now anxious to receive news of David and Sultana. They turned up unexpectedly in Kruševac in the aftermath of the June 5th, 1941, catastrophic explosion in the Smederevo Tower where the Germans had stockpiled their ammunition. The family was reunited; Krsta provided necessary papers for the latest newcomers.

However, their problems were far from over. Germans were rounding up young people and taking them to forced labour in Germany. The German soldier assigned to keep the Tajtacak household in check, was in two minds why David was sought; was he to be taken to a concentration camp or to slave labour in Germany? After hearing from Rebeka for the umpteenth time that



David was out looking for food in the neighbouring villages, the soldier finally decided to question what they were all still waiting for. “Can’t you see what is lying in store for you all?” he asked Rebeka. He then informed her that he would be there each day until David was located. Hiding in the house, David still refused to take the situation seriously. Then one morning, from his window, David saw a truck, escorted by soldiers and full of rounded-up Jews; it came to a stop in front of their house. There was no time to think back to what the soldier had told them. He left the house through the back door which opened onto an alley. Further down the alley was the back door of Kosa Petrović’s house.



David Tajtacak

Kosa Petrović and her husband kept a restaurant with a large wine cellar. When she heard the noise coming from the truck, a single glance into the street told Kosa what was under way. And indeed, on opening her back door to the alley, she momentarily set eyes on the horror-stricken David. Kosa signalled him to come inside. Once in, she told him to hide in her

house. David disappeared into the cellar and after the Germans left, their business unfinished, David knew that there was no way he could return to his home. It was up to Kosa now to think of a way to help her young neighbour. At the time, two school girls were living with Kosa: Mica Vasić and Kosa’s niece, Zlata Veljković, from Donji Krčín, a village in the Kruševac borough. They both advised David to leave immediately for their

village where he could stay with either of their parents. He could choose the house he wanted to settle in. However, to contemplate escape was one thing, and quite another to actually exit Kruševac. There were army check points on all roads leading into the city.

At the time all of these events were taking place, Milenko Veljković, a second grade student of the Kruševac grammar school, was living with Rebeka as a lodger. He too, was from Donji Krčín. Gradually, during the time of his stay in Rebeka’s pension, his mother, Cica, had become friends with Rebeka. When Milenko heard of David’s plight, he immediately informed his parents that David needed help. The village elder was against Jews hiding in their village, afraid that it would be burnt to the ground if they were discovered by enemy troops. Milenko’s father, Dragoljub, nevertheless, decided to take David in. Afraid and unprepared to venture on the road for Donji Krčín, David was yet again aided by Krsta Novaković. Krsta warned David against joining either the Partisan and Chetnik movements, advising him to stay put in the village and be of use to the household giving him shelter. He then issued David an *auswiess* (passage clearance document) in the name of Danilo as he had previously been rechristened in his new identity card. A few days later, a villager in a horse-drawn cart came for David and the two of them, equipped with regular papers, left Kruševac unhindered.

It did not take long for the next ominous warning from Krsta Novaković to reach Rebeka. The message was short and clear: “My dear lady, find shelter for your daughters. The Germans are rounding up Jewish girls.” First to leave Kruševac was Sultana. Vidan Maksimović, a borough official, came to fetch her and the two of them left the town without any problem. Then an acquaintance of Kosa Petrović arrived from Donji Krčín and took both Sophia and Natalia back to the village with him in his carriage. Several days later, mother packed a full cart of their belongings and was the last of the fam-



ily to exit Kruševac, leaving their home behind. They all moved in with Milenko's parents Cica and Dragoljub Veljković.

Cica and Dragoljub Veljković's house was on the very edge of the village, first in line on the road in. Although they were living with the Tajtacaks as one big family, the possibility of German soldiers materializing on the road into the village was constant and presented a risk to all household members. There simply would not be enough time for escape. Good sense told them that the Tajtacaks had to move, and a few months later, the family settled into postman Mile and his wife, Cila's, house. Miroslav Veljković, nicknamed Mile the Postman because of his job, was father to the schoolgirl living with Kosa Petrović in Kruševac, Zlata Veljković. Both Zlata and her room-mate Mica Vasić were members of the Communist organization's youth association and had both taken an active part in the relocation of the Tajtacak family from Kruševac to Donji Krčin. Zlata had appealed to her parents to take the Tajtacak family in. Both girls felt certain that the family's problems were resolved once they had moved in with Zlata's parents. However, a similar problem concerning their protection was encountered; lack of time to get away had been a question in the first case and now it was the distance to safety. The postman's house was in the very centre of the village and when Germans came to the village, the fields and woods where the Tajtacaks could hide in were far off. Thankfully, the Germans never assumed that there could be Jews hiding in the village. Nevertheless, to be on the safe side, the Tajtacaks moved in with Mile's brother, Svetomir Veljković, shortly after. His house was farther from the centre, but also on the road through the village.

The Germans were not on the look out for Jews but were more or less always around searching for Partisans. As time went on, their stops in the village became more and



From left to right: Sultana, Rebeka, Natalia –Beba squatting Sophia

more frequent. The whole village knew that the Tajtacaks were Jews and they all protected them and tried to be of help as much as they could. The Tajtacaks moved once again, this time into the home of Vasilije - Vasa Ljubisavljević. Vasa was a wealthy man, like his father before him. He had built a new house for himself, so he gave the Tajtacaks his late father Grujica's old house to settle into. The house was at a distance from both the village centre and the road which was of late, daily patrolled by Germans. The house had a wooden floor and was equipped with all the necessary furnishings for comfortable living. The Tajtacaks were now living alone with Vasa and his wife Kadivka as frequent visitors. They even had a dog who was practically a member



of the family. Although the Tajtacaks had already spent all the money they had brought with them, they did not want for anything. Both Natalia and Sophia were good seamstresses and at times they even managed to earn a few dinars (money) for themselves; they also taught the village girls how to sew. As people passed by the house, they would leave eggs, vegetables, and on occasion, a chicken or meat beside the door. David dared not venture far from the house, but even so, he would occasionally join his sisters and work as a day-labourer for wages. The village embraced the Tajtacaks as if they had been living with them forever.

The Germans looted the village on a regular basis. They would take either wheat, or cattle for slaughtering, or simply order the village people to hand over their stocks of wool. It was hard on the people and they didn't know what to do. They needed wool for themselves; out of the yarn they spun, they knitted sweaters and bed covers for their own requirements. Since it was all being taken from them, they had to devise a way to keep some back. Finally, they began to shear the village dogs instead of shearing sheep. The Tajtacaks did not complain when it was time for their pet to be sheared. All these villagers were sharing their destiny; when the Germans raided the village, they all ran from their homes together. However, there were times when the Tajtacaks had to flee further away into the next villages: Gornji, Srednji Krčin or even Kruševica. There was not a villager who did not know who they were and yet they willingly shielded them, never betraying their whereabouts. The fact that their dog had had to undergo shearing was a trifle to what the village was doing for them.

Just how much the villagers loved the Tajtacaks became evident in 1943. A railwayman from the village, employed as a train attendant, revealed one day in the village inn that he was going to Belgrade the next day and would report to the authorities that there were Jews hiding in the village. The villagers tried to reason with

him, and persuade him not to report on "their" Jews, as they would often refer to them. His reply was that he was only thinking of the village because it would certainly go down in flames if the Germans found out who they were hiding. No entreaties could make him change his mind. When he was about to board the train for Belgrade, one of his colleagues, who was scheduled to attend to the train for Niš, asked him if they could switch shifts since he had urgent business to see to in Belgrade. The informer was now on the train bound for Niš. Somewhere before Niš station, the train was attacked by Partisans and in the ensuing battle the train conductor was shot dead. A Partisan bullet had put an end to his malevolent intentions. By providence, the informer took the village secret with him to his grave.

The Tajtacaks were still living in Vasa and Kadivka Ljubisavljević's house when the end of war was announced. Soon after, when it was safe, they returned to Kruševac. They never forgot the villagers and the kindness of all the people who had saved their lives.

Zlata Veljković and parents

Miroslav and Cila

all awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 1999

Kosa Petrović and Krsta Novaković

both awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 2003





AN ODYSSEY IN NEGOTINSKA KRAJINA

A beautiful day had drawn out the townsfolk of Negotin into the streets. Tables were placed in the street outside the restaurant frequented by Jacques Levi. Jacques, a Jew, was a well-known and respected merchant in Negotin and its surroundings. It was the beginning of May 1941 and the Germans had already instated their rule in the occupied town. Lists of Jews and Communists to be

apprehended were being made, but Jews could still walk round Negotin freely. In fact, there were only two Jewish families living in Negotin at the time: Jacques Levi's and the family of the engineer Miroslav Schomlo.

Jacques was sitting at a table with his friend Alexander - Aca Jovanović, an official of the County Court in Negotin, when Djordje Blendić, known as Djanta, came up to them to greet Aca. Aca invited him to join them. While Djanta was sitting down, Aca introduced



Blendić family



the newcomer to Jacques. Djanta was a peasant from Jabukovac. When Aca was posted to Jabukovac, where he worked for a period of time, he had stayed in Djanta's house. As Aca was about to introduce Jacques to Djanta, the latter cut him short:

"I am well acquainted with the gentleman; my daughters are his regular customers," smiling, Djanta informed them.

As the conversation continued, Djanta gradually began to realize the difficult situation the Jewish family Levi - Jacques, his wife, Anka, and little daughter, Rena, - was faced with.

"I can help you if need be," Djanta said looking at Aca for acknowledgement.

"This is an honest family," Aca said turning to Jacques. "You can absolutely rely on them."

Jacques thanked both of them, but his thoughts were running in a different direction. He was a friend of both the county prefect, Živan Živković, and the borough council chairman, Bora Lazarević. Both men knew Jacques well and Jacques believed that if the necessity arose, these friends would be able to mollify the occupying authorities as regards his family and estate.

A commissar had already been ensconced in Jacques's shop to supervise, i.e., take over the business. By then, Jacques had moved his valuable goods to the premises of his friend and neighbour, Tihomir - Tića Jovanović's, and his gold and money had been entrusted to Dimitrije Blagojević, a grain merchant from those parts.

During the first months of occupation Germans left Jewish women and children alone. This made Jacques believe that his wife and daughter were safe and that he was the only one who had to flee from Negotin forthwith. Jacques asked his father-in-law, Leon Levi from Zaječar, to join him while his wife, Anka, and daughter, Rena, could go to Zaječar and live in Leon's house. His

father-in-law's health was failing and he had no wish to run. Soon after, the entire Leon Levi family was apprehended and deported to a camp from which they never returned. Anka and their daughter remained in Negotin. Jacques's father, Mosha, stayed behind in town as well.

Averse to cooperating with the Germans, the county prefect, Živan Živković, had made up his mind to leave Negotin, too. The two friends decided they would escape together. They boarded the last train from Negotin still running according to the time table; their plan was to get to Niš. From there they would try to reach Albania. Their final destination was Italy. As things turned out, they didn't get very far. The train, packed with demobilized soldiers returning to their homes after Yugoslavia's surrender, was stopped in Paraćin and surrounded by Germans. The order to abandon the train and lay down their weapons was first issued to the soldiers; they were followed by all the other train passengers. Once in the street, all passengers were lined up to be taken to a transit camp, Živan and Jacques among them. However, they had already been separated by then. Placed under guard, the long line of people was taken down the middle of the street through the centre of the town. The people crowding the streets were puzzled by the strange procession of soldiers and civilians marching by them.

Jacques's personal experience with the Fascist's persecution of Jews had been as good as first hand. Only a few months before the occupation of Yugoslavia he had helped Jews from the so-called Kladovo transport live through the winter. Jews from Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, trying to escape by means of the Danube, had been stopped at Kladovo. He frequently brought them food, medicine and other necessities. He had also helped some of them escape to Bulgaria by way of the river Timok. From there they journeyed to the Palestine in most cases. The Jews detained in Kladovo were denied permission to continue down the Danube to the Black Sea and sail for Palestine. They were returned



to Šabac instead and ultimately executed by firing squad in Zasavica.

Jacques didn't know anyone in Paraćin. The one thing he did know was that he must not reach the camp. Among the line of detainees he could no longer distinguish Živan; he was now on his own. The instant a soldier guarding the line looked the other way Jacques walked out of the line and blended into the crowd standing on the pavement. Since it was already getting dark, he was in desperate need of accommodation. He had to get off the streets before nightfall. Pressed for time, he decided to ask a young man to help him. The lad's name was Duško; without a second thought, he took Jacques to his home. It soon transpired that Duško was the son of the borough treasurer whose relative was married to a Jewess. Jacques was welcomed to their house and kept out of sight since German soldiers were looking for run-away soldiers all over town. It was absolutely necessary that they knew nothing of Jacques's presence in Paraćin. Within the next few days the Germans issued a general announcement stating all persons must return to their place of residence prior to occupation. That same day Jacques thanked his hosts for their hospitality and headed back for Negotin. Not long after his homecoming, he was arrested.

Until his return home Jacques was unaware that prefect Živković had left Paraćin much earlier and was already in Negotin. Jacques was apprehended on the assumption that he had been aiding Communists. In spite of his claims that he was a decent man who had never had anything to do with the Communists, Jacques ended up in prison. Locked inside a cell with no windows or beds, he realized he was destined to sleep on the bare concrete floor. News that Jacques had been arrested reached Živan in no time; he knew exactly where Jacques was being held inside the borough council building. That same night Živan went into the improvised prison. Jacques asked his friend to at least bring him a blanket

since it had become unbearably cold in the cell. Instead of a blanket, Živan ordered the guard to take Jacques to his office and watch over him there. Exhausted by the chain of events he had endured, Jacques fell asleep on the prefect's table.

Early next morning the guard woke Jacques.

"Sir", he whispered. "The prefect has instructed me to wake you up before the Germans arrive and take you



back to the cell."

For ten days Jacques traversed from his cell to the office. On the eleventh day two Germans came and escorted him from jail. They went on foot in the direction of the railway station. Jacques speculated whether he was being deported to camp or led to execution. He was relieved when he saw that they were heading for the town Command centre. He was promptly taken for



questioning to the army commander.

When they told him to leave the commander's room and wait in the corridor, he was as alarmed as when he had been apprehended. His face lit up when he saw the county prefect approaching. Through his connections Živan had learnt of Jacques's whereabouts and had immediately come to talk with the commander.

"Have no fear," was all he said in passing.

Živan left the commander's office and sometime later Jacques was released. Jacques was forbidden to leave his house from six in the evening till nine in the morning. To keep his friend safe, prefect Živković made out a permit for him stating that in the capacity of supervising official Jacques could move round Negotin and its surroundings without any restriction regarding the time of day.

It was evident by now that Jacques had to flee Negotin immediately. On the other hand, he was loath to part with his family and leave them at the mercy of the Germans.

Jacques came up with a new plan. He and major Jakovljević made an agreement to leave Negotin together, taking their families with them. They would reach Belgrade by way of Niš and head for Italy from there. Dearly paid for fake documents provided by major Jakovljević's daughter awaited them in Belgrade. The night before their departure was sleepless for the Levis. The town grammar school was across the street from their house. Since the occupation the building had been turned into quarters for German soldiers. The heavy tread of sentries guarding the building pierced the night. When Jacques noticed that the sentries had crossed the street and were standing in front of their house, he was confused. Early next morning he tried to leave the house but he was ordered to go inside and stay there. It was evident that the plan to escape to Italy had fallen through. Raids throughout Negotin were initiated that same

morning. Major Jakovljević and his son were arrested and sent to camp. Seeing that women and children were not being taken yet, Jacques instructed Anka to tell the Germans, should they come looking for him, that prefect Živan knew where he was. He said 'goodbye' to his family. Then he jumped over the garden wall and found himself in the garden of his neighbour, Tihomir –Tića



*Tihomir Jovanović, Rina Levi, Djordje Stojanović
and Milka Jovanović, 1991*

Jovanović and his wife, Milka.

The town was cordoned off. No one was allowed to leave or enter Negotin. Aware that in search of Jacques Germans would be ransacking close neighbours first, Tića placed him with a friend, Velja Nikolić, who lived at a distance from them. Jacques stayed at Velja's for some time, but once the raids stopped, he returned to his neighbours, Tića and Milka. Tića had been searching for a way to take Jacques out of the blocked town. He finally remembered the coachman, Voja. He could drive Jacques to a nearby village where he had a friend who would take Jacques in and hide him. Since it had been snowing for a couple of days, the roads were deep in snow. Voja's *fiacre* was designed for fair weather only.



However, on hearing that Jacques was sought by the enemy, he immediately dressed up in his old uniform, dating from the time he had been a soldier in Emperor Franz Joseph's army. He harnessed his two white horses and set off to drive Jacques away from town. At the checkpoint things got complicated. Jacques presented his written document permitting unrestrained movement and explained that he had been instructed by the county prefect to make a round of certain neighbouring villages. It seemed as if they had been lying in wait for Jacques to appear; the Germans watched Jacques's movements so closely that he actually did call on the villages and returned to Negotin. He supposedly handed over the required report and next morning met up with Voja again. Jacques left Negotin once more, but did not return this time.

Voja took Jacques to the tavern in Jabukovac. Inside, Jacques met up with judge Antić, who was already waiting for Jacques's acquaintance, a Serbian officer. Jacques hoped that he could best solve his problem. When the officer arrived and heard what Jacques was asking of him, his only words were: "Jacques, walk out of the tavern. We never saw nor spoke to each other."

Coachman Voja was still waiting for Jacques. Seeing no reason for making him wait any longer, Jacques asked if he could just take him as far as the village teacher's home. Jacques knew the teacher from Negotin, prior to his transfer to the school in Jabukovac. He knocked on the teacher's door and was welcomed inside. The teacher was surprised by this late visitor. As Jacques entered the house, Voja headed back for Negotin. But when Jacques appealed to the teacher to take him in just for the night as he would be on his way at dawn, the terrified teacher turned him down. Once outside, Jacques stood in front of the teacher's house completely at a loss what to do next. An approaching carriage made him look up. It was fairly dark by then, but he, nevertheless recognized the county physician returning to

Negotin. The doctor slowed down to see who the lone figure standing in the middle of the road was. Recognizing Jacques, he stopped to exchange a few words with him. The doctor was aware that Jacques could not return to Negotin, but he was able to do the one thing Jacques asked of him. He instructed him how to reach the house of the borough council chairman. The chairman, Voja Kazimirović, was Jacques's old acquaintance.

Although it was dark and snowing hard, Jacques found his way to the chairman's house. Voja welcomed his unexpected guest and told him to come inside.

"Don't you worry," he said when he heard Jacques's woes and his new-fangled plan to hide in the village of Urovica. "Go to sleep now and in the morning I will have a borough carriage take you to the village."

What had suddenly come to Jacques's mind was that Sima Adanja, a Jew and travelling agent of the firm Nisim Kohen and Co. from Belgrade - Jacques's business partners - had found shelter for himself and his family with a friend trader, Zdravko Jovanović, from Urovica. He hoped that this could be a temporary solution for him, too.

Jacques reached Urovica in the early morning. The coachman left him in front of Zdravko Jovanović's store. Zdravko, Jacques's old acquaintance, immediately showed him the way to the house where Sima Adanja was staying. Sima was willing to help, but his host had only one available room and Sima, his wife and two children were already living in it. However, Sima's landlord found Jacques a room at his friend's house close by, so they could keep in touch. For two whole days Jacques did not leave his room. He worried both about himself and his family. He tried to imagine what their life would be like as refugees. His only contact with the world outside was an occasional glance through the window. So it was by pure chance that he saw Sima Adanja being escorted by gendarmes. By then it was too late for him



to react. He tried to run, but the gendarmes were already at his door. When ordered to come out, he had no alternative but to obey. The only option left to Jacques was to produce the prefect's document and claim that he was in the village at the instruction of the county prefecture. It made no difference; the two Jews were escorted together. On their way Sima asked the gendarmes if he could go into Zdravko Jovanović's store to say goodbye to his friend and ask for a little sugar to take along with him. They let him go inside. On exiting the store, Sima told Jacques how he had left all his money with Zdravko, at the time he and his family had come to Urovica. He was now certain that in collusion with the village priest, Zdravko had reported him to the authorities.

"We have orders to escort Sima Adanja to Belgrade. But there is nothing for this Jacques Levi," walking behind them the gendarmes commented.

Suddenly, one of the gendarmes recognized Jacques. "Wait a minute. I know you. I used to shop in your store. You are free to go."

Consumed with fear that someone might report him again, Jacques entered the baker's where the delicious aroma of freshly baked bread permeated the air. He asked the baker whether there was any means of transport to be found to take him to Jabukovac. Jacques could think of no other solution but to approach the Jabukovac borough council chairman, Voja Kazimirović, again. That Jacques was back

in Jabukovac only a few days after he had sent him to Urovica surprised the chairman. Since Jacques was an old friend, Voja welcomed him to his house again. When Jacques told him everything that had happened to him that day, he also mentioned that Sima Adanja was in Jabukovac, under guard on his way to Belgrade. Voja readily agreed to go and see whether he could be

of help. He was somewhat relieved to see that Adanja was under escort of gendarmes and not Germans. As chairman it would suffice for him to state that Adanja had not been found. Adanja could be taken to another shelter and wait for the war to end. Afraid of what might happen to his wife and two children once the Germans learned that he was missing, Adanja declined. He stayed in jail and left with the gendarmes the next day. Nothing more could be done to save Simo Adanja. Barely able to swallow the food he was eating for dinner, Jacques considered his options. In a flash he recalled the invitation Djanta had extended in the Negotin restaurant. He asked Voja how Djanta could be reached. Voja suggested that Jacques stay with him for the night and rest. He would send for Djanta the next morning.

"After everything I've gone through today, I'm afraid to stay in the village," Jacques told Voja plainly.

Voja sent the borough janitor to find Djanta and tell him to come to Voja's house immediately.

"I thought as much. The instant I heard I was being



Nikola and Ljubinka Blendić



summoned by the chairman at this hour of the night, I knew that it could only be for you,” Djanta said. He had arrived on horseback.

Jacques thanked Voja Kazimirović for his help. Djanta dared not take Jacques to his home. He had already decided to hide him in the *salaš* - farmstead - cabin they stayed in during summer when the sheep were grazing. In winter they came to the farmstead to feed the cattle kept in the barn. Leading the horse, Djanta walked beside Jacques seated in the pack saddle. When they came up to an overflowing stream, Djanta told Jacques to cross it and wait for him on the other side. He would cross the water a little further on where there was a tree trunk placed across the stream over which only people ventured.

“Djanta, I beseech you, please do not leave me alone in the dark,” Jacques wailed. “I am straddling a horse for the first time in my life and I may easily fall into the water.”

This was enough for Djanta to take the reins and step into the freezing water. They still had another two hours to go before they reached the modest log cabin where granny Mitra, Djanta’s wife, was expecting him. Before he had started off to the chairman’s, Djanta had instructed his wife to go to the farmstead and wait for him there. She was surprised to see an unexpected visitor and her husband soaked through. However, she welcomed Jacques as if he were a relative. Sitting down at the table, Jacques was given a wooden spoon while

Mitra placed a pan full of *mamaljuga* – well cooked corn meal with milk poured over it - in front of him. After dinner Mitra prepared a bed for Jacques in one corner of the cabin.

The following day Djanta built a makeshift hideout for Jacques where he could stay when rare passers-by stopped at their cabin. At first, neither Djanta’s daughters nor son-in-laws knew that Jacques was hiding in the cabin.

Relatively safe now Jacques was constantly troubled how his family: wife, child and father, all of whom he had left in Negotin, were managing. Jacques’s only connection with the world outside was Djanta. He was the one who went to Negotin, taking Jacques’s messages and bringing back news from his wife, Anka. One evening county prefect, Živković, came by Jacques’s house bringing bad news to Anka; she and their daughter, Rena, had to leave Negotin instantly. The Germans were about to make new arrests of undesirables and Anka, Rena and Jacques’s father, Mosha, were on the lists. At that time, it had become even harder to leave Negotin, but coachman Voja had contrived a way to exit the blocked town unnoticed. Once out of Negotin, he took Anka and Rena as far as Štubik

where Djanta was already waiting for them. Soon the Levi family was reunited within the shelter of Djanta’s cabin. That same night, with the help of coachman Voja, Jacques’s father Mosha started off to find his son.

Securely housed in Djanta’s cabin, Anka adorned the traditional peasant’s wear just like Jacques had done



Nikolica and Olivera Blendić



before her. Djanta's environment was not designed for gentleman's clothes and Jacques had already shed his town suit. Most of the time he stayed indoors while Anka and his daughter Rena traversed the neighbourhood freely. They owed this indulgence to Djanta as he had spread word how he had taken in a woman, whose husband was a POW, and her child. However, the story was short lived. Despite of all his troubles, Jacques still performed his marital duties. Soon Anka was with child. No one was aware of the fact until Anka asked granny Mitra for help. The husband a POW, and wife, Anka, miraculously pregnant?! Jacques and Anka decided it would be best for her to abort the child. After being informed of Jacques and Anka's predicament and the decision they had come to, both Djanta and granny Mitra refused to hear of such a solution. "God willing, the child will be a blessing to us all," was Djanta's decisive answer. He was confident that the right choice had been made, but this did not solve the problem.

When the Germans made terrain expeditions tracking down Partisans and Jews, the Levi family would move from one place to another, from one farmstead to the next. All these retreats belonged to Djanta's relatives. The only place they had never stayed in was at Djanta's brother, Nikola Blendić's, home. Nikola and his wife, Ljubica, lived on the other side of Jabukovac from Djanta. Since the Germans had thus far never crossed to the other side of the river where Nikola and Ljubica lived in their pursuit of Partisans and Jews, it seemed as if they had drawn a boundary to their sphere of interest in Jabukovac. No activity had been undertaken beyond it. Djanta decided he would seek his brother's help. Nikola and Ljubica lived alone. Their children had long ago left the family nest and lived with their own families in separate houses. Nikola and Ljubica decided to help the persecuted people, but dared not take them into their house. Once again the solution was to shelter them on their farmstead at a considerable distance from



Djordje Popović nicknamed Bogdan and his wife Ilonka

the last village houses.

In the meantime, Jacques's father, Mosha, had been wandering from one place to another in search of his son and family. Old and tired, he had travelled a long way. He had gone as far as Brza Palanka and from there to the village Kamenica. He had then searched for them unsuccessfully in a number of other villages. When all the strength had gone out of him, he returned to Negotin. With barely any time to rest, he again fled town the minute he heard that his presence had been revealed. Once again he headed for Brza Palanka and from there to Malajnica where he finally settled down in a tavern. He had enough money on him to pay for food and lodging. But soon the money became a temptation; sensing the wealth of his guest, the tavern proprietor set out to get hold of Mosha's funds. He immediately devised a plan to get rid of the old man and take the money. The instant the proprietor's mother overheard her son's plans she knew she had to save Mosha. She would not have God's



wrath descend on their home and her son. She waited for the right moment to lead Mosha out of the tavern. She then took him to a friend of hers, Mihajlo Dobrivojević, in the village of Jabukovac. Mihajlo let the old Jew stay with him but did not know how to help him in his search for his family. At the time, he was completely unaware that the very persons Mosha was looking for were close by in the neighbourhood. However, led by a gut feeling, he passed by Djanta's house a few times just to see who was staying there.

Seeing the old man sneaking around his house, Djanta went to fetch his nephew Nikolica. Together they burst into Mihajlo's house to warn him off. Mihajlo explained that he hadn't meant them any harm and finally told them who was hiding in his house. Djanta feigned to be ignorant of whom Mihajlo was talking about. Having apparently left Mihajlo to deal with his issues, he



Alexander Djurković, first on the right. In the background the farm where the Levi family hid

and Nikolica deliberated what to do next; on his part, Mihajlo did not stop to wait for Djanta's reply. The following day he went straight to Jovan Blendić, Djanta's father, to seek counsel. Granddad Jovan also pretended not to know what he was talking about. Sensing that Mihajlo was scared and would not keep the old Jew in his house much longer he assured him that he would try to think of a solution for his problem. The minute Mihajlo left, granddad Jovan summoned his grandson, Nikolica, son of Nikola and Ljubica Blendić. He told him to go to Mihajlo Dobrivojević's house and bring the old Jew back with him and then, after Mosha was safe in granddad's house, to head for Djanta's farmstead and inform Jacques that his father had been found, that he was alive and well and staying with Jovan. The meeting between father and son was charged with emotion. Since he was old and lived alone, granddad Jovan could not take care of Jacques's father, so a safe place had to be found for him.

Mosha moved from one place to another several times. He stayed longest with Bogdan Popović, Djanta's son-in-law, married to his daughter, Marija. Bogdan's real name was Djordje, but being a kindly soul ready to be of help whenever needed, people began to look on him as a Godsend. *Bog* being God in Serbian and *dan* meaning sent, over time Djordje was only spoken of and addressed as Bogdan. That Bogdan's house was nearest to Djanta's farmstead was another Godsend for it allowed father and son to stay in touch; when possible, Jacques would even spend a few days at Bogdan's.

At the beginning of October 1942 the Levi family was staying in Nikola's farmstead house. They lived in one



room while a multitude of agricultural tools was stacked in the other. They never knew when field workers might come in to fetch one of the appliances. These unforeseen visits meant that Jacques had to take cover or even move to some place else. As far as his wife and daughter were concerned, by now it was “common knowledge” how they had been forced to seek shelter on Nikola’s farmstead since Anka’s husband was a POW. Once the neighbourhood was “in the know”, no one paid any attention to how far Anka’s pregnancy was gone.

Ljubica came by the farmstead regularly to bring them food. However, on that momentous day she stayed with her husband in Jabukovac. So when Anka suddenly went into labour, Jacques had to deliver the baby himself. Stunned by the unexpected course of events, he hardly knew what he was doing. He was of little help to Anka, who was in great pain. Despite the odds, she gave birth to a healthy boy, their son. Taking hold of a pair of shearing scissors, Jacques cut the umbilical cord. In honour of their saviour, Djanta, the boy was then and there named Djordje. The premature birth had caught them ill-equipped for they had nothing to wrap



Djordje Stojanović receiving the Righteous award from Ambassador to Israel in Belgrade, Yoram Shani (2000)

the baby in. They eventually found some rags to clothe the baby and sat waiting for Ljubica. They were certain she would come the next day to bring them food. But no one came to the farmstead the following day. It was evening and raining hard when Djanta and Nikola came in the ox-drawn cart. Germans had unexpectedly arrived in the village and the Levis had to be moved instantly as far as possible from Jabukovac. Anka was placed in the cart together with the baby and mattress. Rena lay down beside them. Djanta covered them up as best as he could with a hearth rug hoping it would provide some protection from the rain. Jacques climbed onto the cart too, while Nikola led the oxen over the sodden, muddy road. Heading the procession Djanta cleared the road of tree branches torn off by the raging storm. As they progressed the road became increasingly precarious. Whenever the cart swerved, Nikola addressed the heavens above: “God what have these people done that you punish them so.” He kept praying to God for help. They were heading for mountain Deli Jovan where Djanta had a friend who could give them shelter. On reaching the friend’s house, it took great effort to persuade him to take the Levi family in just for a few days until the Germans cleared out of Jabukovac. Once they were in the house, realizing that the Levis had nothing with them for the baby, the hosts immediately saw to it that the child was attended to and wrapped in dry clothes. A few days passed and Djanta had to come for them and take them back to Nikola’s house. They all lived in fear that the Germans would return. A new hide-out had to be provided for the Levis. Djanta took them to Popovica and placed them with Milenko Dinić, a widower. A few days later they moved in with Milenko’s in-law, Alexander Djurković. Their two houses were enclosed within a large garden and far from prying eyes. Actually Milenko Dinić, Alexander Djurković, his wife and adopted son lived in one household but in two separate houses. Alexander and his wife had adopted a boy who



was christened Alexander, after his new father. The hosts received the Levis as if they were close family. They shared with them everything they had. But Jacques worried about his father. Convinced that Anka and the children were in safe hands, he returned to Jabukovac. He stayed mostly with Nikola, and at times at Djanta's while his father kept moving from Djanta's home to Nikolica's, and the home of Bogdan Popović.

One evening Nikolica came to Nikola's house and told Jacques to come and see his father who was waiting for him at granddad Jovan's house. Djanta was there also. It was already getting dark when Jacques and Djanta decided to see Mosha off to Bogdan's where he had been staying for some time now. Nikolica came along as well. Heading for Bogdan's, Djanta, Nikolica and Jacques walked slowly beside a weary Mosha. Night had already fallen, but Mosha had to stop and rest every few steps. Barely uttering a word he would turn his eyes to the stars above while resting. As they were passing by Djanta's house, the old Jew could go no further. He lowered himself beside the fence, asked Jacques to hold his hand and died. It was a time when even a dead Jew had to be hidden so as not to endanger his benefactors. Djanta and Nikolica put together a makeshift coffin and in absolute secrecy buried Mosha in Djanta's garden.

The following day Djanta took Jacques to Popovica where he joined his family staying with Alexander Djurković. The life the Levis led in cohabitation with their hosts differed little from that of a large, harmonious family. Towards the end of 1943 German search expeditions of the terrain surrounding Deli Jovan became more frequent. Life till then had been safe from unexpected German patrols still relentlessly on the look out for Jews in hiding. Suddenly, they were all endangered, the Levis and their hosts likewise. Djanta came to the rescue again and took the Levis to his friends, Andra and Katarina Stojanović, who lived in Malajnica in Katarina's parents, Živka and Nikola Dumitrašković's



Nikola and Živka Dumitrašković with daughter Katarina, later husband's family name Stojanović

home. Of course, the Stojanovići also dared not take them into their house, but moved them into a log cabin in the middle of a corn field. Life in the cabin was tough for the Levis. Djordje was barely a year old and their daughter, Rena, five. The family dared not leave the cabin during daytime. Andrei and Katarina also had two small children. From time to time Andrei brought their son, Rena's peer, to play with her while he kept watch fearing that someone unwanted might catch sight of the newcomers within their midst. It was the time of year when it was very cold in the log cabin. Since there was



no way they could light a fire for fear of being detected, Katarina brought all the spare blankets and covers they had in their house to protect them from the cold. A fire was lit only when Andrei and Katarina made a show of tending to jobs that allegedly needed to be done. It was the hardest winter the Levi family had to live through. With the spring of 1944, it was becoming clear by the day that war was reaching its end. The Levis decided to thank their hosts for providing them with shelter and move to their friend's, Ljuba Milenković's, house in Štubik. Ljuba was the borough bookkeeper and knew Jacques very well, so the Levis felt very much at home in the Milenkovićs' household.

Štubik is situated on the road from Negotin towards Central Serbia. When the Russians entered Serbia from Romania by way of the Danube, they cut off German army troops on the retreat, fleeing from Serbia in haste. The fighting that progressed in the vicinity of Štubik drove the Levis to seek safer refuge once again. Once again they returned to Malajnica, to the farmstead of Živka and Nikola Dumitrašković where Djordje Stojanović, their host's grandson, was also staying. They stayed there up to the end of the war.

When Negotin was liberated, they needed transportation to take them to their home. Naturally, it could only fall to Djanta, who had hovered over their safety and well-being for so long, to take them back. He arrived with his ox-drawn cart, but this time had no cause to drive over the rough countryside and down remote paths. He took the Levis down the safest road to their home in Negotin.

**Mitra and Djordje Blendić,
Milka and Tihomir Jovanović**
awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 1992

**Jovan Blendić, son Nikola and
grandson Nikolica,
Alexander Djurković,
Ljubo Milenković**
Marija and Djordje Popović
all awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 1999

Djordje Stojanović
awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 2000

Katarina and Andrei Stojanović
both awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 2001



MAMMA LUJZA

In the mayhem of World War Two, Mira Adanja was born in Budapest in August 1942. Mira's parents - father, Dr. Solomon Adanja, and mother, Katarina nee Baruch -, had fled from occupied Belgrade to Hungary to escape the Fascist persecution of Jews. The anti-Jewish front was spreading like fire throughout vanquished Europe. When Hungary also became unsafe for Jews, the Adanja family sought refuge in Subotica with Katarina's parents, Olga and Aladar Baruch. The police authorities in Subotica kept their son-in-law, Solomon, under constant surveillance. Katarina also felt the brunt of the Hungarian police harassment while the threat of being banished by the occupying authorities back to Belgrade was ever present. A return to Belgrade meant only one thing: death. In all likelihood the family would be taken to the Sajmište death camp where the majority of Belgrade Jews had ended up and been killed.

When in spring 1944 Germany invaded Hungary, an unsurpassed persecution of tens of thousands of Jews began. In Subotica, still formally under Hungarian protectorate, concurrent preparations were under way for the deportation of Jews to death camps. To reach a decision how to save one's life did not come by reason alone. The Baruchs and Adanjas decision what to do next was dictated by uncertainty and harsh reality. In the end, the "family council" resolved by common consent that Solomon and Katarina should return to Budapest. In their "joint" opinion it would be much easier to hide in a big city where Solomon and Katarina had relatives and friends, despite the ongoing persecution of Jews. The eighteen-month-old Mira was left in Subotica with her grandmother, Olga, and grandfather, Aladar.

Lujza Vlahović, a manicurist, was a frequent visitor of the Baruchs. They had known each other for a long time and the initial, strictly professional relationship had

over the years turned into a true friendship. She lived alone, in a cul-de-sac removed from the city centre of Subotica. Among the town folk she was looked on as a generous and honest person.

Lujza herself was fully aware of what lay in store for the Jews. She was a Croat and therefore not directly threatened by the occupying authorities. Lujza offered to take Mira into her home when the ghetto was formed in Subotica in the spring of 1944 and the Baruchs, together with other Jews, were being forced to leave their home. Caught unprepared, the Baruchs did not, at first, know how to react. Their reservations about Lujza tending to the small child sprang from the fact that she had had no children of her own, and that at an age of over sixty, Lujza would be a novice. However, there was not much time for deliberation; they too, were already des-



*Presentation of the Righteous award in Subotica:
President of FJCY Dr. Lavoslav Kadelburg, Lujza
Milharčić and Mira Adanja Polak*

tinued for the ghetto. Uncertain of the fate that awaited them, they agreed that Mira should temporarily move in with Lujza. Whether this decision was rushed by the three of them, would only be known after a trial period. Grandmother Olga and grandfather Aladar were never



to know if their infant granddaughter had adapted to her new living conditions. They were soon taken from the ghetto and deported by way of Hungary to the Auschwitz death camp.

The enemy authorities knew that the toddler Mira had been staying with her grandparents and that the child was not with them at the time of transport. A search was instigated throughout town for the grandchild of one of Subotica's wealthiest Jews. Apart from Mira, they were also looking for other Jews who had managed to evade the last transport. These hunt downs were a daily affair notwithstanding the approaching end of the war. Lujza told her inquisitive neighbours that the child she had taken in was from Budapest. The child's parents, her relatives, believed that she would be much safer in a small town considering the constant bombardment of the city. Whether the neighbours believed Lujza's story, was hard to say. In any case, not one of them informed that a child, Mira, was hiding in Lujza's humble house.

On one occasion a raid was initiated starting with the school which was only some hundred metres away from Lujza's house. Fortunately, the police did not venture into the out-of-the-way blind alley. Since word of imminent raids nearly always turned out to be true, Lujza was often forced to seek refuge on the farm of her friend, Grga. Once the raids were over, Lujza would return home with Mira. The frequent flights to nearby farmsteads were explained to the neighbours by a deficiency of milk necessary for Mira's nutrition and the general lack of food harassing Subotica.

Lujza took care of Mira like any mother would. Fear for herself never came close to the one she felt for Mira's wellbeing, although if caught out, she and the child would equally face mortal danger. Ridden with dread and uncertainty, they welcomed the end of war.

Subotica was liberated on October 10th, 1944. Quite understandably, it was not to be known for some time

who had survived the horrors of war. In the months that followed none of Mira's relatives appeared in Subotica. Lujza had already begun to look on Mira as her own daughter when her parents returned from Budapest. In spite of the parents' heartfelt joy, they could not make contact with their daughter. Mira spoke Hungarian and her parents Serbian. Solomon and Katarina agreed with Lujza that Mira should stay with her for a little longer until the Adanjas could find their way round Belgrade, which they had left four years earlier. During that period Lujza prepared Mira for the reunion with her parents. Over time spent with Lujza, Mira had learned to call her saviour "mamma Lujza" to distinguish her from her natural mother. However, from then on, not only for Mira, but for the entire Adanja family, counting the two children born after the war, Lujza became and remained "mamma Lujza".

Lujza Milharčić married Vlahović
awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 1985



A WEDDING TO FOLLOW ALL THE SUFFERING

From 1942 Judit lived in Budapest as a refugee from Slovakia (Trnava). Jews were relatively safe in the capital of Hungary up to March 1944 when the Germans invaded Hungary. Once the Germans instated their authority, an unprecedented hunt down of Jews began. Judit, like many other Jews, was linked to Jewish organizations that chiefly operated underground. Groups of organized Jews fled before German persecution toward Romania and then on to Palestine aided by associations like the HaNoar HaCioni (Zionist Youth) and the Hashomer Hatzair. A certain number of these groups were successful in crossing the border and when the time came for Judit and her 14 friends (a group of 15 in all), they set off for Segedin in the company of a villager who was well acquainted with the terrain they were to cover. However, the villager reported the group to the Hungarian police. Informed that the group was in the train bound for Segedin gendarmes stood in wait for them at a nearby station, en route for the Romanian border. When the group descended from the train, they were beset by the police, cuffed and taken to Segedin police station. In the course of the ensuing interrogation, they were beaten to such a degree that eventually they revealed where they had been heading for. The Hungarian police handed the entire group over to the Gestapo. Subsequently, the Gestapo imprisoned the group in a small house, an improvised jail, on an agricultural complex. Under the watchful gaze of the guards the young people tended to the livestock, swept the house the Gestapo people were staying in and cleaned the surrounding yard. Close to the pigsties they also tended to was a threshing floor bordering onto the next property.

Milan Gligorijević, a refugee from Belgrade, was one of the guards. Milan was once a member of the under-

ground movement in Belgrade, but when his illegal activity was exposed, he had had to leave the city forthwith. In Hungary he had to provide a living for himself, so he approached the German authorities presenting himself as a Royalist fleeing from the Communists. He was given the job of a jail guard. Judit had almost immediately noticed that Milan's demeanour stood apart from that of the other guards. She asked him for a barber's razor so that the young men could shave their unkempt beards. Milan brought the razor not suspecting that the youths might have any ulterior motives. However, by then a plan had already been made to escape; aware that their long beards would be detected immediately, the prisoners had to see to them first. Initially, only three of them were to take part in the break-out: Judit, her friend, Ichak Herbst, and Hans Fogel. To postpone being detected as long as possible, they had to tend to the pigs first. Only then did they cross into the next field over the threshing floor and run as far as possible from the prison.

Aiming to reach Segedin, from where they planned to head back for Budapest, they kept to out-of-the way roads. They needed money to buy train tickets for the journey back to Budapest. Between them they only had one fountain pen and a wrist watch which, if sold, could provide enough money for the tickets. Along the road they had taken they came upon a German soldier camp. Judit was chosen among the three of them to enter the camp and offer the pen and watch for sale. An officer overseeing the camp soon noticed that there were two young men waiting for Judit outside the encampment to rejoin them. He immediately realized where they had come from. As he started yelling at them to return to the camp at once, the three young people made their second mistake. They made a run for it, only to be followed by a group of soldiers. Ichak Herbst managed to escape while Judit and Hans were apprehended and returned to jail.



The ensuing interrogation was accompanied by heavy beatings. The Gestapo wanted to learn from the absconders where Ichak Herbst had fled to. During a break in the interrogation, which had also tired out the Nazis, Milan Gligorijević approached Judit and quietly told her to stop smiling complacently because of her boyfriend's successful escape; otherwise, she would not live through the subsequent beatings.

Trusting that Milan had told her the truth, Judit wrote a letter to Ichak the next day. She addressed it to the place she thought he might be in and asked Milan to send the letter to Budapest. Milan placed the envelope in his pocket and instead of posting it, set off for Budapest. When he arrived at the address stated on the letter, he learned that Ichak was not there. Relying on his experience in underground work he insisted he must hand the letter over to Ichak Herbst personally. When Ichak finally appeared, he recognized the guard from the Gestapo jail and wondered what he was doing there. The answer came quickly enough. Milan immediately told him that he had an idea how to take Judit out of jail. The Nazis murdered Jews, but they also used them for many jobs as slave workers. Milan suggested that Ichak should find a young lady who would pretend to be Milan's wife and who, at her husband's advice, would come to the jail in search of a maid. Naturally, Milan would tell Judit to be the first to apply for the job. Together with his friends, Ichak decided that Milan's proposal sounded fair and up-front; it was almost impossible for Judit to be in a worse situation than she was at that moment.

When Milan returned to duty, there was an unpleasant surprise waiting for him. Together with her friends, Judit had been transferred to the camp in Bačka Topola, not far off from the jail they had been imprisoned till then. Milan decided to go forth with the agreed plan. Ichak sent Judit's friend, Cipi Tajhman, to impersonate Milan's wife. Milan approached the camp commander asking if he could take a Jewish girl for housekeeping

work since his wife, although the ominous truth had not been imparted to her yet, was suffering from a grave illness. The commander granted his permission.

Milan and Cipi Tajhman came to the camp at the agreed time. The camp women were lined up for inspection, waiting to see who would be chosen for the job of housemaid. When Milan asked who wished to apply for the post, Judit immediately held her hand up. Cipi was quick to react. She said curtly: "There, that quick one, she can come with me." There were other hands raised, but Cipi could save just one inmate. She hung her head and left the camp momentarily. Judit was ordered to collect her things and go after the mistress without delay.

A horse drawn carriage stood in front of the camp. Milan lived close by and before long, Judit found herself inside his house. Soon Cipi and Judit were once again in Budapest. As unbelievable as it may sound, Judit and Ichak were married immediately.

Milan's mission did not end there. He continued to cooperate with Jewish organizations. Dozens of Jews and many persecuted people of other nationalities have Milan to thank for living through the Fascist pogrom. Together with Tamar, wife to Rafi Ben Schalom, he even managed to save some Jews from the very core of the Reich, Fascist Germany. Each and every of the saved recognized his good deeds, but his own country failed to do so. He immigrated to America.

Milan Gligorijević
awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 1996



THERE ARE NO JEWS IN THIS HOUSE

Josif Levi, better known as Bata Levi among his acquaintances, spent the evening with his friends at the cinema. He came home late, but woke very early. It wasn't that he had slept enough, but on that day, April 6th, 1941, the bombardment of Belgrade, an open city, began in the early hours of the morning without any warning. Mother, Paula, sister, Neli and brother-in-law, Jacques Romano, rushed to the basement with Bata Levi. When the first onslaught of planes had passed, they returned to their flat. Surprisingly, they were all very hungry so Paula Levi, nee Adler, made breakfast for her family. She was as composed and lucid as if nothing had happened. Bata's father had not lived to see the air raid on Belgrade. He had died in 1935.



Neli Romano, Paula Levi i Jacques Romano

Once the country surrendered to the enemy, the persecution of Jews began. They were made to wear the yellow band first; after that, they were denied the right to work while their shops were taken over by commissioners; on the whole, they were left without means for living. Actually, they had more work than they could handle. With forced labour instituted, Jews were ordered to remove the dead from the rubble of houses demolished by bombs. Day after day they worked from morning to night on clearing the debris with only a slice of bread to sustain them. Constantly harassed and humiliated wherever they ventured, they were forbidden to take trams; they couldn't buy bread in stores until everyone else had bought their share. This meant one thing only: they were frequently left without food. At the time, they were still unaware that the lists of Jews the occupying authorities had started drawing up from the beginning of their rule were, in fact, death lists. In their intention to eliminate a whole people in Serbia as part of their Fascist ideology these lists were of vital importance to the invader. Although the majority of Jews in Serbia perished during the war, there were also those who refused to give up on their lives without a fight. They hid, ran from occupied Belgrade, sought rescue far from their homes. The Nedić gendarmes first assisted the invaders in rounding up Jews and then in hunting down those in hiding. However, the greater part of the population was disposed to helping Jews in their attempts to save themselves from the ruthless enemy in any way possible, either because they were their fellow citizens, or simply because of the fact that they were being persecuted.

Concurrently, with the escalating maltreatment of Jews, the Resistance movement was also gaining in significance. Actions were taken against the enemy which caused problems to their reign in the city. In one action fused bottles filled with gasoline were thrown on a line of German trucks. The encounter ended without any casualties. When it was successively revealed that



one of the participants, who had also thrown Molotov cocktails, was young Guta Almoslino, a Jew, a warrant for his arrest was issued. Because of Guta, the authorities summoned a large group of Jews to report to the police Department for Jews, stationed in Tašmajdan. An announcement was issued that Guta had 24 hours to surrender to the police. In the meantime, a group of 122 Jews was selected, the so called ‘First hundred’, and detained as hostages. Guta did not come forward and the entire group of innocent Jews was shot. This is how crime differs from warfare. The people of Serbia fought a war against the enemy, but the invader killed innocent people on the pretext that such reprisals were permissible by Laws of War, in this instance written by the the Fascists. Bata Levi found himself in the line of Jews called up for execution. He was either picked out, or in ignorance of the reason behind this selection, volunteered to be placed there, three times.

What finally decided his fate was his merry disposition and Egon Sabuhovšek, the Gestapo *commissar* in the Department for Jews in charge of the selection, who spared him. Together with 600 Jews, Bata Levi was transported by barge down the Danube to Smederevo, after the explosion of the ammunition stored in Smederevo Tower. The tower was in ruins and the rubble had to be cleared. In the evenings after a day of hard work the Jews detained in the tobacco monopoly warehouse still had strength in them to “keep their spirits up”. Bata Levi would entertain the company by impersonating Egon Sabuhovšek. News of this reached Egon and when the Jews were returned from the Smederevo chore to Belgrade detention centre, he ordered that Bata be

brought to his flat. Bata was escorted to Egon’s place where Egon, launing on his sofa, ordered him to do his impersonation. He liked what he saw, laughed to tears and did not forget that in his villainous duty, it was Bata Levi who had cheered him up. This is why Egon spared Bata from being shot with the “First hundred”.

By the autumn of 1941 many Jews had already been killed, but the worst was yet to come. The Levi family finally realized that the hour of extinction of Jews in Belgrade was approaching fast. For a large sum of money, they managed to obtain fake documents through a Bulgarian stationed in Belgrade. The Levi family, alias Lazin, with son-in-law, Romano, alias Romanović, was ready to start on the journey full of risk for disguised Jews. They packed their bare essentials for the journey, but dared not go across the city carrying them. Miodrag Milosavljević, nicknamed Rodja, Bata’s friend, came to the rescue. Engaging a forwarding agent, he arranged for their things to be taken to the railway station. Once

inside the overcrowded train, they could barely wait for it to start. One of the passengers recognized Bata; unruffled, Bata answered that he must have mistaken him for someone else. He, nevertheless, instinctively raised his hand in an attempt to hide the yellow star on his sleeve only to remember that they had all taken the bands off before leaving for the railway station.

Their first stop on the road to safety was Skopje. The Levis with son-in-law, Jacques Romano, found shelter with Bata’s uncle. Seven weeks of relative peace passed in a house where there was sufficient food and room for them to stay in. A greater part of Macedonia had been integrated into



Josif Bata Levi



the Great Bulgarian Empire; it was Hitler's gift to the Bulgarian Emperor Boris after Bulgaria had aligned itself with the Third Reich, i.e., the Axis Forces, just before the war. It didn't take long before the Bulgarian police issued an announcement in the newspapers that all Jews, who had come from other parts of the country to Skopje, must register with the police in order to obtain refugee status. Bata Levi was open-minded regarding the announcement while son-in-law, Jacques Romano, said that they must flee immediately. He was right. In 1943 almost all the Jews in Macedonia, together with those from Thrace and Pirot, were deported to the Treblinka death camp where they perished. In no other part of the former Kingdom of Yugoslavia did the extermination of the Jewish people come so close to its achievement as in territories under Bulgarian occupation.

The fake documents they had in their possession were invalid in Kosovo and Metohija, which was divided among the Germans and Italians. The Italians had annexed their part of Kosovo and Metohija to Great Albania, which was under Italian protectorate. The Levis and Jacques set off for the territory under Italian control since the Italians had a more lenient approach toward Jews. The Levis had to dig into their wallets again and pay a sumptuous sum to a Bulgarian officer who issued them documents stating that they were long standing residents of Macedonia. In the train on the way to Uroševac, they met a young man, Alexander Brkić. He had fled from Paris where he had been staying up to the time of the German occupation of France. When he heard about the hardships they had endured, he suggested that they head for Prizren and contact his brother,

Arsenije Brkić, who would certainly offer assistance.

The train did not go as far as Prizren, so they got out in Uroševac. It was November 29th, 1941, the national holiday of Albania, and Albanian flags hung out of windows. Bata, nevertheless, managed to find a vehicle to take them to Prizren. On reaching Arsenije Brkić, they were received just like Alexander had told them they would be. Arsenije was a good man, but there was no more room left in his house since the Jewish family of Doctor Mosko Mošić, an otorhinolaryngologist from Belgrade, with a baby, his wife's sister, and his in-laws - all in all six of them - was already staying with him.



Ljubica Mandušić

A single *kapidžik* - side gate - stood between two houses. Ljubica Mandušić, nee Gazikalović, with her daughter Jelica, lived in the house next-door to Arsenije. Arsenije asked his neighbours whether they would take in the Levis and Jacques. Ljubica agreed, and from that day the door of

her house was kept locked at all times. However, word had reached the *Quaestura* - Italian police station - that there were people hiding in Ljubica's house. Policemen started to turn up at her house, but she wouldn't unlock the door until the Levis and Jacques had run off into the garden. From there, Ljubica's daughter, Jelica, took them to safety passing from one side gate to the next. Sometimes they only went as far as the next house, but there were also times when they had to run much farther. Serbs and Albanians alike gave them shelter. At Ejub Goranin's house they remained for a couple of days. On another occasion a prominent Muslim of Prizren took them into his house. Bata's mother and sister covered themselves with veils, and in the manner of Muslims



and their wives, men first while the women followed, they walked to the Muslim's house where they stayed for a week. When the danger passed, they would always return to Ljubica's house.

Once, when the policemen made a blitz-raid in the area where the Jews were hiding, and Ljubica was forced to



Jelica Ranković

open the door immediately, she refused to let them in. She swore that there were no strangers in her house, reasoned with the policemen that her word was evidence enough, and that there was no need to search the house. The policemen would not desist and made a search of the premises. However, a moment before they entered, Jelica managed to lead the much sought after Jews outside, and hide them in the smoke-house of the Seminary. The Mošićs were also hiding in the Seminary except for the father-in-law, who had found himself in the toilet when the raid on the house began. They all feared what would happen if he was found, while he dared not move until the policemen left. He later claimed that he would

have been more endangered in the smoke-house than in the toilet, while the smoke-house refugees claimed that the air in the smoke-house was definitely more agreeable than where he had been sitting during the length of the raid.

Staying with Ljubica was becoming more dangerous with each day. The Levis and Jacques moved to the Zdujić house during one of the repeated police raids. It had been agreed, as always before, that they would return to Ljubica's place after a few days, but reason told them they had to move on. They decided to go to Albania. However improbable it may sound, they found a taxi that took them as far as Skadar. Before they left in May 1943, they thanked both Ljubica and Jelica for their care and set off again into uncertainty.

Luckily, there were good people in Albania, too, who helped them right up to the end of the war. They were not alone there for many Jews from Belgrade had sought and found refuge in Kavaja, Lušanj, Drač and some other places. The war finally ended and the Jews sheltered and saved in Albania, decided to give a farewell performance. Žarko Polak played the harmonica, a small choir sang, and at the end the Albanians gave them new documents issued in their real names. With these papers in their possession, they reached Kičevo in Macedonia, by way of Elbasana. Railway traffic had already been set up from there onward, taking the Levi family and son-in-law, Jacques, back home. On April 4th, 1945, they were in Belgrade once again.

**Ljubica Mandušić nee Gazikalović,
Jelica Mandušić married Ranković**
both awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 2007



NO ONE CAME FOR RENICA

Arpad Alexander Deutsch was a sales agent from Belgrade. Selling paint for a designated firm, he frequently travelled across Serbia. His regular customer was Mika Savić, who lived in the village of Beršići near Takovo. Aca, as the villagers had nicknamed Alexander Deutsch, kept up with events in Europe. He spoke of Hitler to Mika, about the massacre of Jews in Europe, and how Jews, attempting to reach Palestine, passed through the Kingdom of Yugoslavia on their way to safety. He asked Mika and his wife Mileša whether they would give shelter to his family in their home in case of war. The Savićs answered without hesitating that the door to their house was always open to them. It did not take long before the Deutsch family, Aca and his wife, Matilda - Sultania, and their two daughters, Rena - Renica, born in 1937, and Elvira, only two, came to live with them. When the first bombardment raid of Belgrade on April 6th, 1941, abated to some extent, the Deutschs packed hastily and headed directly for Beršići in Aca's black Opel automobile.

The Savić house stood in the centre of the village on the main road. Soon lines of enemy soldiers passed regularly by the house and down the road. Both hosts and guests became aware of the dangerous position they were in regardless of the extended convivial reception and shared wellbeing. The fact

that Jews from Belgrade were hiding in the centre of the village could not be kept a secret for long. Word soon spread that Nedić gendarmes were on the search for Jews. Those found and apprehended were handed over to the Germans and whoever gave them shelter was threatened by the death sentence. The Deutschs had to be moved. It was decided that they would stay in the house of Dragutin and Živka Stoković.

The two Stoković brothers, Dragutin and Dragiša, shared a house. Dragiša and his wife, Milja, had two children: an 11-year-old daughter, Radmila, and a son, Radonja. Dragutin and Živka did not have any children. The Stoković house was in the hamlet of Beršići and much less exposed to inquisitive eyes. The Deutsch family moved into the part of the house that belonged



*Upper row: Radonja and Radmila Stoković, 3, 4 and 5.
Bottom row: Thalma and Milja Stoković mother to Radmila and remaining family*



to Dragutin and Živka. Aca, Matilda and toddler, Elvira, slept in one room while the other was taken by Dragutin, Živka and Renica. However, Renica frequently went over to Radmila's room and the two of them would sleep in the same bed. Radmila was six years older than her friend. They became very close and Radmila called Renica her younger sister; upon Easter 1942, the bond became even closer.

A little before Easter, three Nedić gendarmes came to the village in the early morning hours. They were looking for Jews - in this case, the Deutschs. It was never disclosed who had reported the Deutsch family to the Quisling authorities. Some maintained that it must have been a villager fearing that the village would be burnt down if it transpired that there were Jews hiding in it. Others were certain that it was someone greedy enough for the sum of money the Germans paid out for reports from informers. In any case, the gendarmes burst into the Stoković house and ordered the Deutschs to immediately get their things together and go with them. Matilda, who had risen before the others that morning, saw the gendarmes approaching the house. She burst into tears and began wailing at the top of her voice. Renica, sleeping in bed with Radmila, was woken by her mother's cry. The minute Radmila saw the gendarmes she grabbed Renica by the hand and the two of them escaped into the garden. The Deutschs and little Elvira were taken to the concentration camp on Banjica. Renica's parents and her baby sister, Elvira, were shot on April 17th, 1942.

Unaware of what had happened, Renica spent the days

waiting for her parents to come back for her. Although Dragutin and Živka were as attentive to her needs as any parent could be, a curious sense of foreboding possessed the child. She dared not venture far from the house. She loved to spend her time in Radmila's company, but when Radmila invited her to come and take the cattle out to graze together, Renica was afraid of the shady grove they had to pass through. Once she finally

decided to go, she ran through the woods shouting at the top of her voice to make the dragons and bogeys lurking from behind each tree go away. In a letter to Reni after the war, Radmila wrote: "I remember how we used to take the cattle and sheep out to graze in the fields and how I taught you needlework. We had little time to play and our childhood lacked the usual children's games, but it abounded with true affection between us."

Dragutin and Živka had to deal with problems of their own; mainly, how to protect the Jewish child which they had already begun to look on as their own. New dresses were made for Renica, a scarf covered her head, and she began to tread along in the traditional Serbian "*opanci*" footwear. Dressed like this, no one could tell the girl apart from other village children.

Renica's Jewish name had to be erased quickly from the child's memory for her own protection. They decided to christen Renica in the Orthodox Church. With her new name, Ruška, Renica became a member of the Orthodox congregation. The problem was that Ruška did not like to go to church much; however, the paper now set aside in their home was evidence enough to allow Dragutin and Živka to claim that she was their own child. They



Renica Ruška Deutsch – Thalma



made big plans for their adoptive daughter. She would finish schools, get married....

In 1944 Ruška began to attend school. Liberation followed soon after. Ruška was turning into a diligent pupil when suddenly one day one of Ruška's aunts showed up. The aunt had survived the Holocaust, but she was seriously ill. She could not take the child with her. A great sorrow engulfed the Stoković house when Ruška was taken to Belgrade and placed in a centre for Jewish orphaned children. Ruška hoped that her real parents would find her there; however, no one came to fetch her. Together with other Jewish orphans Ruška was relocated to Israel in 1948 where she was given a new name again: Talma. She didn't forget Radmila: she wrote her a letter to tell her of her safe arrival to her new homeland.

**Živka and Dragutin Stoković,
Radmila Stoković married Vasović**
all awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 1996





FROM BANAT TO SERBIA AND BACK

The Ungar family lived in Novi Kneževac in the region of Banat prior to World War Two. In the town situated between Serbia, Hungary and Romania, Serbs, Hungarians and in a lesser number Germans lived in communal cohabitation with other nationalities, including the Jews.

Born in Banatsko Arandjelovo, Marsel Ungar, a tradesman, founded his family in Novi Kneževac. His wife Margita, nee Blau, was a Jewess who spoke Hungarian and barely any Serbian. Their children were born in Novi Kneževac, Olga in 1925, and son, Tibor, who turned eleven in 1941. That was the year when World War Two started in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia on April 6th. Along with the German soldiers came the armies of their satellites, signatories of the Tripartite alliance, who each wanted a segment of Kingdom Yugoslavia as a reward for their loyalty. The Hungarians living in Novi Kneževac had already put up a triumphal arch banner with “God brought you here” written on it in Hungarian; however, that part of Vojvodina, the Banat region, did not come under Hungarian authority but remained a German protectorate. Had Banat come under Hungarian rule, the Hungarian minority would have certainly fared better, but for the Serb, Jewish and Roma population there was no invader that would ever give them support. Racial discrimination came together with the German invaders. It soon became clear that where Jews were concerned, German ideology meant



Margita Ungar with daughter Olga and son Tibor

the total extinction of their people. When on April 16th, German soldiers arrived in Novi Kneževac, the *Schwaben*, as the natives called the indigent Germans gathered in their *Kulturbund* – Cultural league, brazenly attacked both Jews and their property. There were not that many of them in Novi Kneževac, but *Schwaben* from Kikinda and neighbouring villages came to settle in Novi Kneževac. The instantaneous enforcement of Anti-Jewish laws further enabled them to plunder Jewish property ruthlessly. It seemed that everybody was comfortable with the fact that Jews were ordered to carry out forced labour jobs, were maltreated and battered to death. The only ones who did care were those who found it hard to cope with the prevailing adversity of the new climate.

The Ungar family was not spared from abuse and humiliation from the onset of war right up to August 14th, 1941, when an anxious neighbour rushed into their house to tell them that Jews were being rounded up in the main street. The Ungars were well aware of what this meant. When a Novi Kneževac *Schwabe*, dressed in German uniform, appeared at their door, the Ungars were already packing the bare essentials they could take with them. Not all *Schwaben* behaved equally and this one was an exception.

He waited for the Ungar family to pack and then took them to a building near the synagogue. At midnight all Jews were hoarded into a train and deported to a transit camp established in Novi Bečej.

In Novi Bečej soldiers drove the Jews from the garden of the synagogue into the school at night. With the first daylight they were forced out into the garden where



they spent their days in the heat of the August sun. This went on for a week until they were transferred to a flour mill from which they were sent to forced labour jobs. A month later all the Jews from the camp were transported by small boats down the rivers Tisa and Danube to Belgrade. On reaching Belgrade in the early hours of the morning, males over fourteen were taken to the newly-founded camp Topovske šupe. All others were escorted to the garden of the synagogue in Kosmajaska Street. Those who had someone to stay with were released to fend for themselves.

Marsel Ungar was taken to Topovske šupe along with his brother, Eugen. Margita took the children, her sister, and grandmother to her sister Irma's place. Irma was married to a gentile. Eugen's wife and their two children remained in the synagogue. The Ungars enjoyed relative freedom while staying with Margita's sister, Irma, in Jevremova Street in the centre of the city. Although marked with the yellow band as all other Jews were, the children went to the Jewish Community Centre in the daytime without any hindrance. The Community building was close to their aunt's flat and they spent the time there in the company of their peers, other Jewish youngsters. The little food they had was shared among the family and regularly taken to their father and relatives detained in Topovske šupe. Round mid October their father told them to stop coming because he and the other inmates were to be taken to Germany for slave labour, and that they could collect his belongings at the Jewish Community. Olga looked at her father longingly from the other side of the fence as he waved to her from a window. Beaten with a club across her back for lingering, she started off for home with a sense of grave foreboding. When the Ungars went to the Community Centre for their father's things, they learned the truth. Marsel, along with some other members of their family, had been shot; the only thing they couldn't learn was whether it was carried out in Jajinci or Jabuka.

At the beginning of December, the remaining Jews in Belgrade received summons from Nedić gendarmes to report to the Special police for Jews in Džordža Vašingtona Street on the date specified. The majority of the male Jewish population had already been wiped out; the time had come for women, children, the old and the ailing. The Ungars did not receive any instructions, but they learned from the announcement posted throughout the city that the order applied to all Jews, including those who, by chance, had not been registered till then. Failure to obey was punishable by death?! December 12th, 1941, the final term for Jews to register with the Special police, was approaching fast.

Around the time all this was happening, Dragoljub Trajković, a railway official, whose job included frequent business trips, turned up at the aunt's flat, bringing Irma a letter from her daughter who had fled to Kanjiža. The Ungars asked Dragoljub to tell them what was happening in Banat. Dragoljub, alone in Belgrade, since his wife had also taken off for Kanjiža, was glad to have found himself in the company of people he could speak to freely. So his visits became more frequent and he soon made friends with the Ungars. His wife being Jewish, he could fully comprehend the situation the Ungars were facing.



Dragoljub Trajković

In the meantime, Olga had also become friends with their neighbour, Mile Stavrić. Mile had read the announcement that all Jews were to register with the



Special police. It was December 11th, one day before the final term set for registry with the Special police for Jews, when Mile told Olga that he knew a man who could provide original refugee papers for 10.000 dinars. Olga ran to the flat to tell mother what Mile had said. Dragoljub Trajković and a friend of theirs, Čepika Steiner, a Jewess, who on that day had failed to return to the synagogue before curfew, happened to be in the flat at that moment. On hearing that the Ungars could obtain refugee identity cards, Dragoljub immediately suggested that the Ungars come to stay in his house for the time being. It was at 15, Lomska Street, on the other side of Belgrade. Since the curfew for Jews had already started that evening, he told them that he would come to fetch them early next morning.

That night Margita and Olga could not sleep. When at five in the morning Dragoljub arrived, they told him that they would not be going with him. They were resolved to go to the camp with their relatives. Dragoljub would not even begin to listen to their reasons for such a decision, and, together with the things they had packed to take with them to camp, pushed them out of the flat against their will. In icy, cold weather they walked across Slavia Square and came up to Autokomanda, and from there, carrying all their possessions still with them, they finally reached Dragoljub's house. The house was cold, but they dared not light a fire since Dragoljub had to go off to work and it would not take long before the neighbours, seeing smoke coming out of the chimney, realized that someone was staying in his house.

True to his word, Mile Stavrić arrived at the house in the company of Vlada Katanić. He told them the story he had invented, which was supposedly convincing enough to persuade the authorities to issue refugee cards to mother and daughter. The Ungar family now had a new surname, Urošević, and with it came a new life story. It went like this: the Urošević family had lived in Bitolj and the father, renamed Dušan for the sake of

the story, a mechanical engineer, was mobilized before the war and soon after reported missing. The family had had no news of him from then on. The mother, now Marija, Olga who kept her name, and son, Tibor, renamed Tihomir, had fled to Priština when the Bulgarians occupied Macedonia. Their imaginary daughter, married to Vlada Katanić, lived in Priština. Still feeling vulnerable and uncertain in those parts of the country, they had decided to come to Belgrade.

When recounting this story at the police station located



Fake document of Margita Ungar

in the City Administration building, Olga and Marija further declared that the Albanians had confiscated all of their identity papers at the border. They were presently without identification and didn't know what to do next. Dragoljub Trajković and Vlada Katanić witnessed that they had known both mother and daughter prior to the war. Tibor remained at home because he had no need for an identity card as a minor. Before leaving for the police station, Olga and Margita had told him that if they did not return soon, he should look for them along



Terazije where they would probably be hanging from a lamp post. Luckily, Tibor had no cause to search for them since both Marija and Olga obtained papers from the police with which they could register as refugees and obtain the relevant identity cards. With new documents in hand they could now light a fire in Dragoljub's home and come and go from the house when needed.

In the meantime, Dragoljub's wife returned to Belgrade from Kanjiža. It was the beginning of summer 1942 when Mrs. Trajković and Margita, alias Marija, went out for a walk. Downtown they came across a *Schwabe* who had once worked as maid in the Ungar household. "What is this Jewess doing here in Belgrade!" she began to shout. Marija and Mrs. Trajković disappeared among the crowd as quickly as they could. The incident made Marija realize that it was not as safe in the big city as she had thought it would be.

A country woman from Grabovac frequently came to the Trajković house bringing milk and dairy products. Not knowing who to turn to, the Ungars asked their "dairymaid" whether she would take them into her house. The woman agreed. By July 4th, 1942, the Ungars were already in Grabovac, arriving by way of Svilajnac. During one of the most prominent religious holidays in Serbia, the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, they moved to another house. The new-fangled Serbs could not understand why people fasted for a fortnight before the holiday. However, eating the traditional lean beans they realized that they would have to learn Orthodox Church customs soon if they wanted to blend in and keep their Jewish origin a secret. Dragoljub Trajković came to Grabovac once every month. He walked the distance from Svilajnac to Grabovac carrying packages sent from Margita's sister, Irma, and some money as well, since they were by now penniless. Once again the Ungars had to think fast what to do next. They could not wait for winter to find them stranded in Grabovac; there was no way Dragoljub could traverse roads deep

in snow to bring them regular supplies from relatives.

Although Svilajnac and its surroundings was a Chetnik environment, a number of Jewish families had come to seek shelter there. Even though the town people knew the true identity of some of the Jews, they did not report them to the enemy authorities. The Ungars finally decided that they too, would move to Svilajnac. They found accommodation with Duško, a manufacturer of the traditional Serbian "*opanak*" shoe. His business was flourishing as there were no shoes to be bought in the stores. They thought it best not to tell anyone that they were Jews; thus, no one was endangered. In uncle Duško's store, Tihomir began to acquire skills in making the *opanak*. Mother would occasionally sell a few belongings in the open market since they went for days with only a plate of food shared among them. Their daily menu was a shared half litre of milk and cooked corn meal for breakfast, lunch and supper. Meat was something they could only dream about. They would sometimes go to the Resava River to fish; when they actually caught some, there was no end to their joy.

One day the Uroševićs received orders to report to the Chetnik headquarters. Mother, who had been introduced as a Slovenian since the explanation provided an excuse for her poor knowledge of Serbian, stayed at home while Olga went alone. She was received courteously by the Chetniks, but required to answer whether her mother Marija had converted to the Orthodox Church faith. On being told that their father would never have married a follower of the Catholic Church, they seemed satisfied. Despite her fear, Olga managed to compose herself and return home calmly.

Upon the victorious defence of Staljingrad, talk of the end of the war began to spread around. Radio London was openly listened to in one of the restaurants. At the beginning of October 1944, the Russians entered Svilajnac without encountering any resistance. The war was



over and the Ungars could finally find some peace. Only then did they realize how severe the tension they had been living with throughout the years of war was. Olga returned to Belgrade with the first train that left from Lapovo for Belgrade. She went straight to the Jewish Community where she obtained a document stating that Olga Urošević was in fact Olga Ungar. A few days later, mother, Margita, and brother, Tihomir, also arrived in Belgrade. The time had come for them to return to Novi Kneževac, a changed town now, with their father and nine other family members gone forever.

Dragoljub Trajković
awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 2009





A TALE FROM DORČOL

When in 1939 the household of Bogoljub Lunginović, a Post Office clerk, and his wife Lenka, nee Rejna Demajo, was blessed with the birth of their daughter Sophie, there was no end to their joy. Sophie was a very becoming Serbian name, but colloquially unsuitable for everyday use. So the baby's pet name became Sonya.

At the time, Lenka, a designer in the renowned fashion house Dankučević, was instructed to train a novice in the art of dressmaking. The young girl in question, Vera Andeselić, soon became a close friend, too.

Anti-Jewish laws were enforced in the aftermath of the surrender of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Although she had converted to a new faith when she married her husband, Lenka, like all other Jews, was given notice from her job. Her mixed marriage was denied the fortune of similar cases in which the occupying forces and domestic collaborators had turned a blind eye to incriminating facts. The privilege that the lucky others seemed to enjoy, which actually meant life as opposed to death, was denied her in all probability because both she and her husband were Communists. And death had already become an everyday occurrence.

Times were hard. Jews were driven to forced labour which included clearing away the debris and ruins from the bombing of Belgrade. Seamstress Vera Andeselić was also directed to forced labour in "Elka". She nevertheless found time to visit her apprenticeship teacher, Lenka, and her daughter Sonya.

Sonya was a sickly child, rachitic, ailing from rashes that turned into ugly sores. One felt that life was draining out of her and that she might die at any moment.

Bogoljub Lunginović was a pre war Communist and Communists and Jews were first on the lists for imprisonment and execution. He was taken to the Banjica

death camp. Upon her husband's internment, Lenka invited her mother, Bukica Demajo, who lived near the house where the Lunginović family had rented a flat, to come and stay with them. Even though Lenka was aware of the fact that her husband would be arrested for his Communist ideology, she never imagined that he would perish so brutally. Her three brothers, alongside the Baruhs, Ribnikars and Mosha Pijade, had become well acquainted with penitentiaries from Maribor, through Lepoglava, up to Bileća, but not one of them had died in prison. When two Germans were killed in actions by the Resistance movement in August 1941, Bogoljub was beaten so brutally that he could hardly walk. All broken up, he was taken along with a group of his comrades - twenty seven of them in all - from Banjica to Skela near Obrenovac. Awaiting them there



Moša Pijade, brothers Demajo (Sonya's uncles) and the rest of political (Communist) prisoners of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia

was an even larger group of detainees. Two hundred prisoners were hanged on that occasion in retribution for the dead Germans.

Lenka's mother, Bukica Demajo, was instructed to re-



port to the Special police station in Džordža Vašingtona Street on December 10th, 1941. From there she was taken to the Sajmište death camp. In less than a week, from December 8th to 12th to be exact, the majority of Jews from Dorćol were deported to camp Sajmište situated on the left bank of the river Sava. At the time, this was, in fact, the territory of the Independent State of Croatia. The camp was run by the Belgrade Gestapo. That Sonya and Lenka had not been taken from the house with Bukica was a miracle. After she was left on her own, Lenka invited Marija Andeselić and her two daughters to move in with them. There were quite a few Communists in the Demajo family. Communists, friends of Lenka and her husband, often came to her flat. One day the police arrived and arrested Vera for Communist activities, much to everyone's surprise. Vera had given a contribution for the Communists and the person who had made the collection had also kept a meticulous record of the donors. The list somehow fell into the hands of the Gestapo and Vera found herself among those who were apprehended. When the Germans finally realized that Vera was in no way connected with the Communists and had no idea whatsoever to whom and why she had given her money, they released her from prison.

It seemed that peace had returned to Lenka's flat; unfortunately, not for long. On January 19th, 1942, the most notorious Belgrade Fascists, Kosmajac and Banjac, came for Lenka and Sonya. Beside Lenka and Sonya, they found two other young girls and a grey-haired lady living in the house. They started searching the house resolved to loot it, but found nothing of great value; Lenka had already sold almost everything they had possessed in order to survive. They stacked three sleighs with books, mainly Communist literature and some Russian authors. When Kosmajac took Dr. Ružić's book on baby care from the bookcase, Lenka protested:

"That is not Communist literature!"



Vera and Marija standing. Bottom row friend, Sonya and Natalija (1943)

"But it IS Jewish property," Kosmajac replied and threw the book onto the sleigh.

Kosmajac was pressed for time. He wanted to get Lenka and Sonya to the camp as quickly as possible. Lenka on the other hand, took her time packing. Her one thought was how to ask aunt Mara, as she came to call Marija Andeselić, to leave the child with her.

"Today is Epiphany, a holy day in Serbia," she turned to aunt Mara. "But there can be no God when children are taken to death camps. If you don't take Sonya, there is no one else I can give her to."



Aunt Mara tried to placate and convince Lenka that what was happening was only temporary, that they would return from the camp. However, Vera and Natalija began to cry and with hands clasped, pleaded with their mother to keep Sonya.

“Are you two willing to protect and take care of her?” aunt Mara asked.

“Yes”, answered the two sisters in one voice.

“Mister, will I have any trouble if I keep this child here with me?” aunt Mara asked.

The devious Fascist looked at the ailing infant. Her face was in scratches. Both her face and hands were covered with sores. The only discernible features visible below the baby cap she wore were her anguished eyes.

“Keep it”, Banjac said. “It won’t last out the night in the barracks and won’t live longer than a week here.”

It was only then that Lenka was ready to leave.

“Aunt Mara”, Lenka spoke. “Don’t let Sonya take a needle to her hands for it has brought us nothing more than hunger and misery.”

Lenka was taken to the camp. As she was driven away in a lorry, she waved with a clenched fist, remaining a true Communist to the end.

Vera managed to bring food to Lenka and Bukica Demajo a few times. Mother and daughter were once again reunited, joined together in their predicament inside the camp. The last time they met, Lenka told Vera to stop coming.

“They will be arresting those who visit prisoners tomorrow and most probably we will be gone from here, too,” Lenka spoke in a tired voice. “Sonya may sometimes be a nuisance, but please do not beat her,” Lenka pleaded.

Lenka and her mother Bukica took their last journey together. They were suffocated by gas with other prisoners in a specially designed vehicle, the so-called “suffocating truck”, on their way from the Sajmište death camp

to Jajince where they were buried in the mass grave.

The fight for Sonya’s life began from the day the three women were left alone with her. Aunt Mara would collect leaves and nutshells in the old cemetery and prepare warm baths for the child, exposing Sonya to its healing vapours. When the weather was fine, they would place her in the sun to strengthen her frail bones. Sonya, almost three years old, was still unable to walk on her own. Vera and Natalija took turns in taking care of Sonya while aunt Mara had to traverse the outlying villages in an effort to get some food in exchange for the dowries she had prepared for her daughters’ weddings.

The neighbours were aware that there was a Jewish child living inside the house where the Andeselić family lived at the time. Nobody ever said a word about it; on the contrary, they helped as much as they could. Hoping to speed up her development and her ability to walk unaided, the Šarić brothers would each hold Sonya by one hand and stroll with her round the park. The damson plum trees in the park were a feast for the hunger-ridden people. The brothers used to climb up the trees and pick plums for Sonya in the hope that the fruit would help her grow stronger. Living in the neighbourhood was a German lady, but she never reported to the police that Sonya was alive and had proved the prognosis Banjac had given wrong.

Belgrade was the first open city in Europe to



*Sonya and Marija Andeselić
(November 1944)*



be bombarded by the Germans at the beginning of the Second World War. Near the end of the war it was once again heavily bombed - this time by the Allies. The panic-stricken rush to shelters was being relived. Most of the time cover was taken in improvised shelters. During the initial onslaught the Andeselićs, together with Sonya, hid inside a basement with walled-up windows. The second time they chose to run the distance to the shelter near Bajloni market. On one occasion, arriving late, they witnessed a bomb falling on the house above the shelter. The shattering detonation threw them against the wall of the building they were passing by. Petrified by fear, they could hardly turn around and then hurry back home. From then on, they stayed away from shelters. They braved the bombs in the graveyard; how ironic seeking to save their lives among the dead. They found safety in the monument chapels of the prosperous dead.



Sonya Lunginović, 1942.

Sonya finally began walking on her own and the rash she had suffered from was fading away. The war was nearing its end and Sonya began to develop a friendly relationship with her cousin, Vojkan, Aunt Estera's son, who lived near by and was of the same age. Sonya's family on the Demajo side had perished in the war almost to the last. Sonya also had many relatives from her father's side of the family. However, they were too busy fighting for their lives and the existence of their children and had little

time to spare for her. Vojkan shared the same destiny as Sonya since he too, was a child from a mixed marriage. His father was killed in 1944 in the battle for the liberation of Belgrade while his mother, Stella, was suffering from tuberculosis. They received no help from his father's family. The cousins became very close. However, Sonya's life was somewhat more contented as she continued to grow up in the comforting arms of Marija Andeselić and her two daughters, Vera and Natalija.

**Marija Andeselić and daughters
Natalija and Vera**
all awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 1993



THE SILENCE OF MOUNTAIN MALJEN

Mother had to explain to Bruno why his friends, who had played with him up to then, would not be doing so any more. To be a Jew was a fact totally elusive to him; what was clear was that suddenly he had found himself all alone. No one had the courage to even exchange a few words with the denounced ones. Bogdan, the older son, had gone to Zagreb and was visiting their father's parents when war broke out. It was impossible for him to return home. His mother Emilija even contemplated that he might be more secure there. However, it was far from safe. His grandparents were very soon taken to the Jasenovac death camp and killed, while Bogdan was saved by the *kumovi* of his uncle, i.e., his father's second brother. His uncle perished in the same camp together with his parents.

Upon the short-lived April war of 1941, Ivan Brukner, Bruno's father, was taken to Germany as a prisoner of war, leaving Emilija and Bruno alone in Belgrade. That mother Emilija was not Jewish mattered very little. Once the majority of Jews was imprisoned in the Topovske šupe, Banjica, and Sajmište death camps, the raids and hunts were renewed. Working in unison with the occupying forces, the Special police for Jews, the Ljotić-followers, the Nedić's *Zelena straža* (Green guard) searched Belgrade for remaining Jews. Bruno had to go into hiding. Naturally, his mother was by his side as he was only nine at the time. Deprived of the company of his friends, Bruno turned to books, toys and various objects that in time took on human traits. Yet Bruno could not rid himself of the oppressive sense of loneliness.

With each passing day it was becoming harder to find refuge inside the city. Bruno and his mother moved from one house to another. They hid in various parts of the town: Marinkova bara, Čukarica and Crveni krst. At the

time these city areas were on the outskirts of Belgrade. On Crveni krst, at the very end of a remote garden, Bruno discovered a tiger-striped pussycat. Abandoned, the way Bruno himself was feeling, it found comfort in his arms. From then on, Bruno had someone to take care of, someone to keep him company. However, the situation for those hiding in Belgrade was getting worse by the day. The time for mother and Bruno to definitely leave Belgrade came soon enough. They set off for Užička Požega.

Bruno and Emilija spent the first two days in a restaurant-cum-hotel owned by Steva Burlić. The establishment was in the vicinity of the railway station. Even after they moved to a house, they would frequently pass by the hotel since it stood in one of the main streets of Užička Požega. One market day, despite the pouring rain and the mud-ridden streets, a stream of people arriving from all sides flocked into town. A narrow track train "*ćira*" had just arrived and the dead bodies of Chetniks were laid out in one of the carriages. The wails of the bereft could be heard from afar. As a rule death is horrendous; for those who have lost their dearest ones, even more so. Bruno was still very young to comprehend the tragedy of war, but that day he realized the meaning of death.

The multiplicity of soldiers passing through Požega kept Emilija on the search for new places to hide Bruno. Frequently they had to run across the small bridge over river Škrapež into the mountains and remote villages such as Grumač and Milića selo. The only place they stayed for a longer period of time was in the house of the Tomić family in Gorobilje in the autumn of 1942. Both Partisan and Chetnik formations were active in the region. But when the Bulgarian punitive expedition set out for these villages, mother and son were forced to move on. In fact, this turned out to be the point of their parting. Emilija committed Bruno's welfare to Milje Arsenijević, a trustworthy friend, living in the village



of Družetići.

It was night-time when Milje and Bruno left Gorobilje. Soon they were joined by a number of villagers running from the Bulgarian army. Milje was grave; in the silence of the night, they were slowly leaving the danger zone. They had to rest frequently since Bruno could hardly keep pace with the adults. During these rests they would take a bite or two, sharing the sparse supplies of food the people had managed to pick up before leaving their homes. The journey lasted two nights and a day. At night, during their stops for a rest, Milje protected Bruno from the cold under his overcoat. In day-time they guardedly made their way along the dirt roads. The sight of dogs at loose, with chains torn and dangling from their necks, frantically running toward the forest, signaled that this was a place to be avoided in a broad loop. The village in question was most probably besieged by some army or other or there was a battle in progress; in any case, the casualties would once again be the innocent villagers who could not fathom what wrong they had done to any of them. Fear and the need to keep going kept Bruno up on his feet. He would not allow himself to drag behind Milje. Gradually, as people began reaching their destinations, the group slowly dispersed. By the end of their march Milje and Bruno were once again alone. Soon they came upon Družetići, a village at the foot of mountain Maljen.

Inside the house at the far end of the village the markedly deaf Granddad Rajko was overjoyed to see Milje and Bruno arrive. Milje and his maternal grandfather lived alone in the house. During daytime Milje had to work the land. Now, all of a sudden, Granddad had com-

pany; he was no longer alone in the house. While Milje ploughed their small field, Granddad and Bruno would tend to the few grazing sheep and look after the poultry. As the days went by, Milje sensed that the company of his grandfather Rajko fell short of the boy's needs. He tried to think of a way to help the boy overcome the strangeness of the situation he was now living in. Grandfather slept in the one bed in the house. Milje and Bruno slept in the attic on strewn corn stalks with a hearth rug thrown over them. Exhausted by the time evening came, Milje was too spent to talk to Bruno. The silence of Maljen was, by now, afflicting the boy.



Ljubivoje Arsenijević

One day a burly man, somewhere in his fifties, entered the yard. Milje approached him and stooped to kiss the proffered hand.

“This is my father, Ljubivoje Arsenijević,” Milje introduced the newcomer to Bruno. In turn Bruno also approached Ljubivoje and like Milje kissed the man's hand.

“I don't think this is a good place for you” Ljubivoje spoke calmly. “It would be better for you to come to my house. The children there will be company enough for you.”

Ljubivoje Arsenijević and his family resided at the other end of the village. He lived in a commune with his two brothers and their families. Ljubivoje's father was living with them as

well, and, all in all, there were fourteen family members. Bruno was to be the fifteenth.

Very soon Bruno made friends with Milašin, Ljubivoje's son, since they were of the same age. Living in a commune meant that each member had a designated chore, so Bruno became a shepherd with the task to tend



Vujka Arsenijević, first left

to the sheep.

The years of war were full of hardship. Households had to part with their hard earned yields to appease the many armies that traversed the region. At times they were left with nothing to eat; on the other hand, to preserve peace with these armies there always had to be enough goods on stock for them. Ljubivoje's compassionate wife, Vujka, a quick-witted woman, soon taught Bruno how to milk the sheep.

"Once you are deep in the mountain", she would tell him, placing a piece of corn bread and an onion into his bag, "you must drink some milk. This is far from enough for a growing boy like yourself."

That year a great draught further aggravated the already demanding living conditions on the farm. The issue of feeding one more person was a moot question that hovered over the household. When one evening the subject was finally touched on, Bruno froze. He sat in a corner pale and frightened wondering what would happen to him if he had to leave. Where could he go? He rarely received news from his mother. He didn't even know where she was at that moment.

"As head of this commune," Ljubivoje cut the ongoing

dispute short, "I and no other beside me shall fully answer and be responsible for this child. In the face of any force or authority, my head falls before his!"

Never again was the question of what should be done about Bruno, nor of the danger of his hiding in their home, voiced. The only thing that was stated was Vujka's request to change the boy's name.

"You realize that your name" Vujka patiently explained to Bruno, "stands out in these parts. When people hear us call out to you, they instantly know that you are not one of us."

Bruno was given a new name: Milan. If anybody asked, they were told that he was Vujka's distant relative who had come to find shelter in Družetići.

Generally Bruno, alias Milan, and Milašin shared both the good and the bad that came their way. This was pronounced at times when various military formations came into the village. The resounding sound of the warning cry: "Soldiers sighted!" from one hilltop to another alerted the entire male population to take cover outside the village. The most frequent path they took to was across the rivulet Kamenica and into the forests of the next village, Gojine Gore, situated on the slopes of the mountain Maljen.

The peasants tried to overcome such circumstance as best they could; dugouts were frequently used for shelter. They would dig them up in the vicinity of the village and sometimes right beside their houses. On one occasion Bruno and Stanimir, a villager of Družetići, crawled into a dugout that Stanimir had excavated below the forest road. Fearing ambushes, Germans rarely entered the woods, but on this occasion they went in deeper and passed twice over the dugout where Bruno and Stanimir were hiding. The clatter of the soldiers' weapons meant that the two of them had to be very quiet. Stanimir had thrown his coat over Bruno to protect him from the debris of the crumbling sides. On exiting the dugout, as



Tugomir - Bruno Brukner

they were starting off for the village, they heard Ljubivoje calling out. Ljubivoje had sought shelter in the branches of an old oak tree. When they found him, he was as stiff as a stick. While the Germans were traversing the site round the tree, he had had to stay motionless. Sitting for hours in one position his limbs had stiffened to the point of immobility, leaving him stuck on a tree bough. It took a tremendous effort to bring Ljubivoje down from the tree.

Bruno and Milašin did not always take to the woods. On some occasions Vujka used to dress the two boys up in women's clothes, stick a chipped distaff inside their skirt belts and turn them into young shepherdesses instantaneously.

Life in the country has its charm even in times of hardship. Once, when Bruno took the sheep to the pastures, a sheep gave birth to a lamb. By that time Bruno had already learned what had to be done. He gathered the flock round the mother sheep to allow her to repose

and the lamb to get dry. When it was time, he headed back to the village holding the lamb in his arms close to him. It was an unwritten rule that the first shepherd to take a lamb into his arms became its godfather. The rule was put into practice this time also. Bruno named the lamb Lord William Pembroke after one of W. Scott's heroes. Laughter rang out all around the yard while the members of the family tried to twist their tongues round the name. Finally the family head, Ljubivoje, suggested that the name be shortened; by doing so the villagers of Družetići got their very first Lord.

The end of the war brought great happiness to all. Milašin was in Čačak at the time. Bruno took leave of the Arsenijević family in Družetići. He returned to Belgrade by way of Čačak. His mother was waiting for him in Belgrade. Once in Belgrade, the din of the city replaced the silence of Maljen forever.

**Vujka and Ljubivoje Arsenijević and
son Milje**

all awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 2000



IT'S SAFEST IN ENEMY TERRITORY

“Those that helped me were good people,” wrote Ruža Lihtner. “Fearing for their own lives they, nevertheless, were also concerned for mine.”

Ruža was only four when she left her parental home in Jajce and came to live with her aunt in Negotin. Her aunt, Mira, and her husband, Milan Stevanović, an apothecary, had no children, and Ruža was brought up in their home as if she had been their very own. After finishing school, she went to study at the University in Belgrade. She had successfully completed her first year studies at the Faculty for Yugoslav literature when her uncle suddenly died. Ruža could not let her aunt live alone and she returned to Negotin.

When war came in 1941, Jews and Communists were the first to feel the terror of the occupying authorities. The Fascist ideology was now put into practice. That Ruža was a Jewess hadn't seemed to bother anyone up till then. Before long aunt Mira and Ruža were singled out by the obligatory yellow band on their sleeves. They were no longer allowed to walk freely round town; because of the imposed curfew, they had to be in their home by six in the evening. The Germans had appointed a commissar to monitor the business in her uncle's pharmacy. However, her uncle's assistants, who had stayed on in the store, would secretly set aside part of the daily earnings and hand it over to aunt Mira. Before, Ruža had had many friends in Negotin and was welcomed in any society. Life had suddenly presented Ruža the opportunity to discover just who her true friends really were. She was not disappointed. Her girlfriends continued to visit her and her companionship with Doctor Branko Milosavljević grew into mutual fondness.

In mid November 1941 Ruža was instructed to come to the town hall for a conversation with the borough book-

keeper. Ruža was concerned what might be the reason for this meeting since she had had no previous contacts with him. The bookkeeper was outspoken when he told her that imprisonment of Jews would soon commence and that she should flee from her house immediately. All at once Ruža felt that she was being persecuted. She sought shelter with her neighbourhood friend. Since nothing happened in the next few days, Ruža returned home. When one morning Fascists suddenly came to arrest her, going into hiding became a reality she had to face. The pharmacy was located in the house in which Ruža and Mira lived. Master of pharmacy, Čeda, opened the door to their flat, and while calling Ruža by her name, his hand kept signaling her to run away. Clad in slippers and her aunt's morning robe, she ran to her neighbour's, Slobodanka Janković – Pešelj's, house. Slobodanka was married and had a small child; she, nevertheless, had no qualms when Ruža appeared at her door and asked for help. Ruža hid in her house for two days. Knowing that she could not have gone far, the Fascists began to look for her round the neighbourhood. Ruža had to leave Slobodanka's house quickly. At Doctor Branko's recommendation, the midwife, Mara, received Ruža into her house where she stayed for one month. In the meantime, the doctor was searching for a safer place for Ruža. As yet, nobody had come to search for her aunt since she had converted to the Orthodox faith when she married Ruža's uncle. Doctor Branko approached one of Ruža's school friends, Slobodanka Florojkić, who lived in a house on the edge of the town. Slobodanka took Ruža in without a word, but Ruža was out of luck.

Bulgarians, who rummaged all over Negotinska krajina together with German soldiers, were looking for a place to locate a kitchen for their soldiers. They chose the shed and a small room in Slobodanka's backyard. Slobodanka was told to vacate these premises immediately and Ruža had to leave. Doctor Branko then placed Ruža



with Boca Lazarević, the brother of the borough council chairman. Staying with Boca and his wife, Cveta, Ruža finally felt safe. Since she was forbidden to go out, boredom soon plagued Ruža. She would often stand in front of the door of the house with a shawl wrapped round her head covering a fair part of her face, too. With the spring of 1942, Cveta began to work in the fields and Ruža was left alone in the house. Cveta felt sorry for her and suggested she put on peasants' clothing and come to help her out in the field. Overjoyed, Ruža accepted the offer. The thought that someone might recognize Ruža while she dug into the furrows never entered their heads. And that was exactly what happened. Fortunately, no one informed the occupying authorities of Ruža's whereabouts. It was Boca who got word of what was going on. He was furious with them for their recklessness. However, there was no going back. He called Doctor Branko and they decided that Ruža must leave Negotin. Once again, human solidarity came to the rescue. Velja Trtuš Mikulić, who worked in the county administration, provided Ruža with an identity card in the name of Olga Ilić. Doctor Branko saw Ruža off at the railway station, and handed her into the care of a railway worker, who took her to the official compartment where he introduced her as his wife. Safe in the company of railway people as far as Niš, Ruža continued her journey from there to Kragujevac alone. Ruža was heading for her *kum*'s house, a good friend of her uncle's since their studies in Gratz. When she appeared on their doorstep, they were all visibly surprised. First, the *kumovi* by Ruža's unexpected visit, and soon after, Ruža with the fact they had a high-ranking German officer as a lodger, who also

took his meals in their house. Ruža spoke almost perfect German and the *kumovi* story of the long standing friendship with her uncle was satisfactory enough to get through lunch smoothly. Once the meal was over, Ruža had to find someplace else to stay.

On her way from Niš to Kragujevac, Ruža had got acquainted with the wife of the stationmaster in Badujevac. A very outgoing woman, who had two children to take care of, she had invited Ruža to come to stay with them in Badujevac and help her round the house. Believing that she would be staying with her *kumovi*, Ruža had declined and thanked her for the offer. But after she had had to leave the house of her *kumovi*, she immediately boarded a train and only two stations away from Kragujevac, soon found herself in the home of the woman who had offered her a job. Ruža's acquaintance from the train was pleased to see her and Ruža got the position.

Ruža was well liked within the company of railway workers but also baffled by frequent suggestions made by some that she should go and stay with someone else. She didn't have to wait long to understand why. One night, as Ruža was sleeping in the kitchen, the stationmaster came up to her with vulgar amorous propositions. After a sleepless night Ruža left the stationmaster's house without saying a word. She approached one of the railway workers, a Russian and his wife. They were well aware of the stationmaster's habits, but all the same Ruža had to leave Badujevac. The Russian took Ruža to Batočina to stay with a rich, widowed woman, Divna Kovanović.

Upon her husband's death, Divna



Divna Kovanović



Kovanović had taken charge of a sizable estate. It was a wealthy house with a Ford automobile and chauffeur. Being a copious estate, it employed machinery beside a great number of labourers; they even had their own threshing machine. Ruža had little experience in field-work and the ways of country life. Nevertheless, Divna found employment for her. She tended to the house and the large garden close to the railway station. Divna had two sons, Žarko and Živa, and a daughter, Raca, who were all still at school. The elder daughter, Biserka, was married to Vladimir Mladenović. They lived in a separate household but maintained everyday contact. They had given shelter to a Jewess, Klarisa Levi, in their house. All of them took Ruža, alias Olga Ilić, for a Bosnian refugee. Prior to World War Two Vladimir Mladenović had been an apprentice to Klarisa's father, learning trading skills in his shop in Belgrade. When Klarisa's father died just before the war, Vladimir had returned to Batočina. During his apprenticeship the two families, Mladenović and Levi, had become close friends. When Vladimir married Biserka, Divna Kovanović's family accepted his friends, too.

Without declaring war on Yugoslavia, the Germans bombarded Belgrade on April 6th, 1941. The Levi's family house was hit. The Kingdom of Yugoslavia surrendered to the enemy and soon the persecution of Jews was set in motion, primarily in Belgrade. Before it spread to other parts of Serbia, Klarisa's brother had already fled to Niš to stay with relatives. Vladimir was fully acquainted with the situation of the Levi family, but as far as the Levis could see, his help was not needed. Klarisa followed her brother to Niš. There they were marked out as Jews and one day Klarisa's brother was taken to the

concentration camp Crveni Krst (Red Cross) in Bubanj. Klarisa never learned when her brother was shot. On hearing what was happening in Niš, Vladimir acquired fake documents in the name of Melanija Marković, and set out to bring Klarisa to his home. This is how it happened that Klarisa was already staying in Batočina when Ruža Lihtner came to the house of Divna Kovanović.



Biserka Mladenović

Divna's sons had many friends who would at times come to their house to have some fun. They usually sang and played the guitar while Divna and Ruža sat in front of the house. One song reminded Ruža that not so long ago she, too, had had her own friends in whose company she had spent memorable evenings. She began to cry and finally told Divna that she was a Jewess, a student of literature from a well standing family. "I thought as much," Divna told her. "I didn't want to say anything first. May the devil take the Germans and those persecuting you! You have nothing to worry about, auntie Divna will take care of you. One thing only, say nothing of

this to anyone else. I am the only one to know." Ruža was relieved that she had told her story to someone she could trust. From then on, it seemed that Ruža and auntie Divna had grown closer.

It stands to reason that this wartime idyll could not last long. It was market day in Batočina in 1943. Crowds of people from neighbouring villages, some even from Kragujevac, came to buy supplies in the marketplace known for its bountiful offer and low prices. The railway station was across from Divna's house. Visiting peasants and potential buyers often passed through her yard to take a short cut to the market. Divna never objected to this. The two of them were sitting in front of the house looking at the passers-by when Ruža sudden-



ly went pale. Staring at her was Major Dragojević, the commander of the garrison in Negotin. Ruža was unaware of the fact that he was from Kragujevac; on leave, he had decided to come to Batočina to buy supplies at the market. Major Dragojević did not address Ruža, he simply passed by her. Ruža immediately told Divna that he had recognized her. Without a minute to lose, auntie Divna ordered horses to be harnessed and sent Ruža off to her sister-in-law, Žana Kovanović, in Prnjavor. They didn't have to wait long to see what would happen next. In no time Divna's garden was besieged by German soldiers in search of a Jewish girl. All the girls working in Divna's household were lined up in the garden. There were no Jews among them and none of them knew what the Germans were on about. No one disclosed the fact that Ruža had left in the carriage in a direction unknown to them minutes before the Germans arrived.

A few days later, Ruža returned to Divna Kovanović's house, this time to discuss what should be done next. The Germans had initiated a search of all houses so that Klarisa Levi, hiding in the house of Vladimir and Biserka Maldenović, was in danger, too. One evening Divna's sister, a widow of a certain Miler and employed at the Gestapo, came to visit her. She was aware that both Klarisa and Ruža were Jewish girls but had kept quiet about it. After prolonged discussions Divna's sister suggested that both Ruža and Klarisa set off for Germany?! After the initial shock, Ruža surmised the sound consistency behind the proposal. If they passed the medical check-up in the *Arbeitsamt*, the German Work Bureau in Kragujevac, and there was no reason not to since they were young and healthy, they would go off to Germany where no one would ever

begin to believe that they could be Jewesses.

The following day Ruža and Klarisa stood in front of the building of the German Work Bureau. They were still undecided whether to go on with the plan. The thought of what might happen if the Germans concluded that their documents were a fake and that they were actually Jews kept them back. While Ruža built up her courage and entered the bureau building, Klarisa decided that she would not go in. After an introductory conversation with a lady clerk, Ruža went for her medical. She left the building with a signed bureau employee contract in hand. Ruža could set off for work in Germany, last destination point - Berlin.

Klarisa found it hard to cope with the situation she was now in. Thoughts of killing herself came to her frequently. It was clear that she could no longer stay in the Mladenović home. Vladimir saw to it that she was



Ruža Lihtner (in white blouse) with her saviours



transferred to a safe place. She stayed with his mother for a short period of time after which Vladimir took her to Grocka near Belgrade where she remained unharmed up to the end of the war.

Ruža started off for Germany from Belgrade railway station. The train stopped at various stations where passengers, like Ruža, heading for work in Germany got on. When the train stopped in Gratz in Austria, at the time a part of the Third Reich, Ruža suddenly changed her mind. She got off the train with the passengers who had work contracts for Gratz. Since she dared not show the contract which stated that she had been sent to Berlin, Ruža had to overcome multiple challenges posed by the Austrian administration staff to finally obtain a job in a pharmacy. In Gratz Ruža met other workers who had come from Serbia, i.e., Yugoslavia. She dared not tell anyone that she was a Jew, except for Ratko Cvetković, who had come to Austria from Kragujevac. Ratko had escaped the mass execution of pupils and citizens of Kragujevac in 1941, and, like Ruža, thought it safest to hide in enemy territory. Once Ruža told him her secret, he began to guard her safety. People round them were quick to notice the change in their relationship and soon came to look on them as a couple. Ultimately Ratko managed to provide a legal paper, something close to a contract, witnessing their liaison, and serving as a substitute for a wedding certificate. When, walking down the street one day, Ruža came across a married couple she had met while staying with Divna in Batočina, Ratko was prepared to leave Gratz with her immediately. They moved to a smaller town, Bruck an der Mur. There they found both employment and a small room of their own to stay in. When Ruža got pregnant, Ratko decided to send her back to Belgrade to stay with his sister. Ratko's sister was barely making ends meet and staying on with her once the child was born, would have been an added burden to the already stretched household budget. In the street Ruža met Mića Todorović, a high ranking Chet-

nik officer, with whom she had once been good friends in Negotin. Mića had not forgotten the days of shared friendship and took Ruža to his mother's place. Draginja, Mića's mother, told Ruža that her aunt Mira, who at the same time happened to be Draginja's good friend, had been taken from Negotin to the camp on Banjica in 1943. Aunt Mira did not survive the horrors of the concentration camp.

War was nearing its end and once more people had to run for shelter. This time it was the allies who bombarded Belgrade. Draginja took care of Ruža as if she were a niece of hers. They fled to Rakovica and when the time came for Ruža to give birth, Mića took her to the hospital. With her baby in her arms, Ruža celebrated liberation day.

**Divna Kovanović ,
Biserka and Vladimir Mladenović**
all awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 1999





TWO WOMEN – BOTH MOTHERS TO ONE CHILD

Eva Komlós, married name Kohn, gave birth to a son, Petar, in Novi Sad on February 6th, 1944. The joy felt was dimmed by the absence of Petar's father, Geza Kohn, who had been taken to Hungary to slave labour.

The Kohns had managed to escape the 1942 Novi Sad raid in which the majority of Jews living in Novi Sad and its neighbourhood had perished. They had hoped that the worst was over, but only a month after Petar's birth the Nazis occupied Hungary and the extermination of Jews recommenced. Eva was an only child and she had no one to turn to for help in Novi Sad.

Petar's paternal grandfather, Moses Kohn, and his wife, Roza, nee Wiener, had settled in Subotica at the beginning of the XX century. Roza had given birth to four sons and a daughter, Margita. Son Geza was born in Becsehely, Hungary, and educated in Subotica. On receiving his university diploma, he had moved to Novi Sad where he found employment. One of his brothers was also living in Novi Sad at the time. Soon after the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was invaded, the only one left in the Subotica family house was their sister, Margita. Their parents had died before the war and the two brothers who had remained in Subotica were driven off to slave labour. Alone in Novi Sad, Eva decided she would pack her things and move to Margita's home in Subotica with her new-born baby.

Although they were fully aware that the war was coming to its end, the Nazis nevertheless hastened to

implement their monstrous plan to eradicate Jews. In May 1944 a ghetto was established in Subotica. Entire families moved to the fenced-in part of the city in Paralelna Street. It was only provisional accommodation; a number of families were put together inside one house. It was clear to all that the ghetto was just a transitory station to the Nazi camps. Eva, her son and Margita, to whose house in Subotica Eva had come hoping to find shelter, had to move to the ghetto with the others. The imprisoned Jews were told that they were being transported to labour camps. Eva was concerned how she would work with a baby to take care of. Who would care for Petar while she was away labouring? Petar was only four months old when Ana Matyasovics came to the ghetto to visit her friend Bozi Glueck. Ana and her husband, István, lived in Budapest. Their marriage was childless. Doctors had diagnosed that Ana could not bear a child. Bozi knew that her friend dearly

wanted children and fully aware of the situation Eva was faced with, she suggested that Ana adopt Eva's child and save Petar from camp. The two young women came to an agreement soon. Bribing the guards, who readily looked the other way in exchange for money, Ana managed to take Petar out of the ghetto.

When Eva and Margita arrived in Auschwitz by way of Bácsalmás, they realized that Eva had done the right thing. Women with small children were immediately taken aside and killed in gas chambers. Owing to Ana Matyasovics, Eva had saved both her child and herself. Petar was now safe in Budapest in the home of Ana and István Matyasovics. Eva and Margita became inseparable inside the camp.



*Petar with parents Eva and Geza
Kohn and uncle Mr. Komlós*



They went to forced labour together, slept in the same barrack, shared the good, if there was anything good to share, and the bad which amassed by the day. One day Eva and Margita's group was lined up and divided. One of the two women was placed to the left, and the other to the right. Margita was in the group led to the gas chamber.

Eva survived the tortures of the Nazi camp in Auschwitz and in 1945 she came to Ana Matyasovics's home. Ana was glad that Eva had survived the war but also deeply troubled when she realized that Eva wanted to take her child back. Surviving the trials of being taken from one camp to another Geza, Petar's father, returned home, too. Petar was lucky that both his parents had managed to survive horrendous death camps; mother - Auschwitz and father - Dachau, the last camp he found himself in before liberation. Petar's mother and adoptive mother came to a strange agreement. Eva was fully aware that had it not been for Ana, her child would not be alive and decided that it would be in everyone's best interest to let him live six months with one mother and the next six



István and Ana Matyasovics



Ana Matyasovics and Petar Kohn

with the other.

Who can tell what goes on inside the human soul and inside the body – the vessel of the soul. After some time Ana became pregnant and soon both mothers could each turn their attention to their own child. Once a grown up, Petar, nevertheless, still called Ana, Mother Ana. Out of respect for István and Ana, Petar kept the surname of his saviours, Matyasovics.

Ana and István Matyasovics
both awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 1988



A FRIENDSHIP THAT PASSED THE HARDEST TEST

Citizens from all parts of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes came to live and raise their families in Kosovo, the holy ground of monumental Serbian medieval monasteries. In the period between the two wars, Dragutin Jakić, a renowned lawyer and descendant of an old Serbian family, married Ana, an islander from Rab in Croatia. Nela, as everybody came to call her, became a resident of Prizren, a town in Kosovo and Metohija. Their two daughters, Biserka and Ivanka, were born in Prizren.

During the twenties of the last century a physician of the King's Army, Dr. Josef Teitelbaum, was also posted to Prizren. Josef Teitelbaum had studied medicine in Vienna and during World War I served in the Austro-Hungarian army. Once the war was over, he could no longer practice medicine in Austria or anywhere else in all German speaking countries. Being a Jew, his destiny was ruled by *Numerus Clausus*' restrictive norms. Then, as fate would have it, Josef read an advertisement for the post of physician in the army garrison of Prizren, applied, and got the job. During one of his visits to Vienna, he met Paula, nee Weiselberg, from East Galicia, the land of his own descendants. They were soon married and Paula came to live in Prizren. When in 1931 a son was born to them, Dr. Josef, and ardent chess player, named him Raul after the famous chess player of the time, Raul Hose Capablanca. By that time, Dr. Josef had already completed his compulsory Army service and once discharged, he became the general practitioner of Prizren County.

In the small picturesque town on the banks of the Bistrica river the two families, Jakić and Teitelbaum, became close friends. Whenever possible they spent a part of their summer holidays together in Nela's parental home

on the island of Rab. Raul and the Teitelbaum elder daughter, Biserka, were as close as brother and sister.

Living in Prizren, the Teitelbaums had not yet felt any consequences of Hitler's subsequently instated anti-Semitic politics in Germany at the time of the Nazis coming to power in 1933. They lived in peace and maintained good relations with their neighbours: Serbs, Albanians, Montenegrins, Turks... When the German Army attacked the Kingdom of Yugoslavia on April 6th, 1941, everything changed almost overnight. Like the rest of the country, Prizren was soon occupied by the Germans. Dragutin Jakić, now a POW, was taken to Germany leaving behind his wife Nela and their two daughters.

In the distribution of the spoils of war, the Germans handed Prizren and the greater part of Kosovo and Metohija over to Fascist Italy. The Italian occupying forces contributed to the formation of Great Albania by entrusting it with a larger part of Kosovo and Metohija and certain territories of Macedonia and Greece. However, under Italian and Albanian rule Jews were not persecuted with equal commitment as in those parts of the Kingdom Yugoslavia occupied by Germans. It was equally hard for prominent Serbs and Montenegrins, who by the end of 1941, were interned in a camp near Peza in Albania. Dr. Josef Teitelbaum was among them. Like Nela, Paula found herself alone in Prizren with her son, Raul.



*Raul with his father
Josef Teitelbaum*

Jews living in territories under Italian administration were not blatantly threatened by death; however, they



were exposed to harsh discrimination. The property of wealthy Jews was plundered from the very beginning of the occupation. Soon interrogations and harassment became habitual. One day Paula and her son, Raul, were evicted from their home. The Italians were civil in as



Ana Jakić with daughters Biserka and Ivanka

much as they gave them a few days to pack and leave the house. This was a time when friendship passed its most difficult test. Nela Jakić took the Teitelbaums into her home.

Raul could not go to school any longer so the street became his second home. The National Liberation Front (NLF) did not act as intensely in the territory of Kosovo and Metohija as in other parts of dismembered Yugoslavia. However, there was resistance against the invader and Albanian administrative rule. Raul soon joined up with the youth organization operating underground in

the town as a branch of NLF. They collected money contributions, distributed leaflets, occasionally stole weapons from the Italians, participated in minor sabotages, and regularly reported to their older comrades about the movement of Italian troops. His mother Paula and auntie Nela knew not what to do with him and fearing an arrest, Paula revealed to Nela that she had 150 gold “napoleons” with her. She did not want the money to go to waste in case of their imprisonment. Nela came up with a solution. They placed the gold coins in a case and lowered it down into the water well. Nela was convinced that it could never be detected there.

Italy capitulated in September 1943. The Germans occupied Kosovo and Metohija once again. With the departure of the Italians, Dr. Josef Teitelbaum and other detainees of the camp in Albania were for the time being released. Paula decided to leave Prizren with her son and join Josef. After spending almost two years in Nela’s house, they left for Albania. Once reunited with Josef, they all joined the Albanian Partisans, together with some of the doctor’s fellow prisoners. Dr. Josef looked after wounded Albanian Partisans, but their prolonged stay in the mountainous regions soon affected his health gravely. In spring 1944 Dr. Josef decided to return to Prizren with his family. Taking remote roads they finally reached the town and found a room to stay in. The underground movement in Prizren was organizing a hide-out for the Teitelbaums, but the SS was faster and sprang upon the family. One morning SS officers, accompanied by Albanian volunteers of the diehard Skenderbeg division, burst into the Teitelbaum’s room. They woke the family with shouts of “*Schnell, schnell*” - “Quick, quick” and “*Raus, raus*” - “Out, out”. The Teitelbaums were dressing as quickly as possible when Dr. Josef decided to ask the SS officer for a little patience and then spoke of his fighting for the Austro-Hungarian monarchy during World War I. He took his decorations and medals out of a cupboard and handed them over



to the SS officer. Not giving them a second glance, the officer tossed them all straight out of the window and ordered the family to leave the room immediately. The Teitelbaums were taken to Priština. More than 400 Jews from Kosovo and Metohija, Sandžak, and Montenegro were seized by the Germans and held in Priština. From there by way of the Sajmište death camp in Zemun, where another 50 Jews still imprisoned and awaiting deportment joined them, they left Serbia heading toward Germany. This last transport was destined for the Bergen-Belsen camp. More than a year had passed since Himmler decided to conceal all traces of crimes that had been committed in the camp where the Teitelbaums were imprisoned. Within days before the inmates of camp Bergen-Belsen were liberated, more than 7,500 prisoners were sent in the direction of the Czech border packed in three trains. The first train reached Terezin, the second was stopped by American soldiers and the Jews from this transport were saved. The third train with the Teitelbaum family traversed the railways of East Germany for 12 days. Not even the engine driver knew where to take the carriages with the exhausted and ailing Jews. The transport was named “the Lost Train” by Red Army soldiers who finally came to the rescue of the depleted and famished Jews. Among the detained Jews many were suffering from typhoid, Dr. Josef’s family among them. The Red Army soldiers isolated the sick Jews in the hospital quarantine of Milberg prisoner camp. Completely worn out, Dr. Josef simply did not wake up one morning. He was buried in the camp graveyard.

Paula and Raul returned to Prizren. Nela was overjoyed to see that at least they had lived through the horrors of Nazi camps. Nela’s husband also returned from the POW camp. Nela helped Paula and Raul to move into a house where they rented a room. That Nela had been right about the water-well was still of greater help. The gold submerged there had stayed safe. Soon Paula and

Raul moved to Belgrade and from there immigrated to Israel in 1951.

Ana Jakić

awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 2001





ESCAPING THE USTASHI KNIFE

During World War Two, Bosnia and Herzegovina was a part of the Independent State of Croatia. From the moment of its instatement, the puppet government of ISC, headed by Ante Pavelić, adopted Adolph Hitler's anti-Jewish laws, exercising them word for word as envisaged by their mentor. A large Jewish Community existed in Sarajevo. They had settled in this town while it was still under Turkish occupation after the expulsion of Jews from Spain at the end of the XV century. When World War Two began, Jews became a persecuted nation once again. The Nazi ideology found its followers among some of Sarajevo's ethnic communities which had lived in peace and civic tolerance up to then. Now, the slightest incident, often fabricated, was cause enough for apprehending and imprisoning entire families. The Ustashi placed the Jewish prisoners in provisional deportation centres. The centres were located in partly destroyed sacred buildings, in town buildings adapted for this particular purpose, and in jails. Mejtaš, Baš-Čaršija, the partly destroyed La Benvolencija building, and some others, became one big camp scattered all over Sarajevo. The number of detained Jews rose by the day and a solution had to be found urgently. The Ustashi government in Zagreb decided to open a concentration camp in Djakovo. The Djakovo diocese had an out-of-use mill on the church estate, abandoned years ago. Antun Akamović, the Djakovo bishop, vehemently protested against the idea of opening a camp for Jews on church property. A declared Ustashi, he had no desire to see Jews in his par-

ish. Eventually Serbs, Communists, the Roma were also imprisoned in the camp, but Jews outnumbered them all. Events that followed proved that Akamović was no God abiding man of mercy. In December 1941 some three thousand people, mostly women and children, were deported to Djakovo where they were denied basic living conditions. A bitter cold induced the Jewish management, charged with the day to day running of the camp, to ask for fire wood. They were given a small quantity of wood, but it came at a great price, as they were concurrently accused of stealing a large part of it. An insufficient number of latrines presented an even bigger problem. The Djakovo diocese had no wish to be of help; rather to the contrary, it banned further installation of latrines. Once again the management intervened, but the answer they received from the diocese this time was: "This is not a sanctuary for Jews." The existing latrines were overflowing with faeces, while the lines of people waiting in front of them became longer. Typhoid spread inside the camp and was taking its toll. The inmates gradually passed on to the Jewish cemetery in Djakovo in a daily flow.



Judita and Kalmi Levi with children

The family of Kalmi Levi was among the inmates deported from Sarajevo: his father – Ichak, mother - Luna and his six brothers and sisters. The Levi family also suffered losses inside the camp. The decision to transfer the majority of inmates to camp Jasenovac was made in July 1942. Of the entire Levi family, only Kalmi and his brother were left to enter the train transport heading for Jasenovac. Occasionally, on its way there, the train would come to a standstill. When it stopped at one of the stations, Kalmi



asked the guard to let him out just for a gulp of water from the nearby water tap. Glancing at the worn out young man, the guard took pity and let Kalmi leave the wagon. Kalmi pleaded with his brother to accompany him saying that this was their last chance to escape from the death-bound transport. His brother declined and the train soon set off leaving Kalmi behind. Kalmi had no idea where he was, nor which way to go. The guard duly reported him missing and a large company began the search for Kalmi. He did not get far. Apprehended, he was transferred to the prison in Ilok since the train he had fled from was on its way to Jasenovac.

It was the high season for fieldwork. The fully-grown wheat had to be harvested and there was just not enough manpower for the job. Prisoners from Ilok were sent to estates where farmhands were required. By then, Kalmi had figured out where he was and knew exactly where to run to. He had remembered his father's friend from pre-war days, who lived in Šid. Kalmi took his chance when they were working in a field at some distance from Ilok and ran off again. Completely exhausted, he managed to reach Šid and find the house of Boža Jovanović, his father's friend. Boža was not at home, but his wife, Desanka, and daughter, Nada, let the young, exhausted man in. They made him rest until Boža's return. When Boža came home, he



*Nada and Desanka Jovanović,
photographed during the war*



*Katarina Kozlov, Nemanja Jovanović
and Olimpijada Kozlov*

called his son, Nemanja, to deliberate what should be done about Kalmi. They decided that they would save him from the sharp edges of Ustashi knives.

Boža Jovanović had already been of assistance to Vlada Schlezinger, a trader in leather and furs, and a business partner of his prior to the war. He had provided fake documents for him. However, he could not use the same source again. Boža remembered his friend, Safet Fazlagić, who lived in Split. Evidently, he could not write to him and ask him to mail fake documents for young Kalmi. What he did was to approach a friend who worked in the Railways. It did not take long for the reply to arrive; Kalmi had obtained documents in the name of Ivo Martinović, a refugee from Serbia. One problem was thus, solved. Still, just uttering a word was enough to give Kalmi away since he spoke in the Sarajevo dialect which had little to do with Serbia. To make matters worse, Nemanja, an active member of the Resistance movement, presented yet another problem as he was under surveillance. Nevertheless, no one came to disturb the Jovanović family up to December 1943, when the Partisans blew up the railway tracks in a sabotage raid. The Fascists selected hostages among the citizens of Šid and locked them up while the Ustashi chased after the Partisans. When none of the saboteurs were caught, they re-



solved to hang the hostages in retaliation. Both father and son, Boža and Nemanja Jovanović, were among the hostages. It was a public execution. After Boža was hanged, the citizens present at the event protested requesting that Nemanja be spared since he was the family's only male descendant. Nemanja was literally taken off the wire. The Jovanović family had to leave Šid at once.

Desanka's sister, Mileva, was married to Milan Kladović. They lived in the village of Tenja, near Osijek. Nemanja, who was married and a father of one child, decided to sell a part of the family estate so that they could all move to the new location. Thus, the entire Jovanović family, together with Kalmi, settled in Tenja.

While still in Šid, Kalmi had wanted to join the Partisans. As the war was nearing its end and the Srem front was opened in the very vicinity of Šid, Kalmi joined the Partisan units. With the end of the war that came in May 1945, Kalmi's wartime ordeal ended, too. Some years later, Kalmi immigrated to Israel. He never forgot Boža and the Jovanović family, who had helped him in the darkest hour of his life.



Nemanja Jovanović holding Bogdan (named after the slain grandfather) and his wife Zorka holds Stanko, after the war

**Desanka and Bogdan Jovanović,
daughter Nada and son Nemanja**
all awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 1968





NEVER ASK WHO IS HIDING YOU

Miroslav Kirec, a sales assistant, and his sister, Zlatica lived in Belgrade in Radnička Street on Čukarica. Already in the position of a sales assistant, Miroslav, better known to his friends as Mirko, joined the labour movement before World War Two. He was directly connected to Branko Tasovac, the Communist Party organization secretary in the Party's home committee for Belgrade, and Jovo Ćorović, the secretary of the III district committee. Mirko's area of operation was in Belgrade; his task was to unite sales assistants into one organization on Čukarica. Thus organized, they could request better living conditions and reduced working hours. Fully occupied with the distribution of the worker's weekly, the study of progressive literature, and the organization of sales assistants' strikes, the news of the accession of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia to the Tripartite Pact on March 25th, 1941, struck Mirko like lightning. That same day, together with his male and female comrades, Mirko headed for the demonstrations in downtown Belgrade. Two days later the whole city was on its feet protesting against the union with Hitler's Germany. The Government was overthrown and Hitler's revenge was swift. On April 6th, 1941, Belgrade was bombarded. Very soon Yugoslavia surrendered to the enemy and Serbia came under the joint rule of the German military administration and collaborationists.

Organized operation of the Čukarica SKOJ (Association of the Communist Youth of Yugoslavia) started early in

June 1941. Mirko and his sister, Zlatica were immediately accepted into the SKOJ organization. With each day the scope of operations entrusted to Mirko and his friends increased. The persecution of Jews and Communists had been set in motion by then. In those days Čukarica was a border-line community of Belgrade and one of the roads leading to Partisan units crossed over its territory. This meant that Mirko's assignments were becoming increasingly more complex. During the months that followed, Belgrade Communists on their way to Partisan units successively passed through Zlatica and

Mirko's flat. Jews were also joining up with Partisan units. The three Baruch brothers, all Communists, entered the Partisan units in the first days of the war.

When in December 1941 mass internment of Belgrade Jews into Zemun Sajmište camp commenced, the Baruch sisters, Sonia and Bela, and their mother, Bulina, received summons to register with the Special police for Jews. The Baruchs were well aware of what this meant: deportation to death camps. A few days before they left their home taking their fake documents with them, Sonia learned of the tragic destiny of her brothers from her sister, Shelly. At the end of August 1941 her brother Isidor had been killed in one of the battles for the Užice Republic. Josif had been wounded in battle at Bajina Bašta and died in Užice in October that same year of sustained wounds. Bora had been entrusted with propaganda work in the Užice Republic.

On his way back from Sandžak, he was apprehended and sent to Belgrade. Only after the war was Sonia to learn that he had been shot in Jajinci in July 1942. The male descendants of the Baruch family had been



Miroslav Kirec



eradicated from the living in a matter of months. Shelly told Sonia everything she knew about the family as if foreseeing that this would be their last meeting. Shelly and her husband were apprehended after an accident in the process of making hand grenades which brought the enemy to their door. They were taken to Banjica camp where they were both executed by a firing squad.

Since 1938 Sonia had been a member of the sports organization “Polet”. In fact, “Polet” was a meeting place for young people of progressive thought. In 1939 they founded the first SKOJ organization in Belgrade. When her friends learned that Sonia, her younger sister, and her mother were completely alone they committed themselves to taking care of their safety. No one dared tell mother Bulina the tragic fate of her sons. Sonia’s friends provided the necessary fake documents and with that the trials of securing shelter for the Baruch began. They moved from one flat to another, sometimes without knowing the names of the people they were hiding with. It was best to know as little as possible about one another. The odds of being “exposed” were thus lessened. However, the care of their hosts brought back belief that good people still existed. At times separated, they found shelter in abandoned shacks or even ruins left after the bombardment of Belgrade. They lived like this up to March 1942 when there was a major “exposure” in Belgrade. Many Communists and members of the SKOJ, who had hitherto managed to escape arrest, had to leave Belgrade immediately. Sonia’s “connection” was on the list of those uncovered. It was time for Sonia to leave Belgrade, too. Comrades still active in Belgrade were entrusted with the care of her mother and sister. Sonia’s route to central Serbia went through Čukarica



Sonia Baruch

and Rakovica. This is how she found herself in the flat of Mirko and Zlata Kirec. It was a time when raids throughout Belgrade were stepped up. The search was on for Communists and hidden Jews, those who had eluded internment in the Sajmište camp. Sonia dared not leave the Kirec flat for some days; she was now black-listed since her name was on the lists of those wanted. Once Mirko and Zlatica surmised that the situation had somewhat abated, Sonia was transferred to another shelter in Rakovica. After the exposure of October 1942, there was nothing left for her to do but take the first train out, to Jagodina. Sonia was saved.

Sonia was to learn that her mother was alive only after the war had ended. Her friends had moved her mother to Drugovac near Smederevo where they took care of her up to liberation. Her sister, Bela, was less fortunate; she passed into memory together with her brothers and sister Shelly who had all given their lives for a brighter future.

Miroslav Kirec
awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 1990



THE IMPORTANT THING IS THAT THEY ARRIVED SAFELY

Arslan Rezniki, a merchant from Djakovica, established contact with renowned Jewish traders from Skopje and Thessalonica back in 1932. With mutual trust gaining momentum, cooperation was expanded as requested by the Skopje traders. David Cohen, Rafael Natan, and Arslan decided to become partners in 1937. Arslan was engaged in widening the market toward Dečani where he had a family house.

The traders from Skopje kept close track of what was happening in Germany. They were among the few who realized in advance what was about to happen to Jews. David Cohen and Rafael Natan asked their business partner whether they could find refuge in Dečani for themselves and their families. Arslan was willing to welcome them into his home guaranteeing safety for all. Although his estate in Dečani was large, the house



*Mustafa Rezniki receiving the Righteous award
for his father Arslan*

built on it was rather small. In order to provide adequate accommodation for his partners, he asked them to grant him a loan, so that he could build a larger stone house for them. Both David and Rafael agreed, and Solomon Konforti from Thessalonika joined in as well. The house was still unfinished when David Cohen and his family moved into Arslan's old house at the beginning of 1940. The house was completed in record time, four months in all. The Cohens moved to the new house and soon the Konforti and Natan families joined them.

Arslan helped others, too, but when an epidemic of typhoid spread through Kosovo and parts of Macedonia, he was unable to help the members of his own family. Three of them died of typhoid; his son, Mustafa, and daughter, Nadjarija, were also infected. Hospitalized in Djakovica, they were erroneously diagnosed and treated for malaria by the hospital staff.

At that time, the pro-fascist Yugoslav government signed the accession to the Three Partite Pact. After the March demonstrations in Serbia, when the people rejected the signed pact with Hitler's Germany and the Axis forces, it became evident to the new government in Belgrade that war with Germany was inevitable. The rushed mobilization was still in progress when, on April 6th, 1941, Belgrade was bombarded and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia attacked in the aftermath. After a short time Yugoslavia surrendered. In Macedonia, Southern Serbia at the time, men had also been drafted. Chaim Abravanel, the renowned physician from Skopje, was among them. His unit was transferred from Skopje to Peć and from there they arrived in Djakovica by bus. Solomon Konforti saw him there and immediately sent Arslan to ask him to help his ailing children. Dr. Chaim Abravanel examined the patients. Suspecting typhoid infection, he prescribed new treatment for the youngsters not waiting for the expected blood analysis results from Skopje. It was just as well, since they never reached the Djakovica hospital. By then, Yugoslavia had entered into war with



Germany and Dr. Abravanel's entire unit was captured. When Arslan caught up with the line of POWs, the Germans were taking the prisoners from Djakovica to Peć. He tried to convince Dr. Abravanel to run off with him since the German guards were slack, but the doctor declined his offer. Arslan returned home and immediately told Salomon what had happened. Salomon suggested they both go to Peć and try to convince Dr. Abravanel to flee from detention camp once again. After a prolonged effort in persuading the doctor to go with them, he finally agreed but on condition that they take his fellow prisoner, Dr. Jovanović from Subotica, with them. Arslan agreed and the two colleagues soon found themselves inside Arslan's house.

Dr. Abravanel was surprised to find three Jewish families living in Arslan's house, but there was no time for talking. Abravanel and Jovanović had to be stripped of their clothing and dressed in the traditional Albanian attire while their uniforms were burned to ashes in the yard behind the house. Dr. Jovanović was eager to get back to Subotica as soon as possible. The situation was still highly strained and dangerous; still, the doctor set off on the long journey after spending four days in Arslan's house. Dr. Abravanel stayed in Dečani. He soon became well known both in Dečani and the surrounding neighbourhood. He treated people for various complaints but never took any money. He always spoke how he was well looked after and how Arslan and his wife, Fatima, took good care of him providing all he



Standing from right to left: Arslan Rezniqui, Dr. Chaim Abravanel and Mustafa Rezniqui son of Arslan; sitting from right to left: Dr. Reni Levi - Abravanel, Berta Abravanel, wife of Arslan Rezniqui, unknown woman and baby Rahel Levi

needed. Arslan's son, Mustafa, was an important link with the outside world.

The Cohen, Natan, and Konforti families had settled down in Dečani and felt quite at home there. Professor Becir Kastrati came to the house to teach French to the girls, Suzika Natan and Ivet Konforti. Chaim Abravanel was the only one who was experiencing concern. His wife, Berta, was alone in Skopje.

Three months had passed since Dr. Abravanel had come to stay in Dečani and the situation on the ground had become more explicit to all. Government of part of Kosovo was shared among the Italian invader and newly-founded Great Albania. Dr. Chaim asked his host whether he would help him return to Skopje. The times were risky and Arslan took a guard with them for added protection. Naturally, there was no chance of them taking the short-



est road to Skopje. Dr. Abravanel had no documents that could take him through the many check points they had to pass. They went to Prizren by way of Djakovica. This stretch of the journey was still safe. They reached Prizren in the evening and with the first daylight set off for the mountains in order to reach Tetovo. They spent the following night in Tetovo. On the third day they arrived in Skopje. Standing in the garden of Dr. Abravanel's house they checked whether the Bulgarian occupying regime was keeping it under surveillance. Once they were sure that the house was not watched, Arslan suggested that Dr. Abravanel should knock on the door and if anyone unknown to him opened it, he could say he needed the doctor's help since he was still dressed as an Albanian. That is exactly what Chaim did. But Berta would not open the door to the stranger. The only thing she told him was that she doubted the doctor was alive. On hearing this, Chaim whistled a tune known only to the two of them. The door opened and soon all the travelers were inside the house. Throughout the night Chaim and Berta talked about what had happened to both of them, and in the morning they thanked Arslan and his guard for looking after the doctor. Taking the same road, Arslan and his guard returned to Dečan.

Dr. Chaim was no longer endangered. Later, at the time of the largest deportation of Jews in Macedonia in March 1943, physicians, medical staff, and pharmacists were exempted. The situation in Serbia was completely different. Immediately upon the occupation in 1941, the Nazis commenced with their plan to eradicate Jews. In a short time word spread among Jews that the Italians were not implementing Hitler's plan to exterminate the Jewish nation. On territories under Italian rule Jews were harassed, but their lives were not threatened. The Jews who managed to get as far as Kosovo and Metohija were transferred to Albania and from there a number of them managed to reach Italy, thus increasing the distance between themselves and the Balkan inferno.

Arslan's house in Dečani very soon became a safe house for many Jewish families seeking refuge on their way to Albania. Within his community Arslan Rezniqui was looked on as an honest man and many were willing to assist him in the task he had taken upon himself. At the time, it was of utmost importance for Jews heading toward Albania to have warranted protection. The merchant Halim Spahiu and his partner, Hasan Rema, helped most. Their role gained importance when in September 1943 Italy capitulated and the Germans instated their rule in Kosovo. The hunt for Jews was once again initiated and they were now deported to death camps. The Cohen, Natan, and Konforti families were forced to leave Arslan's house and seek refuge in Albania. Pashuk Biba, whose brother Kolja was the Secretary of internal affairs in the Government of Albania, came to the rescue. With Kolja's assistance Jewish families were transferred to Italy. After the war, when Arslan was asked how many Jewish families had passed through his home, he answered that he had no count of their number; however, he added that he had later received confirmation for each person who had left his house of their safe arrival at the designated destination.

Arslan Rezniqui

awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 2008



A view of Kosovo and Metohija, 1941



IN GOD WE TRUST

That morning a horrific explosion woke the Kremers up. Beside Belgrade, many other towns in Serbia, among them Smederevo, were bombarded on the morning of April 6th, 1941. The Grand Hotel in Smederevo, held under lease by Alexander Kremer, a Jew from Poland, and his wife Olga, a native of Slavonija, sustained heavy damage. They immediately resolved to leave Smederevo and move to Sremska Mitrovica. The reason for leaving Smederevo was not only the fact that they had been deprived of their livelihood. Alexander was afraid of being persecuted by the enemy forces. It so happened that in March 1941, when the people took to the streets to protest and say “NO” to the pact signed with Germany, Alexander had, in the prevailing atmosphere of celebration, provided free drinks and food in front of his hotel. The news had been broadcasted on Radio Donau and Alexander was named as the generous host. Soon upon the April bombing operations, the Germans entered Smederevo. As lists of all undesirables had already been made, arrests began straight away. Fortunately, the Kremers were already in Sremska Mitrovica. They found accommodation with the Botić family. In fact, it was the house where their son-in-law, Radovan Botić, married to their daughter, Ada Perl, lived.

Alexander Kremer was a devout man, but not dutiful enough to be pardoned in Poland for having cut off his *pejsele* (sideburns), a grave offence for any true Orthodox Jew. Whether he had been banished or had had to flee from the community which had strictly condemned the offence, he found himself living in Osijek at the onset of World War I. There he met his wife, Olga Scheiber, whom he married right after the war. Their harmonious marriage was blessed with the birth of their three daughters: Julia, Ada Perl and Josipa. Alexander was a successful grain merchant at first, and after that,

a hotelkeeper. He became rich and his family was never in want of anything. He helped many people and when he himself was reduced to desperate circumstances; his kindness was remembered and readily repaid.

The Germans stationed in Sremska Mitrovica began to pay extra attention to the house where the Kremer fugitives lived. They were searching for his son-in-law, Radovan, who had been a proactive participant in the March coup. Alexander sensed that the Botić home was not safe for them any more. He deemed that it would be better for them to move to a bigger city where he felt that he would be less conspicuous. He moved to Belgrade with his wife and two daughters. Stojković Živko, a relative of the Botić family, living in Kralja Vladimira Street, took them in. Next to join them there was their daughter Ada, Radovan’s wife, with her two infant children. Mitrovica had become too dangerous for them also.

Finally, Radovan had to flee Mitrovica as well. He first found shelter in Veliko Orašje. However, by the end of June 1941, he rented a house in Guča. He had no way of knowing at the time that he would be staying there right up to the end of the war. By profession Radovan was a veterinary surgeon. The times being hard, he often declined payment for his services. People respected him for his disposition toward the village and its inhabitants, and when the entire Kremer family moved in with him some time later, they generously repaid him by helping the family.

Alexander’s hope that they would be less noticeable in Belgrade went unfulfilled. He had had to report to the police where he was given the yellow band and ordered to wear it on his sleeve. From then on, he had to perform forced labour duties each day. At the beginning of June, SS officers came to their door. He was taken to the Gestapo building in Kralja Aleksandra Street. For the first time in his life Alexander experienced the scent



of death when he was taken with a group of Jews and Communists to Jajince and placed before a firing squad. Even though Alexander had, as previously pointed out, done away with his sideburns, he was nonetheless a devout man. Now, facing death, he prayed to God, firmly believing that no harm could befall him since he had always been an honest and inoffensive man. It seemed that God heard his prayers, for he and another inmate were taken back to prison from the place of execution. At the same time, his son-in-law, Radovan, was desperately trying to find a way to free him from prison. He finally remembered that his school friend Radulović was acquainted with a German major of the SS corps. Prior to World War Two the major in question, at that time a student with very progressive ideas, had managed to escape Nazi persecution by coming to Belgrade. Once in Belgrade, many had helped him to survive in the city, some Jews among them. Upon the arrival of the occupying forces, the rebellious student had been pardoned since he was well acquainted with circumstances in Belgrade and was given a high post in the Commissariat for Jewish issues.

“You looked after me once and it is with pleasure that I can repay you now”, the major answered Radulović on hearing his request. After a two-month incarceration in the Gestapo prison, Alexander Kremer was released and sent home.

At the beginning of September, the Partisans held a number of towns in west Serbia under control. Among them was the village of Guča near Čačak. In these new circumstances Radovan managed to obtain legitimate identity papers and rushed up to Belgrade to transfer the Kremers to his new house. He arrived in Belgrade with a Partisan courier. The courier was under orders to carry out a mission in Belgrade. However, Alexander would not hear of moving. In Belgrade the German propaganda against the Partisans was fierce, describing them as bandits terrorizing the people in the territories under

their control. Alexander feared that conditions for them in Guča would be much worse. Nothing would persuade him, so finally Radovan returned to Guča, accompanied only by Ada and the children. Nevertheless, Olga hid the papers Radovan had provided in a safe place, just in case.

The Partisans continued liberating more and more places right up to the town of Užice where they instated their rule. The Republic of Užice, “Užička Republika”, was the first territory in occupied Europe to be liberated. Very soon the Germans began their counter assault with the aim to regain authority over lost territories. Guča was among the first places on their way to Užice. The German advance meant “terrain cleaning” operations. The ensuing unprecedented terror made the village population flee to the woods and seek refuge in improvised shelters. Once the situation settled down tolerably, i.e., when the railway traffic from Čačak was reestablished, Radovan set off for Belgrade all over again.

He arrived at the door of the Kremers on December 18th, 1941, when most of the Belgrade Jews had already been taken to the Sajmište death camp, situated on the other bank of the Sava river.

“Very soon they will be here to get you, too,” Radovan told them. “It must be clear to you by now that you will not be living here much longer.” Radovan insisted that they pack immediately and depart for Guča with him.

Once again Alexander was adamant that he would not leave Belgrade, whatever reason they may give him. The ensuing strenuous argument went on for hours. Time was becoming very short as they dared not miss the train for Čačak. In the all-pervasive general upheaval that came in the aftermath of the German assault, this was probably the last opportunity to take them out of Belgrade.

The train was scheduled to leave in the early morning hours. Radovan had already bought the tickets and



made a down-payment for a meat transportation van to take them to the railway station at four o'clock in the morning.

"We are not going," Alexander repeated for the umpteenth time. "We are a decent family and God will lead us on our path and preserve us from evil."

Živko, their relative, decided to have his say in the discussion.

"If God is watching over you, he will protect you in Guča as well." Živko then told them of the danger he himself was constantly in by harbouring them in his flat. This was the decisive argument that made them enter the freight car early next morning.

It was at the time the only means of transport that could take them to Čačak.

Since there was nowhere to sit in the car, they had to stand all the way. As if he was facing the Wailing Wall, Alexander ceaselessly prayed and kneeled during the journey. The family surrounded him so that the others could not see what he was doing.

"You must stop that kneeling at once," Radovan said. "You are endangering us all. Someone could report us the moment we are off the train."

Although Alexander stopped kneeling, he still deeply doubted the wisdom of embarking on this journey.

Čačak station was swarmed with people and it was impossible to carry out any kind of control of passengers leaving and arriving. Curfew was moments away, so there was no chance for them to reach Guča that night. They had to spend the night in Čačak. Once again Radovan came up with a solution. He remembered a friend who could help them. They went to the home of a colleague veterinary surgeon, Dr. Radiša Veljović. Radiša's two brothers were in the Partisan units and Germans often inspected the house in search of them. In spite of the danger, Radiša let them stay overnight.

Next morning they immediately rented a horse-drawn cart and departed for Guča.

Radovan and his family lived in a rented house in the centre of Guča. On arriving, they found the village packed with Chetniks, Ljotić-followers and Germans. For the hundredth time they were searching houses looking either for Partisans who might have stayed behind or any of their collaborators. Court-marshal law was enforced ceaselessly and every so often blasts from firing squads were heard on all sides of the village. Slung from the street post in front of Radovan's house was a hanged man.



Nada and Radovan Botić, seated Julia Ben Schahar

Not even his daughter's joy at seeing her parents and sister well and alive could wane Alexander's dismayed countenance.

"So this is where you have brought us," Alexander grumbled.

"Are you saying that you never saw people hanged in Belgrade along Terazije Street?" Radovan replied. "You



are safe here with me and stop worrying now.”

Alexander Kremer and his daughter Julia soon won the confidence of the village folk. They wrote letters for young men imprisoned in POW camps in Germany. They translated from and into German various necessary official documents for the villagers and farmers. They never took any money for the favours rendered since the affection of the people was payment enough.

So far as the inhabitants of the house knew, Radovan was a veterinary who paid frequent visits to neighbouring villages; they were completely unaware of his other activities. Radovan was, in fact, an active collaborator of the People’s Resistance Movement. He maintained constant contact with the Partisans and the Communist party and actively participated in many actions.

The Partisans had found a way to monitor the county magistrate mail. Written communications of the county prefect underwent special scrutiny, since many activists had by then been apprehended and executed owing to informants’ statements. In an intercepted report prefect Milošević notified superiors how there were no Jews and Gypsies in the region except for the Jewish family hiding in the home of Radovan Botić in Guča. Radovan immediately received word of the report. A revised version leaving out the information on the Kremer family was finally forwarded to the relevant German Command centre.

They deliberately waited a couple of days for the report to reach the Command centre and then one night, when it was freezing cold, Radovan with two of his friends, Rade Jovanović and Mile Protić, nicknamed Budak, burst into Milošević’s house. They interrogated him for three hours in a cold room while Milošević was clad only in his underpants.

“I never wrote that,” prefect Milošević claimed. “Whatever made you think I did?”

“Do you really think that we don’t have people working

for us in Kraljevo?” Radovan replied. “We received a cable today which cites what you wrote in your report.” Milošević confessed to all. He was ordered to leave the county early next morning by nine o’clock at the latest, which he precisely did. He dared not tell anyone of what had happened and that there were Jews still living in the Botić household. He was convinced that the Partisans had insiders in every German H.Q. and that telling someone what had happened would certainly result in an imminent death sentence. The Kremers were living in Guča when the war ended. Radovan was proud to have been able to save them from the greatest evil of the twentieth century. At the time of the Kremers’ departure from Guča, Radovan was wearing a major’s uniform of the People’s Army of Yugoslavia.

Radovan Botić

awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 1989



GRANNY KATICA FROM PERLEZ

Round the middle of 1941 they all got together although it was not a celebration. The brothers and sisters had left their homes and with their families had come to the parental home of Avram and Berta Aureti to seek shelter within its walls. All of them had always lived in Belgrade, but now their parents' apartment in the house in 8, Despota Djurdja Street was more like a transit camp than a family dwelling.

One of the Aureti daughters, Anuška, was already living with them at the time. Each morning her husband, Solomon Danon, had had to go to forced labour and had returned home at night leaving her on her own the whole day. She found the loneliness too difficult to bear, so she had come to live with her parents. Solomon would occasionally come to see his wife at her new home.

On July 25th, 1941, Guta, a seventeen-year-old Jew with a yellow band on his upper arm, threw a bottle of gasoline on a German truck setting it on fire, and somehow managed to escape. That same day three other similar actions were carried out, but the occupying forces succeeded in identifying only Guta, the son of the apothecary Nisim Almoslino. Although no Germans had been killed in the attacks, a large group of Jews, among them Anuška's husband, Solomon Danon, was taken to Tašmajdan park. Guta was given 24 hours to give himself up to the German authorities. He had not thrown the bomb because he was Jewish, but because he wanted the Germans out of his Belgrade. Guta would not surrender, so the Germans selected and shot 122 Jews; Solomon was one of them. The "initial hundred" was only the start of a large scale execution of Jews that came in its aftermath.

On the ominous morning of April 6th, 1941, when Belgrade was under bombardment, Anuška's pregnant sister, Rozika, went into labour. Her term for delivery had

come and she was urgently taken to hospital by a Red Cross van. The hospital was crowded with wounded people so there was not enough space for mothers with babies. They could not keep her long in there and she was transferred to the home of the Levi family in Zemun to convalesce. Each day Anuška crossed the bridge over the river Sava in order to reach her sister and help her as best she could. She had enough time on her hands to devote herself to her sister, but because of the yellow band on her sleeve, she was constantly exposed to all sorts of danger. When walking over the bridge she would remove the band from her arm in order to avoid further interrogation. This in itself was even more hazardous because of the constant threat of being discovered and accused of violating the established order for Jews to wear the mark. Once Rozika was fully recovered, she returned to her parental home with the baby in her arms.

Anuška's brother Jakov, Jacques as they called him, had not been spared the tough grind of forced labour. Still, he had made a plan to flee to Thessalonica and take his wife and daughter along. Unfortunately, they were caught and immediately brought back. Jacques and his wife were killed in the Banjica death camp, while their daughter disappeared without a trace.

Anuška's sister Bukica and her two daughters were also living in the parental home. Her brother, Maks Aureti, a doctor working in the Jewish hospital in Dorćol, lived in his own apartment, but often came to visit his parents. The only one missing was her brother Leon, who had been taken as prisoner of war to Germany. Protected by the Geneva Convention, he spent his days in the POW camp Stalag II. Sometime near the end of the war he was killed in an accident.

Days of anguish awaited the Aureti family when Anuška's father, Avram, and uncle, Avram's brother Josif, were taken to the Topovske šupe death camp. Anuška and her sister Rozika frequently visited their fa-



ther and uncle but managed to hand over the food they had brought them only twice. The Topovske šupe camp, once the barracks of the artillery of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia Army, housed a large number of Jews from Banat. Executions of prisoners by firing squad were performed on a daily basis. However, each day there was less and less living space as waves of Jews were brought in from Belgrade. They slept on sparsely strewn straw, in corridors, sheds and rooms overflowing with inmates. The food was terrible and insufficient so that the sisters hardly recognized their father the second time they came to visit. Anuška and Rozika could not hold back their tears, and emotionally overwhelmed, were unable to make any conversation. Their father somehow managed to tell them:

“Take care of your mother for we shall not see each other again.”

October of 1941 was ending when, in response to the summons of the Presidency of the Jewish Community in Belgrade, Anuška arrived at its seat at 34, Kraljice Milice Street. She had no idea why she was there. On seeing her father’s knapsack, which he had had with him when he was taken to the Topovske šupe camp, she began to cry. As they handed her the knapsack, they informed her curtly that he had been taken away. No further explanation followed. So many questions: where, when, why, were never answered. However, the truth will always surface despite our need to shy away from it. Anuška subsequently learned that one cold October day, following a downpour which left the ground covered with ice, her completely depleted father and uncle braved each other to walk over the slippery ground in order to stand in the line from which prisoners were being chosen for work in Austria. Some of the prisoners volunteered to go after hearing that they would be working on village farms and would be fed adequately. There was no need to take anything with them once they set on the journey, for new working clothes awaited them there. This ploy

brought good results and trucks brimming with prisoners started on their journey to Jajince; once there, all of them perished in front of the firing squad.

With the Aureti home becoming chillingly more spacious, the hearts of its inhabitants withered into deserts of desolation. The only ones still living in the flat were the women. Granny Katica Janušević, an old acquaintance, visited them regularly.

Grandma Katica lived with her husband in Dorćol. Her husband, Stevan, worked at the Belgrade railway station. They had spent their life, as Steva used to say, on the move along the railroad tracks, wherever his job took them. Their stay in Belgrade was so far the longest they had been in one town. As witness to the demise of the Aureti family, Grandma Katica felt deeply for its womenfolk. Not so long ago she used to sew their underwear, or putting it more nicely, their “white linen”. Now she was seeking for a way to help them. Rozika scarcely had any connection with her husband Alexander Bacalel, who found himself in Sophie at the outbreak of the war and was still staying there. Rozika’s one thought was how to reach Bulgaria with her child and be reunited with her husband. Grandma Katica had promised that her husband Steva would help her and that he would organize her transfer to Sofia with the help of his fellow railway men. Once the preparations were completed, Katica showed up at their door. As it turned out, she had not been informed that Rozika and her child had, in the meantime, thankfully reached her husband travelling via Skopje. This fact did not change Grandma Katica’s resolve to continue helping the Aureti family. She proposed to take Anuška to her house in the Banat region, precisely to Perlez. Anuška was perplexed: Weren’t Jews brought over from there and killed in the Belgrade places of execution?

“Go!” with a heavy heart, her brother Maks tried to persuade Anuška to accept the offer. “Take the risk and get



out of this hell.”

Anuška finally agreed to go with Grandma Katica. There was no time for preparations. She put a few essentials into her small suitcase. Penniless and without any means to help her survive, she stood ready to go.

“You’ll be back soon,” were her mother’s parting words. “Anuška, the war is coming to an end!”

It may have seemed so to her. She could not fathom that things could get worse after all they had been through.

The dark waves of the Danube made Anuška ponder how the times when they had waltzed to Strauss’s music were long-gone. Beautiful blue Danube and ball dresses were a thing of the past. Accompanied by Grandma Katica, she reached Pančevo by boat. Awaiting Grandma Katica was a forwarding agent who was to take them to Jabuka. From afar the coachman observed whether they would pass the ID checkpoint on leaving the boat unhindered. No one knew that Grandma Katica had supplied Anuška with her daughter Anica’s identity papers. Her daughter had been arrested under suspicion of being a member of the Resistance movement. The two women passed the checkpoint without any problem and were soon on their way to Jabuka. Once there, they got on the freight train and finally reached Perlez.

Grandma Katica’s relations readily accepted Anuška into their household. She soon discovered the hardships of surviving on meager means. Their only source of living was Steva’s small railway salary and the backbreaking fieldwork. Together with other household members, she worked for daily wages in the fields of German landowners. In order to do this, she went under the name of Grandma Katica’s daughter, Anica. She tended the cattle, the pigs, fed the chickens and could hardly wait for Grandma

Katica to come and bring her news from Belgrade.

“Sis,” as the household members had named Anuška, “come and hear what I have to say to you.” Grandma Katica took Anuška aside. “I shall not be going to your home anymore. They have all been taken to the Sajmište camp.”

Anuška cried bitterly, deeply regretting that Bukica had not allowed her children to come to Perlez with Grandma Katica. Bukica would simply not part with her children and they all went to their death together with Granny Berta.

Death had become a daily feature in their lives. There was no time for grievance even when Anuška heard that in one day all the doctors and medical staff of the Dorćol Jewish hospital, where her brother Maks worked, had been rounded up and taken to the Sajmište camp. They

met their death in the specially designed “suffocating” truck. By design, the engine gas exhaust was directly connected to the hermetically sealed truck body inside which prisoners were driven to Jajince. Citizens in the streets of Belgrade along which the truck passed, were spared from hearing the wails of the dying on their way to the place of their internment. Those that stood prepared in Jajince awaiting the arrival of the truck, could do nothing else but bury the dead in a mass grave. The number of these graves was countless.

The Resistance movement was growing and turning into a force to be reckoned with. Germans went through houses searching for Partisans in hiding. There was no way of knowing when the aggressors would ransack one’s home. Grandma Katica would hide Anuška in different houses for a couple of days fearing that the many German neighbours in the village might reveal her existence to the enemy. No one but Katica knew where





Perlez

she was hiding. On Whitsun holiday the village was blocked. In its centre nineteen men and one girl were hanged. Anuška was forced to flee again. She ran the 12 kilometres to Čenta over ploughed fields to reach the Subić family, Grandma Katica's relatives. She stayed there for three days waiting for the danger to pass. On this occasion too, only Grandama Katica knew where she was.

The Railways had transferred Steva to a new post in Jabuka. Round mid October 1944 Anuška also found herself in Jabuka. Together with Red Army soldiers, the Partisans liberated Jabuka. The joy was overwhelming and there was happiness yet to come, for among the Partisans stood Grandma Katica's daughter, Anica. At last the time had come when Anuška could return Anica the name she had borrowed from her, the name which had saved her life so many times.

Katica Janošević

awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 1964



THE LONG JOURNEY TO FREEDOM

The Konfino family celebrated Bojana's graduation in Slavonski Brod. Expelled from school like the rest of the children whose parents were Communists, she had completed her last year of secondary school and graduated away from home, in Ruma. She was finally back at home.

The shadows of war crept over the Konfino family when father Marko was drafted. Born in Pirot, Marko Konfino was sent from Croatia to his hometown in Serbia to defend his country. The territories of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia were engulfed by the Second World War in a flash. The country's defence was short lived and Marko was captured by the Bulgarian army. As a native of the parts of east and south Serbia and Macedonia that had come under the jurisdiction of the Bulgarian government upon capitulation, his stay in prison was short. The Bulgarians regarded themselves as liberators of Pirot and since it was Marko's birthplace, he was deemed to be a subject of Bulgaria; however, being a Jew, he was barred of any rights. Although his right to an identity card had been annulled, he managed to survive and find his way round his native city. A sharp-witted man, he soon realized what was going to happen to Jews in the newly founded Independent State of Croatia. Through a German liaison, he sent word to his wife Matilda to leave everything behind, take their children, Bojana and Ruth, and immediately set off for Zemun where he would be waiting for them.

Travelling round the occupied country was a trying experience at the beginning of June, 1941. Bojana's friend, Ante Djerkić, a Croat, came to their rescue by providing the necessary travelling passes. Once in possession of the documents, they were able to reach Zemun, which was now part of ISC territory. Marko Konfino was waiting for them there. They crossed the river into Belgrade

without delay and set off for Pirot the next day.

Marko's aunt, Rena Abravanel, helped the Konfino family to settle into an abandoned house in Pirot. Their next-door neighbours were linked to the Partisan movement. The head of the neighbouring family, Ljubomir Kostić - better known as Ljubomir Kolar - and his wife helped the many who, in the hard times that had befallen them, needed support and guidance. Each member of the Kostić household had a designated task. Their daughter, Bosa, whose fiancée was in the Partisans, and son, Dragoslav, maintained liaison with the world outside.

Bojana was overjoyed when Ante Djerkić, their friend from Slavonski Brod, sent three cases of Konfino household possessions. One of the cases contained Bojana's complete bridal dowry. Rudi Abravanel, who, in the meantime, had proposed to and been accepted by Bojana, was pleased, too. Bojana was never a person who could sit at home idly. She had found employment as a tutor to the children of Mr. Cekić, a wealthy owner of a rubber factory. She gave them lessons in French and German.

The relatively peaceful life of the Konfino family was disrupted when, at the beginning of 1943, the regulation for Jews to wear the yellow band on their sleeve was enforced. People began avoiding each other and felt uncomfortable in the company of Jews. The fact that their neighbours were obliged to wear yellow bands caused no reservations in Ljuba Kolar's household. They shared everything they had with them: flour, beans, potatoes, poultry, eggs.... On the other hand, Bosa was learning cooking skills from Matilda. She had been presented with a notebook of recipes to copy out for herself. Keeping their spirits high, Matilda even baked a concoction of her own which she named "war cake". But Marko was very anxious; the established labelling of Jews was unmistakably foreboding.

The house the Konfino family had settled in had a win-



dow overlooking the back yard. Beyond the garden was Ljuba Kolar's plum-tree orchard. Whether clairvoyant, or a person competent to grasp the sequence of future events, Marko duly asked Ljuba Kolar if they could hide in his plum orchard in case of danger.

"Marko, my house and everything mine is yours to make use of be it midday or midnight," Ljuba replied.

The anticipated police raid was launched before dawn one morning at the beginning of March, 1943. The Bulgarian police carried out a door to door search apprehending all Jews along the way. In just one day nearly all the Jews in Pirot were incarcerated in the *Sokolana* (sports hall) of the town grammar school. However, not all were apprehended. Those who were swift on their feet managed to find shelter in neighbouring vineyards and fields. At the first hammering sound on their front door Marko Konfino knew that the Bulgarian police had come for them. He woke up his daughters and pushed them out through the back garden window. He himself managed to jump out at the last moment. Matilda stayed put inside the house ready to sacrifice herself for the safety of her husband and daughters. She, the wife and mother of the family, was taken to the *Sokolana*. Marko and his two daughters, clad in their nightwear only, rushed to Ljuba Kolar's house. Ljuba, already awake and waiting, heard and immediately responded to the faint knock on his gate.

"Come inside the house," he insisted, seeing how frightened and cold they were.

"No, not inside the house," Marko reasoned. "Once they see that we are missing, they may search your house, too."

Ljuba Kolar took them to the basement.

Mother woke Bosa up and sent her to milk the cow while she lit a fire in the stove. Once the raid had passed, Ljuba told Bosa to go and bring their unexpected guests up to the house. Their hosts then gave them some cloth-

ing and asked them to join the family for breakfast. Since the now uninhabited Jewish houses were ransacked without delay by the Bulgarian aggressor, there was no hope that the Konfinos would collect any of their belongings. All goods thus seized were sold exclusively to Bulgarian citizens.

From that morning the Konfino family lived in total concealment. Marko and his daughters moved into Ljuba's house. The attic became their dwelling space. It was packed with hay and cornstalks. Bosa brought some blankets; one was placed over the hay on which they would lie down and the other was thrown over them for cover. She would then strew cornstalks over the second blanket for better protection. They would venture downstairs only in the early morning and at night. The entire day was spent in the attic. With no hope of finding out what was happening in the town, they asked Dragoljub and Bosa to reconnoiter the situation. News was scarce; all that could be seen was that the *Sokolana* was well guarded by the Bulgarian police. All over town announcements were plastered proclaiming that families harbouring Jews would be shot dead to the last and their houses set on fire. Ljuba Kolar was uneasy and suggested they should join the Partisan units where they might be safer. The Konfino family spent two days with the Partisans and returned to Ljuba Kolar's house. Refusing to accept the existing state of affairs, mainly that he would be abandoning his wife Matilda to an uncertain destiny, Marko had no wish to leave Pirot. He was preoccupied with thoughts of how to save his wife.

Coming into town one day, Bosa happened to see Nisim and Chaim Abravanel openly walking down the streets of Pirot towards the *Sokolana*. After hiding for a few days in a vineyard above Pirot, the brothers had obviously decided to come forward. Nisim went straight for the *Sokolana* while Chaim took a turn toward the house of Mica *Amerikanka* (the American). Living in Mica's house were high-ranking Bulgarian officers from both



the administrative and policing sector. Chaim pleaded with Mica to tell the officers to leave him and his brother be, since they had come to give themselves up voluntarily. As Mica's house was close to Ljuba Kolar's, Bosa ran home and informed the family what was going on. Wasting no time, Ljuba sent Bosa back to wait for Chaim, instructing her to bring him to their house the minute he left Mica's.

"Now remind me, whose child are you?" Chaim asked Bosa when she approached him.

"I'm Ljuba Kolar's daughter," Bosa replied. "There's mother waiting for you at the gate."

At the same time Chaim went off with Bosa to the Kolar house, Nisim, already inside the *Sokolana*, was surrendering to the Bulgarian police.

Ljuba Kolar would not let Chaim leave his house so from that day on Chaim went into hiding together with Marko Konfino and his two daughters. Word got round town that the transport of detainees for Bulgaria was in preparation. Marko and Chaim decided to leave Pirot and wait for the transport in Sofia. However, neither of them had any standard document acceptable to the Bulgarian police. Ljuba Kolar came up with the solution; he gave Marko his Bulgarian identity card, and the card of his wife's deceased brother to Chaim. Bosa gave her own card to Bojana while Ruth obtained one for herself from a close friend. The task of pasting their photographs on the procured documents was entrusted to Chaim and once he had finished, they were ready for their journey. The first to leave was Ruth in the company of her father's friend who, at Ljuba Kolar's request, had come from Sofia to escort her. Rudi, Bojana's fiancée had no documents with him; yet clad in a long black leather coat, he was by and large mistakenly taken for a German and so no questions were asked. After almost two weeks spent in hiding, the remaining refugees were ready to depart. Their hosts baked a customary round

loaf of bread, *pogača*, and a chicken for them, adding cheese and eggs to the package. Dragoljub bought the train tickets and accompanied them all the way to Sofia.

Bulgarian citizens, i.e., holders of Bulgarian identity cards, could take their loved ones away from the deadly transport. This, in fact, had been the purpose of their journey. Matilda - Marko's wife, Rachel - Chaim's sister and her son Timi, Rudi's parents and many Abravanel family members were inside the transport.

Marko managed to lead his wife Matilda from the transport with the help of his relatives staying in Sofia at the time. Chaim saved Rachel and Timi with the support of his brother-in-law, Isak, while Rudi continued on as far as Lom; there he approached the membership of the Jewish Community asking them to stop the transport heading for Treblinka. On hearing that Rudi had jumped off the train and come straight to them, one representative of the Lom Jewish Community assailed Rudi:

"Because of you we'll all end up in flames." He refused to have anything to do with the transported Jews. "You'll be the death of all of us here."

He demanded that Rudi go and report to the camp where the Jews from Pirot had provisionally been placed. Rudi never went to the camp and likewise failed to rescue his parents from the transport. His grandfather and grandmother, and three uncles with their families were also in the transport with the Pirot Jews. Profoundly distraught, Rudi returned to the Konfino family in Sofia.

Marko had managed to procure Bulgarian documents for his wife Matilda and Rudi through his connections. They decided to seek refuge in Albania. The relocation of Jews was charged one gold piece per head; once the group was formed, they began their journey. A few other Jews joined up with them in Skopje and finally, by way of Priština, they reached safety. They remained in Skadar up to the end of the war.



**Ljubomir Kostić and his spouse,
son Dragoslav and daughter Bosiljka**
all awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 1997



WE ARE GOING HOME

Fighting the war in Russia and other European countries, Africa and the Middle East, the Third Reich had enormous requirements for food, timber and other war-industry raw materials. This demand was met by supplies obtained within occupied territories. The utter disregard for the basic needs of the population in these territories was also felt in hunger-ridden Serbia. Such circumstances in Serbia were heightened by the uninterrupted operation of the pits and smelting plant in the Bor copper mine. Heavily guarded, labourers were driven to keep up the continuity of raw material extraction and metal production. However, in mid 1943 the enemy was running out of manual workers for the toughest jobs. Serbian youths were fully aware of the working conditions awaiting them in the mines: excruciating labour, foul food, and the fact that once taken there, people rarely returned. Serbs tried to evade going to Bor in all ways possible. The lack of mine work-force coincided with the mobilization of Serbian youths by various armies fighting throughout Serbia. To enter into conflict over workers with collaborationists' forces that protected their campaign in occupied Serbia was contrary to German interests. The Germans finally settled the problem by making a "business" arrangement with the Hungarian Defence minister: the Hungarian government would deliver 3.000 of "its" Jews in return for a small quantity of copper. In the end, the Hungarians never received the badly needed copper supply.

As agreed by the signed contract, Hun-

garian Jews came to Bor during July 1943. Slave labour, poor food, unhygienic working and living conditions were the cause of the daily death toll. The slightest slip-ups were generally punished by death. Miklós Radnóti, a Jew and one of the greatest Hungarian poets of the XX century, was among the interns. He kept insisting that he had ended up in Bor by mistake but soon realized that he had to accept his fate. One thing he could not forego was his poetry. While others occupied themselves with black-marketing in order to survive, huddled up in his top bunk Miklós wrote poems in a small notebook he had acquired.

In the summer of 1944 the Red Army was advancing in the direction of the border of Serbia by way of Moldavia and Romania. It was just a matter of days before their troops would finally cross the Danube and join up with Partisan units. The long-awaited liberation day of Serbia was approaching. German troops were packing

up and fleeing from occupied Serbia. The Germans in Bor decided they would return the "purchased" Jews to the Hungarians. Word went round the camp barracks: "We are going home!" The slave labourers were divided into two groups. The first group started off for Hungary on September 17th, 1944.

Hungary was a long way off. Journeying down dusty roads on foot the prisoners were forbidden to lift their heads. Frustrated, counting each step they made, some dared to lift their heads. They were shot on the spot. By the beginning of October they had reached Novi Sad. The long line was divided into several groups which passed through Novi Sad slowly. Miklós Radnóti who, like many others, sincerely believed that they were



Pal Rosenzweig



heading back for Hungary, was in one group of the line of prisoners. However, not all the captives were that gullible. Some of them reasoned that it was the last moment to escape and decided to seek shelter in the Novi Sad hospital.

Pal Rosenzweig was in the line passing by the hospital. His feet were badly infected and he could barely walk. He had not been able to take off his old boots for days because of his swollen feet. A young man was standing in front of the widely opened hospital side gate for horse-drawn carts. As Pal approached him, he heard the man speak to him in Hungarian. The voice was quiet, but firm. "Don't look up, just walk in. It's safe. Hurry up." Pal entered the hospital yard and the young man took him directly to the basement of the old hospital building. The man's name was Dušan Jovanović and he was one of the four medical students who worked in the Novi Sad hospital during the war. Pal received therapeutic treatment immediately. Without any anaesthetics, the sores on his feet were cut open and cleaned, preventing further infection. Pal was saved.

Dušan Jovanović provided shelter for all the prisoners who resolutely ventured through the hospital side entrance and made a run for the hospital buildings. He directed them to the basement of the building housing the clinic for ear, throat and nose treatment. The labourers' attempts to explain how they had come to the hospital hoping to find remedy for their sore feet were unnecessary. No clarification was needed, Dušan was fully aware of what was taking place. Over the years he had repeatedly heard the words "You are so lucky that you are not a Jew" and distinctly remembered the 1942



Dušan Jovanović

raid when thousands of people had been thrown into the ice-covered Danube, just because they were Jews or enemies of the regime. He quieted the prisoners down and hid them as best he could. That day some twenty Jews from the line heading toward Crvenka found shelter in the hospital. One of those who had run from the line into the hospital yard was György Shapiro. However, he was detected by the sentries guarding the line of labourers and they rushed after him. A captive once again, György could not be treated. The ensuing search of the hospital premises proved fruitless. The other fugitives were not discovered.

Only a few staff members remained in the hospital since the majority had fled when it became apparent that the Germans were retreating. Dušan administered first aid to the worn out and sore-ridden slave labourers. Ester Kish, a trained nurse employed in the department for contagious diseases, came to his assistance. They procured food and medicine for the emaciated Jews and tended to their wounds in utter secrecy. They were still in doubt as to the possibility of Hitler's wrath catching up with them for harbouring Jews. Years later, Ester spoke of how, in those times, she "...had worked with people who had survived Nazi revenge. Keeping a secret was valued more than gold." In the early morning of October 7th, 1944, just as the labourers who had received treatment were being hidden in various basements, Dušan was informed that another group of inmates from Bor would soon be reaching Novi Sad. He was prepared to once again hide all those who had the strength to seek shelter inside the hospital. However, the second group never reached Novi Sad. Partisan units had cut off Ger-



man retreating troops and the line of slave labourers they were herding with them was set free.

At the same time, the first group had continued its march toward Crvenka. The doomed line of prisoners was met by the Handžar division which was securing the retreat of German troops. 680 inmates were killed mercilessly. The few survivors headed on for Hungary.

Twenty-two dead bodies of Jews, who had almost to the last been slain by a bullet to the head, were eventually uncovered in the far north-west region of Hungary. A notebook, with poems written while labouring in the mines of Bor, was found in the back pocket of a dead Jew bearing the number 12. The poems were written by Miklós Radnóti and they were a shattering testament of a time of vicious inhumanity.

Soon after, on October 23rd, 1944, Novi Sad was liberated. Dušan, Ester and the healing Jews could finally breathe a sigh of relief.



*“It was so”
Ester Kish in conversation with Nenad Fogel
Palić, 2009*

Dušan Jovanović
awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 2006





TO THE HOSPITAL ON 'PIGGYBACK'

Up to the Second World War, Eugen Hochberg was a representative of the Hungarian firm Ganz, trading in construction machinery. He was married to Elza, nee Georgenberger. Their daughter, Miriam, was born four years before the war. When the Germans occupied Yugoslavia in 1941, their search for Eugen began almost instantaneously. It is difficult to say today whether he was persecuted so early on because he was Jew or a noted and experienced engineer. Whatever the case might have been, his friend from the Italian Embassy in Belgrade informed him that he had to leave Belgrade at once. That same friend also issued the Hochberg family fake documents in the name of Hadžić. He further provided a fake passport for Elza's niece, Adela Georgenberger, with the same surname, Hadžić. Using the fake identity papers, the Hochberg family and Adela planned to reach Italy by way of Kosovo and Albania.

The fugitives got as far as Prizren. There they were detained by the instated Italian occupying forces and forbidden passage to Albania. They moved into the only hotel in Prizren, the Kruna, aware that this could just be a temporary solution. Eugen's job had frequently taken him to Prizren before the war, so he was familiar with the town and was also well known and respected. He had drawn up the plans for the construction of the electric power plant in Prizren. However, the Hochberg family belonged to the middle classes and their means of living were insufficient for a long-term stay in a hotel. They were also too conspicuous and needed to find less noticeable accommodation. The fact that Kosovo was under Italian protectorate and that it was soon united with Great Albania had little bearing on the documents issued to them by the Italian Embassy in Belgrade. They were of no help beyond Prizren. The plan to reach Albania with fake documents had fallen through. Since

Adela's father was also well known in Prizren, she decided she would pay a visit to the Jovanović family and ask whether they would lease a part of their house to them. There was a separate single-room flat in one part of their house which the Jovanoviés willingly rented to the refugees from Belgrade. The Jovanović family, father, mother, and their six children lived in a modest house. Eugen soon spent all the money he had brought with him. The Jovanoviés simply let them stay on. They continued their life together; the Hochbergs had become a part of the family.



Petar Jovanović

Petar – Pero Jovanović, the oldest son in the family, took care of the refugees. His father, at that time already 70, and his somewhat younger mother had handed the management of the household over to their oldest son. Pero provided new fake documents for Eugen's wife, Elza, and niece, Adela, registering them as family members. Eugen rarely left the house fearing

arrest. His concern was well grounded. Occasional raids had impelled Pero and his brothers to make a separate shelter for Eugen. The shelter was never discovered but the problem was to reach it in time. In a predominantly Albanian environment the Hochberg family and Adela were relatively safe. When in September 1943 Italy capitulated, the entire Kosovo region came under German military rule. From then on the search for Jews turned into rigorous persecution. While the Gestapo searched one part of the town, Jews would flee to the other. That is how the family of Bata Levi and their in-law, Žak Romano, came suddenly to the Jovanović house. There were also others, like Sava, a Jew and proprietor of the



Akva store in Belgrade prior to the war.

Each nation, irrespective of the religion it practices, has its share of unscrupulous men and women. When Kosovo fell under German protectorate, an eager informer exposed the Jovanoviés for hiding the Jewish family Hochberg in their house. It was wintertime, the beginning of 1944, when German soldiers burst into the Jovanović home and arrested Eugen, Elza, and Adela. Miriam sat quietly in Pero's lap. Aware that they would all be apprehended, using Miriam's pet name, her father asked Pero to take care of Tipica. The child was spared and remained with the Jovanoviés. Eugen, Elza, and

Adela were deported to Austria for slave labour. Two days later *Wehrmacht* soldiers came and arrested Pero Jovanović.

Pero was fortunate that he had not been arrested by the Gestapo. The soldiers took Pero to the Army command and demanded to know why he had given shelter to Jews. Threatened with the proclaimed death penalty, he was told he would be killed for harbouring Jews. Pero insisted that he had no idea of whom he had taken in since Eugen had showed him documents in the name of Ilija Hadžić. He simply had had no way of knowing they were Jews. The Jovanoviés had rented them the flat



Wedding of Petar and Dušanka Jovanović, October 1944. Father Milan and mother Milka sitting between German officers



because, being poor, they needed the rent money to live on. Then the German soldiers told him that they would kill the little Jewess, of whose continuing presence in the house they had been informed. Forgetting all the heavy beatings he had sustained, Pero swore that Tipica was a Serb whom his family had adopted since her parents were too old to look after her. They were over fifty! In the end, Tipica's blue eyes were the decisive factor. The Germans concluded that a Jew's eyes had to be dark and they let Pero go home. Once they were convinced that Pero had not intentionally given shelter to a Jewish family, it became easier for him to approach them when he next needed their help.

Tipica fell ill. She lost the use of her legs and Pero had to carry her in his arms to the German hospice. The doctors presumed that it was infant poliomyelitis. For almost a year, Pero carried Tipica on piggyback to the hospice for her treatment. Finally, it was confirmed that a virus, which Tipica had been infected with long ago, was the cause of her illness. When in 1945 her parents returned from captivity, Tipica's health had already been restored. Adela also came back. The Hochberg family and Adela stayed on in Prizren for some time and then, forever grateful to Pero and the Jovanovićs, they returned to Belgrade. Adela moved to Sarajevo.

Petar Jovanović
awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 1993



Old Prizren



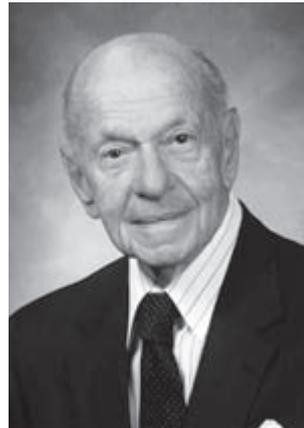
TEARS OF JOY

In the aftermath of the bombing of Belgrade on April 6th, 1941, Fascist troops soon instated their military rule throughout the entire territory of Serbia; with that, the persecution of Jews in Belgrade began. The men were immediately rounded up to work on the clearing of debris and it did not take long before executions by firing squad began. One of the goals of Hitler's ideology was to exterminate a whole people: the Jews. The majority of Belgrade Jews could not comprehend what was happening to them in the town they had been born in and where they lived. Their existence in Serbia was marked by the fact that anti-Jewish politics was a thing of the past, and that in the 1940's hardly anyone could recall such times. Once they realized what was happening to them, it was too late. A fraction of Belgrade Jews managed to leave the city and seek refuge elsewhere before mass murder commenced. Among them was the family of Dr. Rafael Margulis. Dr. Margulis, his wife Olga, and their two sons, students of medicine, Rajko and Alexander, found provisional shelter in Priština in July 1941.

Upon the capitulation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Kosovo was divided among the aggressors. A lesser part of Kosovo was given to Bulgaria, together with parts of eastern Serbia and Macedonia. One part came under Fascist Italy, and the Germans kept the remainder for themselves. With their fake documents, stating their Serbian nationality and Orthodox religion, the Margulis family arrived in Priština, which was, at the time, under Italian administration. Soon word got round Priština who was actually hiding behind the fake documents. In regions under Italian protectorate Jews fared better in as much as their lives were not threatened, but they were, nevertheless, exposed to constant maltreatment. Although no one had up to then harassed Dr. Margulis, he decided to go to Italy with his family. The doctor

had accurately anticipated that the Germans would soon place all of Kosovo under their rule; that meant deportation to death camps inside which only a small number of Jews lived to see liberation day. The one thing he did not know was how to obtain documents which would enable them to escape. Their fake Serbian documents were ineffective for their planned exploit.

A Serbian family, named Popović, was living in Priština at the time. When Skopje was bombarded in 1941, Stevan Popović, an officer of the King's military forces, sustained a major contusion. Stevan's wife was also ailing. Due to gall-bladder problems, which prevented normal food processing, she had visibly lost weight in a very short period. They had five children, two daughters and three sons. Their eldest male child, Predrag, was 17 at the time. The Popoviés learned that a specialist of



Rajko Margulis

internal medicine was staying in Priština and sought out Dr. Margulis to help their mother. That is how Predrag met Dr. Margulis' sons, Rajko and Alexander. Upon examination, Dr. Margulis urgently sent the mother to the Belgrade Clinic for Internal Medicine to be treated by his colleague professor, Dr. Antić. The children of the two families began to visit each other. They would meet more frequently in the

Popović home because it was secluded from the street and had a high, brick wall that sealed the yard off. The young entertained themselves by playing chess or cards, listening to gramophone records. The Popoviés were a well-to-do family who, at that time, already possessed a record player. In their house there was also a violin, and Mevorah, a future doctor and another Jewish refu-



gee who visited the Popovići, would occasionally give small concerts for them, playing on the violin. Mevorah managed to survive the horrors of the Holocaust, but his entire family perished during World War Two.

Predrag Popović was making preparations to visit his mother in Belgrade when Dr. Margulis decided to ask the young man for help. Dr. Margulis had a friend in Belgrade, an attorney who had connections within the capital's Italian Embassy. Without a second thought, Predrag agreed to carry out the delicate task of taking the photos of the Margulis family to Belgrade and bringing back their false passports to Priština. When the attorney handed over the pictures at the Embassy, it transpired that they were so faded that a new set had to be obtained. At the time, Olga's sister and her family were still in Belgrade and had a key to Dr. Margulis's flat. She and Predrag went to the flat to find adequate photographs. Olga's sister did not waste time; she tore out pictures she thought would best suit a passport from the family album and handed them to the young man. Passports for the Margulis family were soon obtained and entrusted to Predrag. As his mother's hospital treatment was additionally prolonged, Predrag decided he would remain in Belgrade until she was released. He hid the passports at his aunt's place where he was staying.

On making his acquaintance with Olga's sister and her family, Predrag yet again became the centre of activity. It was September 1941 and most of the Jewish men were already imprisoned in camps; moreover, many of them had been shot dead. The camp for Jews at Sajmište, designed to be the final solution for the Jewish question, was about to be opened. Mass deportation of children, women and the old to a destination of no return was in the final stages of preparation. Olga's sister and her husband realized that the last moment to leave Belgrade with their daughter and seek shelter elsewhere had arrived. They, too, acquired passports in the Italian Embassy, but they agreed that they would try to reach

Italy separately. Father made the journey to Split while his wife and daughter, a student of medicine, prepared to leave for Priština with Predrag. Once there, the two women would reach Italy by way of Albania.



Alexander Margulis

Before setting off, Predrag sewed the passports inside the lining of his overcoat. He told his companions not to mention Priština during their journey. If anyone asked, they were to say that they were going to the spa Kuršumlijska Banja for treatment and rehabilitation. The spa was near the border with Kosovo. A relative of Olga's joined them for the trip and Predrag warned all

not to show their Italian passports to anyone up to the Kosovo border. The women were in possession of fake identity papers with Serbian names and, if disclosed, the passports would only raise doubt that could lead to serious consequences. Just before they departed, the *pater familias* phoned to tell them that he had arrived in Split safely.

In order to be less conspicuous, Predrag had suggested they travel by train, taking seats in the third class. He had planned the travel arrangements to the last detail. Their overnight stay in Niš, where they had to wait for the train for Kuršumlija, was spent inside the station restaurant since checking into a hotel required registering with local authorities. They continued their journey by train the next day. On reaching Kuršumlija, the only way they could continue their journey was by a horse-drawn carriage, so the travellers settled in an inn which had rooms to let. The proprietor, a Serb, promised he would help them reach their destination. They had to wait a



few days before an Albanian from Podujevo could reach Kuršumljija with his carriage. The Albanian had given his *besa* (word of honour) to the inn proprietor that he would safely take the travellers to Priština. The carriage started off and journeyed down roads known only to the Albanian coachman entrusted with the protection of the travellers. But when they reached a knoll overgrown with trees on the border of Serbia and Kosovo where generally there was never a soul to be found, a group of Albanian gendarmes unexpectedly stopped the carriage. A search of the passengers' luggage was initiated. To live up to his word of honour, the Albanian driver spoke out. He warned the gendarmes that the passengers had regular documents. This meant little to the illiterate gendarmes. However, when he told them that he had given his *besa* to take the passengers to Priština safely and that he would be in trouble the next time he went to Kuršumljija if he failed, the gendarmes decided to proceed with leniency. They would only search Predrag before they let them go. Thankfully, they only felt his pockets, not suspecting that the Margulis family documents were hidden inside the coat lining. On reaching Podujevo, the Albanian took the travellers to the home of a poor Serbian woman. They were to spend the night inside her humble house with only a single room and kitchen. The travellers speculated whether to search for lodgings at the local inn, but the coachman talked them out of it. The inn was kept by an Albanian and Albanian gendarmes frequented the establishment. They made a habit of waking the guests during the night, asking to check their documents. During the process, guests were frequently robbed of their belongings in the dim candle light. When the driver told them of the distressingly inferior hygiene in the establishment, the travellers decided to stay with the poor Serbian hostess. Side by side, they lay down on a couple of rags thrown on the floor and covered themselves with the one blanket found in the house. Thus they spent the night.

In the morning they set off for Priština. They did not encounter any problems on the German-Italian border. In their passports they had a German exit and Italian entry visa. They reached Priština round three o'clock. Tired and exhausted, more mentally than physically, they soon found themselves inside the house the Margulis family was living in. Predrag handed the passports over to Dr. Margulis. On receiving the documents, the doctor could not contain his tears any longer. Olga's cheeks also glistened with tears of joy. Soon they all were crying. The final hurdle on their way to safety had been passed and their joy could only be vented through tears. They kept thanking and praising Predrag, who was becoming increasingly embarrassed. Predrag had also brought a box of insulin for Dr. Margulis, who was a diabetic. Procuring his necessary insulin in Priština was becoming harder by the day and in the process his life was being jeopardized. On opening the box, the doctor stood agape in wonder. "There's enough medicine here for five years, I am saved," he shouted. The entire Margulis family was saved too, once they departed for and reached Italy unhindered. They all returned to Belgrade after the end of the war.

Predrag Popović

awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 2001





IF WE SURVIVE THIS ICE, WE'LL SURVIVE THE FASCISTS, TOO

Lug is a small village in Srem on the slopes of Fruška Gora. Only a few kilometres separate the village from the right bank of the Danube. After the capitulation and quartering of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the Danube became the new border line with the Independent State of Croatia (ISC). The border line was extended up to the river Sava. Zemun was now an ISC border town. Across the Danube from Lug, the Bačka region spread out toward the east from the left bank of the river. At the time, Bačka was occupied by Hungary and was under its rule. The village Lug was predominantly populated by Slovaks; the Jewish family Deutsch - Menachem and Sara, with their eight children, three sons and five daughters - lived among them.

The Deutschs lived in accordance with Jewish tradition. They took special care of their eating habits keeping them kosher and in concord with religious norms. The family lived in a rented house not far from their neighbours, the Dudasovs. They bought all their dairy products from their next-door neighbours. As Slovaks and followers of the Nazarene faith, the Dudasovs,



Ana and Pal Dudas

Pal and his wife, Ana, did not keep any pigs and used only goose fat in their diet. When it came to food they, too, observed their religious norms and in that respect, differed little from Jews. That is what brought the two families together. With the outbreak of war and the first notices announcing anti-Jewish laws plastered round the village, Menachem lost his shop. Nevertheless, the Deutschs stayed on in Lug despite the looming threat of the ISC's Ustashi regime.

Although Pal Dudas's large estate was scattered all over Fruška Gora, it did not go beyond the bounds of the village district. Parts of the estate were in the vicinity of Lug. The Ustashi occasionally came to the village in search of Partisans and Communists. They presented a minor threat to Lug's villagers as there were many Slovaks in the Ustashi units. Nevertheless, all those harbouring Jews were in danger of being severely penalized. The same fate awaited them as did Partisan and Communist sympathizers. The Deutschs had to flee from the village during the Ustashi raids. Dressed in Slovak traditional wear, they would go off with Pal's labourers into the hop fields and return home in the evening, by which time the raids were usually over.

Inside the village the Ustashi had their informers as well as a few other eager villagers who would on occasion make a show of their loyalty to the Ustashi regime. Shortly before Christmas 1941, Jano Badjonski burst into the Deutschs house. Visibly drunk, he grabbed Menachem and threw him against the wall, threatening to kill him on the spot if he found one Jewish item in the house. One of the daughters, Hana, kept her cool and quickly disposed of the talit – the traditional prayer robe - throwing it onto to the woodpile behind the house. The intoxicated Jano failed to unearth anything he could call Jewish; all he managed to accomplish was to make Menachem realize the extent to which both his and the lives of the members of his family were seriously jeopardized.



Dudas received information of impending Ustashi raids of the village and each time sent the Deutschs further away from the village to the remotest parts of his estate. Dudas's daughter, Katarina, only eight at the time, brought food and news from the village to the fugitives. During one raid, the five members of the Jewish family Kisler found shelter in the same hideout as the Deutschs. The Kislers lived in the neighbouring village of Susek. At the time, the camp in Jasenovac had not yet been erected and apprehended Jews were taken to the prison in Ilok. A number of Jewish families lived in Ilok. All of them had more or less been stripped of their property and were obliged to wear sleeve bands with the yellow David star. Some were taken to forced labour duty, but many escaped as far away from Ilok as they could. Dudas helped many Jews who found provisional shelter in the vicinity of Lug.

Menachem and Sara's eldest daughter, Margita, was married and lived in Bački Petrovac. The parents decided to send their two daughters, Blanka and Hana, to Bački Petrovac. Jews living in the Bačka region which, as mentioned, was under Hungarian occupation, were still spared from persecution. It was January 1942 when Pal Dudas harnessed his horses and drove Blanka and Hana to Koruška, located on the Danube bank. They started off in the early evening hours when the Ustashi had already returned to Ilok for the night. He took his son, Pal - his namesake, and Katarina with him in case the carriage got stuck in the snow. Fighting the snow, which in places had piled up to two metres, they reached Koruška with great difficulty. Margita and Gregsa Jano with his boat were waiting for them on the river bank. Once Blanka and Hana got on the boat, Pal returned to Lug with his children.

Slabs of thick ice drifted down the Danube and Gregsa had a hard time to steer the boat in the direction of the opposite bank. A couple of times close encounters with the floating ice almost capsized the boat. "If this ice doesn't

kill us, neither will the Fascists," Gregsa commented, his features contorted in a semblance of a smile. Despite all odds, Gregsa, an experienced boatman, managed to maneuver the boat to the other bank. He moored the boat near the village of Begeč, across from Banoštar, a few kilometres downriver from Lug. On the very bank of the Danube, on the way to Begeč, was an inn which Hungarian soldiers frequented. The soldiers, curious as to what Gregsa was doing with Margita on the frozen Danube, were intrigued with the fact that Blanka and Hana had no identity papers with them. They sat down in the inn to explain matters. Gregsa ordered and paid dinner for all and saw to the constant flow of rounds of drinks for the soldiers. Soon the Hungarians were so intoxicated that Gregsa and his passengers left the inn unobserved.

Overcoming a number of similar difficulties on the way to Bački Petrovac, the travellers thought that they were safe from Fascist terror as they entered the town the next day. Their happiness was cut short when, only a few days later, the great Hungarian raid in Vojvodina was launched. Jews from all parts of Vojvodina were taken to Novi Sad. Among those who stood in line, waiting to be executed on the banks of river Danube, were also a number of prominent Serbs and opponents of the occupying regime. As they were hit, prisoners, often still breathing, were thrown into the frozen river and slid under the ice together with the dead. All the Jews found in Bački Petrovac had also been arrested and were held inside the synagogue. Among them were the three sisters, Margita, Blanka and Hana. They were waiting to be transported to Novi Sad, not knowing what awaited them there. News of the monstrous crime reached Hungarian dictator Horthy, who ordered the killing to stop immediately. The sisters were freed and for the first time firmly believed that the end to their misfortunes had come.

By mid 1942 the camp near the village of Jasenovac



was completed. Throughout the territory of ISC the Ustashi began to round up Jews and deport them to the new death camp. The Kislser family fled into the woods above Lug. They were caught there and instead of being taken to Jasenovac, were killed on the spot. They would not have fared better had they been transported to Jasenovac; they, too, would have been bestially killed like the remaining members of the Deutsch family, who were imprisoned in the camp.

When the deportation of Jews and Serbs to Jasenovac began, Margita and Gregsa crossed the Danube a number of times to convey the persecuted to its other bank and into Bačka. Among those saved was a Jewess, Rehnica Lea, from Ilok. She and the Deutsch sisters stayed together up to the end of the war.

Sometime later, Pal Dudas was also arrested and taken to Ilok. Charged with providing shelter to Jews and helping the Partisans, he was lucky in the sense that his interrogator was a German from Slovakia. Speaking in the Slovak language, as the conversation progressed, the German took pity on Pal and facilitated his return to Lug.

Jews lived a relatively peaceful life in Bački Petrovac up to the spring of 1944 when Hitler's Germany, aggravated by the way the Hungarians were dealing with Jews, occupied Hungary. All territories beyond Hungary but under Hungarian rule were now administered by the new occupier. The persecution of Jews recommenced. Once taken, they were deported to death camps, mostly Auschwitz. The three Deutsch sisters were transferred to Baja at the time of Pesah, where they waited for their transport to Auschwitz in the transitory camp. When the infamous Nazi murderer, Aichman, arrived, they were thrown into cattle wagons along with other Jews. Eighty Jews were packed into each carriage. Transport conditions were inhuman and exerting. The train travelled without stopping for five days. It finally stopped in an

out-of-the-way station for the dead to be taken from the wagons; the haggard were kept inside and deprived of water. Through a small crack in the carriage wall, Blanka addressed a German guarding the train. His answer was blunt. "Have you got any money with you?" he asked. Money saved the Deutsch sisters and Lea. As instructed by the guard, Blanka threw the money onto the ground. She received further instructions to stay away from the wagon and on no account reenter it. Blanka asked why but received no answer. The Jews were uncertain what was best for them to do. Those signalled out by the Fascists could remain in the station while others had to travel on. The Deutschs' daughter-in-law and her infant child were among those left in the wagon and destined for the camp. She, too, had been apprehended in the last raid in Bačka where she had come to seek shelter. The train soon continued on its journey to Auschwitz. Jewesses with small children were on arrival instantly sent to the gas chamber and then thrown into the crematorium. The Jews who had remained in the station were transported to an estate near Vienna.

Since the present testimony is dedicated to the Dudas family and the sacrifices they made in their effort to save the Deutschs during a critical period of their lives when they were threatened by the Ustashi knife, I, nevertheless, feel obligated to give a short account of what happened to the Deutsch sisters and how they were freed from German imprisonment. After the Jews had been transported to the vicinity of Vienna, they were selected for slave labour work. Blanka was placed inside a barn with other Jews destined for fieldwork on a farm. It was the season for gathering beanstalks. Together with the others, Blanka toiled for twelve hours each day, incessantly feeding the bean shelling machine. Her sisters, Margita and Hana, and Rehnica Lea as well, were sent to a factory to slave labour there. The end of the war was approaching and the Fascists were becoming increasingly agitated. Relocation of Jews from one place to an-



other commenced. They still had not decided what to do with the remaining live Jews; to kill them, like the many they had murdered before them, or to try to cover up traces of their crime by sparing them and in the process prove their humanity?! Jews from the neighbourhood of Vienna were placed in Altbrau, but since there was no work for them there, they were again thrown into wagons and by way of Strashof sent to Bergen-Belsen. They did not remain there long and were again transported by train to Terezienstadt. On the way there, the train was bombed by the Allies. The wagon doors were opened and the prisoners rushed to the nearby grove for shelter. When it was time for them to return to the wagons and continue on their way, they could not separate a mother from her dead child. “When you return home, tell daddy that mommy has died,” the mother kept saying as she held the boy, whose head had been torn off by shrapnel, in her arms.

For the Deutsch sisters and Lea liberation came while they were in Terezienstadt. When Soviet troops released the camp inmates on May 8th, 1945, the concentration camp was handed over to Czech Partisans to administer it. They kept the imprisoned German SS camp staff and civilians under identical conditions their prisoners had been exposed to during the war. Later on, they were all put on trial for their misdeeds.

Ana and Pal Dudas

both awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 1995



FROM ONE HELL TO ANOTHER

Upon the short-lived April war of 1941 and the quartering of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, greater parts of Vojvodina, together with Novi Sad, were occupied by Hungarian troops. Compared to Belgrade, where German Nazis instigated the persecution of Jews within the first days of occupation, Novi Sad was relatively safe for Jews. In Belgrade Jews were marked by having to wear the yellow band on their sleeves; plundering of Jewish property was an everyday event. Jews were ordered to forced labour duties. They first cleared the rubble left after the bombing of Belgrade; corpses had to be taken out of demolished, crumbling houses and once the first camps were opened, the labourers stopped returning to their homes after a hard day's work. Inmates were systematically taken from the camps to sites of execution such as Jajinci, Jabuka . . . , even as far as Šabac, and shot there. Izsak Dezider was among the imprisoned Jews in Topovske šupe camp on Autokomanda. He was taken from the camp on October 14th, 1941, and beyond that fact his family learned nothing more. His wife, Marta,



Marija - Ketika and Ljubomir Tomić

and daughter, Eva, were now alone in their home.

Marija Schanz, who had married Ljubomir Tomić prior to the war, lived in Novi Sad. By descent a German but born in the Bačka region, she lived with her husband in downtown Novi Sad across the street from the Putnik Hotel. Ljubomir Tomić was a Jew whose birth name was Ljudevit Kohn. Ljudevit and his brother worked for an insurance company. Being Jews, their surname Kohn presented all sorts of problems when working with clients, so the brothers agreed to change it to Tomić. Ljubomir Tomić, nicknamed Lolo, had a large family and many close friends in Belgrade. News of what was happening in Belgrade was getting more distressing by the day and Lolo was deeply troubled. Marija, called Ketika by almost everyone in Novi Sad, realized that the last moment had come to help the endangered Belgrade Jews. Her German origin helped her make contact with German soldiers. She was looking for a way to transfer Jews from Belgrade to Novi Sad. She managed to persuade a German army driver to help her. It is hard to say whether the German soldier was aware of the danger he was exposing himself to when he agreed to drive Jews from Belgrade to Novi Sad in an army truck. The first trip he took was the hardest. A group of twenty Jews waited for him at the agreed location in Belgrade. Once they were inside the truck body, he covered the Jews with tarpaulin as if he were driving contraband, which, in a way, he was. He passed the first border check point between occupied Serbia and the Independent State of Croatia (ISC). The German army truck and its driver gave no rise to suspicion. During the drive across ISC territory to the Hungarian occupying zone border the truck encountered no problems. Again the driver passed through the check point effortlessly and the truck with its secret cargo arrived in Novi Sad safely. It was then that the driver found out this was just the beginning of the operation. Ketika had a list of Jewish refugees waiting to be transported to Novi Sad. She only had to



inform them when and where they were to wait for the truck that would take them to safety.

When, on October 31st, 1941, the time came to transport a group of Jews with Marta and her daughter Eva on the list, a problem arose in Izsak Dezider's family. Eva would not leave Belgrade until she learned where her father, Izsak, had been taken to from Topovske šupe camp. She desperately wanted to receive news from her father because once she left for Novi Sad, there was no way he could know how or where to reach her. Eva was 14 at the time and her mother, grandmother Valerija, and aunt, Ana Švarc, did their utmost to explain to her affectionately and tactfully that they had to leave Belgrade urgently. In the end, they arrived at the designated meeting place, a stairway of a building in Pop Lukina Street. Most of the Jews escaping with them in the group were unfamiliar to Eva, but the fear that exuded from their eyes was shared and brought them closer to one another. They all obeyed the instructions given out by the driver. On the border with ISC they dared not even breathe. When, after the long journey, the truck at last stopped inside the secluded delivery entrance of Ketika and Lolo's house, they could finally relax and breathe normally. They left their possessions in the hall and at Ketika's invitation, climbed the stairs to her flat to take a short rest there. The driver went off, prepared to answer Ketika's call when the time came for the next group of Jews to be transported from Belgrade.

Although stifled, the voices of the happy travellers permeated Ketika's flat. They were overjoyed to have reached Novi Sad safely. Lolo managed to quieten them down and warn them that a Hungarian gendarme was staring at the windows of their flat and writing something down. The travellers left the flat immediately. They even forgot the possessions they had left in the hall. The house had two exits on two different streets. Leaving the gendarme in one street, the Jews, divided into smaller groups, left the building and went down the

other.

With her mother, grandmother, and aunt, Eva went to the flat of her father's friend, Jakov Bartoš. Jakov was glad to see them but on hearing how they had to flee from Ketika's home, he immediately went to Ketika's flat to learn what happened after the Jews had left. All their belongings and identity papers were still in the hall, but Ljudevit and Ketika had been arrested. Jakov advised the women to continue their journey to Budapest. A few days later, Jakov personally accompanied them as far as Budapest. On their way there, he informed them that Lolo and Ketika had been released from prison in the



Marija and Ljubomir Tomić, Felisa Deutsch, Adela Broeder and child Judita Deutsch



meantime. After his release, Lolo immediately left to join the Partisans while Ketika departed for Budapest to distance herself from Novi Sad for the time being.

Ketika made return visits to Novi Sad a number of times and came back to Budapest just as often. On Ketika's insistence, the German driver brought many Jews to Novi Sad, among them the Deutsch family, too. Escaping the persecution of *volksdeutsche*s at the very last moment, the Deutsch family had managed to flee from Petrovgrad, today's Zrenjanin, in August 1941 and move to Belgrade. At the time, they had no idea that they were escaping from one hell to another. Ketika's dedication to be of help made it possible for them to reach Budapest with four-year-old Judita by way of Novi Sad. Compared to what was happening in Belgrade, life for Jews in Budapest was much safer. Granny Broeder made the journey with the family as well. Many members of Lolo's family were now living in Budapest. Ketika had managed to save them the same way she had provided a way out for other Belgrade Jews.

In the spring of 1944 the situation in Budapest drastically changed. Germany occupied its former ally, Hungary, and an unprecedented persecution of Hungarian Jews and all those who had found shelter in Budapest began. At the time, Ketika was also in Budapest and spoke too freely how Hitler's days of rule were numbered and that he had lost the war. When arrested for her heretic talk, the fact that she was German could no longer help her. The Nazis insisted she tell them where her husband, Lolo, was, which she refused to do. She was deported to camp Ravensbrik with a group of Jewesses. At the end of 1944, Ketika and Eva met again inside the camp. Eva had been deported to the camp with her mother and aunt. Luck stayed with the heroes of our story. Camp Ravensbrik was known as a place from where women were sent to other camps as sex slaves. But Ketika, Eva and her relatives managed to stay in Ravensbrik up to the end of the war.

Fighting many battles, the Partisan Lolo lived to be among the liberators of his country. Ketika returned to Novi Sad after being released from captivity. At long last Ketika and Lolo could find time to dedicate themselves to their future offspring.

Marija Tomić

awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 2009





MOTHER, I DON'T WANT TO GO!

Jakov Bararon, a Serb of Moses' faith, was second *kum* at the wedding of Jovan and Angelina Stefanović from Jajinci. Although they were very good friends, Jakov, who was a citizen of Belgrade but also a Jew, could not be first *kum* at the wedding held in the Orthodox Church.

Jakov also got married soon after and as the children of the two families grew, so did the friendship between the two families. Throughout the years they kept in touch with one another. When Yugoslavia was occupied in 1941, the children were already grown ups. Jovan and Angelina had had four children and Jakov was already a grandfather by then. His grandson was named after him, Jakov. His son, Avram, had married Rivka in 1939 and the grandson, whose pet name was Jaša, was born soon after.

Persecution of Jews commenced with the arrival of the Nazis. Avram was among the first to be taken to Topovske šupe, but the Nazis spared him. They needed someone well acquainted with local circumstances to help with providing supplies for the camp. Avram was transferred to the camp at Sajmište once it opened. The imprisonment of the majority of Jews in the newly-founded death camp was in preparation. Avram's wife, Rivka, and their son, Jaša, were still at home. It was a matter of days before they too, would be deported to the camp.

Jovan and Angelina Stefanović's son, Mile, from Jajinci, visited Rivka and Jaša regularly. He desperately wanted to help them since there was nothing he could do for Avram. He managed to procure fake documents for Rivka and Jaša. Rivka became Radmila Babić, and her son Jaša, Miša Babić.

Rivka thought they would be safer if they moved to central Serbia. However, the plan was too intricate,

risky, and thus dangerous for little Jaša. Rivka asked her maid to take Jaša to her home in Zemun until she found the necessary accommodation for herself and her son somewhere in the country. Before Rivka set off on her mission, she went to visit her husband, Avram, at the Sajmište camp. She had also made Mile promise he would visit little Jaša regularly. Rivka saw Avram but dared not tell him where the child was hidden. It was already public knowledge that camp inmates were exposed to torture and she feared Avram might give their son away if beaten. It was to be their last meeting as the strain of camp life was getting to Avram; the double life of temporary freedom when sent to procure supplies on the black market and the return to the horrors of camp had worn him out. He could not stand it any longer. On one of his supply trips to Belgrade across the river, he



Milutin-Mile Stefanović

jumped from the improvised bridge into the cold water. The waves of the river Sava closed over one young life. With Rivka gone to Niš to find shelter for her son and herself, Mile went to see how Jaša was faring in Zemun. On arriving at the flat he found Jaša unattended. He waited for the maid's return. He could not understand how such a small child could be left alone all day long



with no one to feed him or change his nappies. At that time, Jaša was not yet two. When the maid returned home, she told him her side of the story. She had to work and earn money for both of them. She looked after Jaša when her working day was over. Mile could not accept such living conditions for the toddler and took the boy home with him. This happened on St. John's day, January 20th, 1942.

The entire Stefanović family: mother, father, two sons and two daughters were living in Jajinci at the time. On returning home Mile handed Jaša over to his brother Vladimir, known to all as Lale, and his wife Zorica. Lale and Zorica had two small children of their own, both of them toddlers, the same as Jaša. The family lived near the prewar military firing range which had been transformed by the Nazis into an execution ground for shooting Jews and other undesirables. Fascists took care to keep what was happening on this large area of land a secret from the neighbouring inhabitants: namely, the executions and mass burials of camp Sajmište inmates. Camp prisoners were gassed on their way to Jajinci inside truck bodies turned into gas-chambers – so called "suffocating" trucks - and on arrival thrown into mass graves.

Zorica looked after Jaša as if he were her own child. He called her "Mother" and she protected him from the horrors of war just as she did her own children. No one thought that Jaša's real mother would show up in Jajinci in such a short time. On reaching Niš, Rivka had tried to live up to the identity stated in her fake documents; she became a Serbian refugee from Bosnia. However, she was soon unmasked and warned by a German to leave Niš as quickly as possible. Not three months had passed since her departure from Belgrade. Once back in the city, she went to see her son. Her stay in Jajinci was short. She did not see her son as he had already gone to bed. Zorica thought it best not to wake the child fearing his reaction on seeing his mother. One never knew what

the neighbours might do if they heard the child crying. There was always someone ready to denounce and report their closest friends, let alone their neighbours. So the child was left to his sleep.

Seeing her son so well taken care of, Rivka decided to go to Austria and work there. To put this bold plan into operation she needed Mile's assistance. Mile helped Rivka leave Belgrade safely by the train that took volunteer workers to Austria and Germany each Friday. However, Rivka's luck ran out once again. She was on the brink of getting a job in Vienna when some old acquaintances of hers recognized her and duly reported to the Gestapo that Radmila Babić was, in fact, Rivka Pardo Bararon, a Jewess. She was immediately apprehended and sent to Mauthausen. There she was selected for work in the airplane factory next to the camp. In a very short time she became emaciated. With her hair cropped close to her scalp, Rivka looked more like a boy than a woman. Inside the camp there was a doctor who, prior to the war had owned a sanatorium in Belgrade. He took pity on her and managed to transfer her to work in the camp sickbay. This helped Rivka to stay alive till the end of the war.

Belgrade was liberated on October 20th, 1944. The Mauthausen camp was the last Nazi camp to be liberated by the allies on May 5th, 1945. By that time collective centres for war orphans had already been opened and were operating in Belgrade. Under the supervision of the Jewish Community, children survivors were given to families willing to take them in. No one had any information whether Rivka had survived the horrors of war at that time. In the Stefanović household talk went on for days what to do with little Jaša. The proclamation requiring parentless children to be handed over to the centres was unacceptable to Zorica who could not tear herself away from the child. Lale dared not take Zorica's side openly and Mile had his qualms about what was best for the child. Their sister, Seka, was on the Srem front,



*Mileva – Seka Stefanović, husband's surname Svjetličić,
and Jaša Bararon*

so it was left to their older sister to intervene. Thinking clearly, she decided for them all. Jaša should be handed over to the Jewish Community in Belgrade. Parting with Jaša was exceedingly painful. Addressing Zorica, he kept crying: "Mother, I don't want to go." A fabricated story calmed him down. Before long he found himself living with the Medina family: Tildi and Flora, who had survived the war and returned to Belgrade. Soon after, Rivka, worn to the bone, returned to Belgrade as well. Once again Jaša was in his mother's arms. Rivka never forgot the good family Stefanović, especially Mile, who had helped her to stay alive, and Zorica, who had looked after her little boy during the years of war.

Milutin Stefanović and sister Mileva
both awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 1992





SAFE AMONG CORNSTALKS

Only when Red Army troops reached the Danube, the border between Romania and Serbia, did the Germans realize that they were losing the war. A rushed retreat of the German Army was set in motion. Jews that had been brought from Hungary the previous year to work as slave labourers in the Bor mines were to be taken along with them. Living in unhygienic conditions for months on end, underfed, punished with death at will, the survivor inmates were to head for Hungary at forced march pace. For the first group of Hungarian inmates the strenuous march began on September 17th, 1944. A long journey lay ahead of them and it was already October when they reached Vojvodina.

There were many among the Hungarian Jews who really believed that they were returning home; however, there were also those who had grasped that they were not being treated as camp inmates about to be released. In passing the Novi Sad hospital, some twenty inmates sought refuge inside hospital premises. German guards set out to apprehend those who had escaped from the line. The one unfortunate prisoner they caught up with was shot on the spot; the others, who had managed to get inside the building in time, were received by the hospital staff and concealed. A few days later, the line of prisoners was marching through the area of Kula. A process of separating inmates into smaller groups of 20 to 30 individuals began. These groups were taken away in an unknown direction.



Nikola Bošnjak in Partisan uniform - 1944

Although unaware that the notorious soldiers of the Handzar division were waiting near by, Laufer György knew that it could mean one thing only. The Handzar division was providing safe passage for Germans on the retreat. In doing so, 680 Hungarian Jews were brutally slain near Crvenka. Intentionally, Laufer kept at the back of the line in an attempt to distance himself from those being separated into smaller groups. He even remained standing when a German guard began to bash his head in with a rifle butt. The guard had sensed that Laufer was trying to escape from the line, so he finally took out his revolver and shot him in the head. Laufer fell to the ground and was left to lie there.

The line continued on its way. Laufer was slowly regaining consciousness. A group of women, wailing the death of the shot prisoner in Hungarian and Serbian, encircled Laufer. Once he realized that everything happening round him was of this world, Laufer's first thought was how to escape as far as possible from the deadly road. A second line of inmates from Bor, on its way to Hungary, guarded by Germans, was to pass down the same road. Laufer had no way of knowing that the line had been stopped in the vicinity of Bor as Red Army troops intercepted the German retreat. The inmates were thus saved from German captivity.

The corn had already been harvested and bushels of stalks were lying beside the road. Once inside the cornstalks protecting him from detection, Laufer felt as if he had stumbled on a real castle. He was soon joined by another inmate who had managed to escape from



the line undetected. On the road from Kula to Crvenka there lay the homestead of the Bošnjaks. At the time, the Bošnjak family was living on the farm with their son, Nikola. The stacks of stalk the two runaways were hiding in were on the Bošnjak estate. Nikola, seventeen at the time, was making rounds of the farm. He was the one who came across the exhausted prisoners. At the beginning of 1944, Nikola had also been taken to forced labour in Austria. He had spent a few months there and from experience was fully aware of the position the runaway inmates were in, and what would happen to them if they were found out. He saw that Laufer was badly wounded and decided to take them to his home. He explained the situation to his parents and they let the Jewish fugitives stay in the loft. Nikola tended to Laufer's wounds and gave them both calf hides to cover themselves. For the first time after what seemed an eternity, the camp inmates were fed and could, if only briefly, find some respite.

No one thought that the search for the fugitives would begin immediately. Germans arrived at the Bošnjak homestead but did not find the Hungarian Jews. Left with no other option, Nikola had asked the men to once again hide among the cornstalks right behind the house. Laufer, completely worn out, hid among the stalks, while the other fugitive decided to move on.

The Partisans and the Red Army, advancing from the north into Serbia from a number of directions, liberated invaded towns on their way through the country. Laufer had spent seven days inside the cornstalks when Kula was liberated. He was finally safe. He was next taken to an improvised medical centre where first aid was dispensed to wounded soldiers, and from there transferred to Kula where, after one month of rehabilitation, he felt well enough to continue on his way home. Thanks to Nikola Bošnjak, one more Jew was spared from the infamous Nazi idea of annihilating a whole people.

Nikola Bošnjak
awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 2010



MAYA MADE IT TO MOSTAR

They still haven't reached the letter "J," Andja Jovanović told her husband when she came back from the market. The Ustashi announcement posted that day required all Serbian, Jewish and Roma families whose surname began with the letter "F" to report to the regional command post for transportation to Serbia.

"They'll come to it soon enough, don't worry", Todor, Andja's husband, replied, pacing nervously round the room. "You must know by now the one thing we won't be seeing is Serbia."

"If the Red Cross watched over the transport we could reach Serbia." Andja replied though fully aware that the transport led directly to the death camps. Of all transports, the one or two that had actually reached their destination had been supervised by the international organization from Geneva.

"They've thought of everything. We're allowed to carry luggage up to 50 kilos, which means that we pick out all our valuables and pack them up. Why? For them, of course, just so they don't have to waste time rummaging and looting flats," Todor spoke in rage. "Scavengers and assassins, all of them."

The intricate conversation was interrupted by the arrival of their friend, Nevenka Dragić. Todor sensed that the women wanted to speak to each other alone, so he went out for a walk since he had nothing else to do. He was a World War I veteran of the Thessalonica front and a Serb. Immediately upon the establishment of the occupying forces in Mostar, he was laid off. He had a wife and three children who depended on him, but it was practically impossible to find work to feed them. Although in 1941 and 1942 the city of Mostar was in the zone governed by Italian occupying forces, Ustashi and German Fascists roamed the city domineeringly.

The German Fascists were on the search for Jewish and Roma heads, the Ustashi for Serbian as well. One way or another, the Italians still had the means to save lives of the persecuted. However, they could not stop the transports as officially they were relocations for the benefit of the city's undesirable citizens.

On returning home, Todor found that Nevenka had already left. Soon enough Andja told him the reason for Nevenka's sudden visit. Nevenka's sister, Danica, was married to a Jew, Dr. Albert Buchwald, who had been slain by the Ustashi in the first days of war. The Buchwalds had an eight-month-old baby girl, Maya, and Danica lived in mortal fear that the Ustashi would come to take her child and kill her because of her Jewish origin. Nevenka had said that Danica believed it was only a matter of hours before they came for the baby. She pleaded with Andja to find a reliable Muslim woman who could immediately set off for Busovača, where the Buchwalds lived, and bring Maya to her in Mostar. Although in Bosnia, Busovača was under the authority of the Independent State of Croatia.

Word went round, Andja recalled, that Mevzeta Kreso was a collaborator of the Resistance movement. She picked up her things and went to see her right away. Mevzeta lived close by. Andja told her the reason for her visit the minute she arrived.

"The women I trust are momentarily out of Mostar," Mevzeta told her. "They will be back in a couple of days." Mevzeta dared not tell Andja that the women were on a secret mission in Borci, a village near Konjic. Andja returned home thinking all the while what to do next. She told Todor how things stood and that something had to be done immediately.

"I'll do it", Andja concluded. "I'll just go over to Nevenka's and fetch the return train ticket."

Todor never said a word but shook his head in disapproval. Nevenka, on the other hand, would not hear of



it.

“You have three children of your own and a husband. The whole exploit would be too hazardous for both you and your family,” Nevenka concluded, while at the same time she was at a loss what to do next.

It was then that Andja remembered that she had kept her documents from Zagreb in which her maiden name Zalad was entered. She knew that it was extremely important that she should not have with her any document stating her Serbian surname Jakovljević. Should she be found with one, she would momentarily be taken off the train in one of the stations on the way and would never see her family again for sure.

“Don’t worry, I plan to use the return ticket, too,” were Andja’s parting words.

She took the ticket from Nevenka and left for Busovača by the next train.

An Ustashi sat across from Andja inside the compartment. When the conductor came along, an agent in the company of two Ustashi also entered the compartment and spoke quietly into the ear of the man sitting across from Andja.

“No”, the Ustasha replied brusquely. Andja instantly knew that the agent had asked him if they were traveling together.

The agent took Andja’s documents issued in Zagreb and read her maiden name Zalad.

“What is your business here?” he asked strictly.

“I am returning home from a visit to my husband,” Andja replied calmly. “He has been posted to Mostar, but the children won’t leave Zagreb,” Andja complained. “I sincerely hope my husband will be transferred back to Zagreb soon.”

The agent thanked her and hastened on followed by his cohort; he thought that he had stumbled on the wife of some big shot from Zagreb and that it would be best to

leave the lady alone.

Once in Busovača, Andja easily found Dr. Buchwald’s home. She went by the house, turning round to see whether she was being followed. Now that she was finally there, she didn’t know who was inside and how best to make her presence known; it was a bit awkward to enter such a well-to-do abode unannounced. She saw a well inside the yard and devised a story on the spot. She knocked on the door, which was soon opened by a young woman.

“Who do you want?” the young woman asked, giving the stranger standing in front of her a look-over.

“Mrs. Dana,” Andja replied calmly.

When Dana appeared and saw Andja, she could not conceal the anxiety in her eyes.

“What do you want?” Dana asked.

“I’m pregnant,” Andja told her. “Could I have a glass of cold water and rest here for a while?”

“Katica,” Dana called for the girl who had opened the door. “Fetch some water from the well for this lady.”

The moment they were alone, Andja told her host the reason for her visit.

“Your sister Nevenka from Mostar has sent me to take Maya.”

Danica was instantly relieved because up to that moment she believed that Andja had been sent from the Ustashi station to take Maya from her. The next thing she did was to give her maid Katica the day off so that she could be alone with Andja. The two women had to decide what to do next.

Danica firmly believed that it would be best for Maya and Andja to leave for Mostar as soon as possible.

“Katica is a Croat,” Dana said. “But it’s not only that; for some time now I’ve felt as if I was being constantly watched. I think it best that we don’t wait to see how she



will put this free day to use.”

They placed Maya in a baby carriage and immediately set off for the railway station. They decided to place the stroller in the cargo wagon so that Andja would hold the baby in her arms. The minute they handed the stroller over, a well-known Ustashi named Kljaja, from the hamlet Ilić near Mostar, materialized in front of Andja. At the time, he was performing the duty of station master in Busovača.

“And what would you be doing here, madam”, he asked with irony.

“I’ve just been visiting a relative, an Ustashi officer in Travnik,” Andja replied, seemingly unperturbed, while the blood froze in her veins.

“And what is the name of this relative of yours?” Kljaja kept goading her.

“Fajdiga,” Andja replied. “You must surely know him?”

Giving Andja a suspicious look, Kljaja started off for the station building.

The first obstacle had been surmounted, she concluded. With Maya in her arms, Andja entered the first compartment where there was a free seat for her and the baby. However, a new shock was awaiting her in there. Seated in the compartment were Hilmija Balić, a pharmacist and first-door neighbour from Mostar, and Ivan Golubović, a high-ranking Ustashi officer, also from Mostar.

“Whose child is this, madam?” the pharmacist smiled slyly. “I don’t recall seeing you pregnant.”

“Mine,” Andja replied, wondering how she would get out of this predicament. “It seems that you, my dear Mr. Balić, have little interest in married women as you hardly notice them. No wonder, when you have all those young ladies to choose from.”

Laughter filled the compartment spontaneously. Then Ivan decided to have his say in the conversation.

“You, Mr. Balić, are most probably unaware of the number of times Andja gave me a good thrashing for stealing fruit from her garden,” still laughing the Ustashi remarked. “I was a child then,” brandishing any further comment.

“Children cannot be held responsible,” Andja replied. “Can they, Mr. Balić?”

“Quite so,” the pharmacist agreed.

However, the train would not start. Recalling her conversation with Kljaja, she immediately became apprehensive. She placed the child on the seat and stood by an open window. Two Ustashi were talking below the window.

“Must get this woman and that Jewish brat she’s taking with her,” one of them said. “We’ll drag them off the train and execute them on the spot.”



Andja Jakovljević

“Wait, let me finish this cigarette,” the other replied. “Don’t worry, we’ll find them.”

Andja picked the child up and addressing the pharmacist, asked if he would look after her while she went off to the rest room. Balić took the baby from her. Andja immediately got off the train. Taking cover behind the station house, leaning against the wall, she waited in trepidation to see what would happen next. The Ustashi entered the train. There was no sign of them for quite some time. On the opposite side of the station house she saw Dana, standing and biting her lips nervously. Seeing Andja leave the train without the child, the child’s mother could not bring herself to imagine what might have taken place inside. Fortunately, she stood her ground and never approached Andja. The train was



preparing to start off as the two Ustashi descended from the last wagon. Hastily, Andja reentered the train.

“It seems that the baby has wet herself,” Balić reported, handing Maya back.

Andja took the child and started changing her nappies. However, the train would still not start. She glanced furtively through the window and saw two more Ustashi approaching the search party on hand. She desperately hoped that there would be no time for a renewed search. The words of an Ustashi with a prominent Herzegovian accent floated through the open window:

“Who knows where the woman and child have gone to. Damn the two of them! They won’t be getting very far.”

The train started after the prolonged wait. Relieved by the sound of its slow motion, Andja finally calmed down. The conversation was resumed in a boisterous tone. Andja’s laughter was well feigned for the thought of what was waiting for her on reaching Mostar beleaguered her.

As the train entered the station, Andja saw from afar agents and Ustashi soldiers lined along the platform, ready for passengers’ identity check.

“Mr. Balić, could you please take care of Maya while I go to the cargo wagon and take the baby’s carriage?” Andja asked, handing the child over to him at the same time.

Without a word, pharmacist Balić took the child. Accompanied by Ivan, he headed straight for the station exit. Since both of them were prominent Mostar persons, no one considered checking them. Pushing the empty stroller in front of her, Andja, too, left the station. Beside the station exit, Maya in arms, Balić stood waiting patiently for Andja with Ivan for company. Andja politely took her leave of Ivan and thanked the pharmacist for his trouble.

“There goes my baby,” Balić said handing Maya over.⁹

As they took their leave, Nevenka came into sight. Soon, the child was finally on its way home. However, Andja dared not return home. She headed straight for Mevzeta’s place since the thought of what pharmacist Balić had meant when he said: “There goes my child!” would not leave her.

“Whose side is Balić working for?” Andja asked adamantly the moment she met Mevzeta.

“Balić is one of us,” Mevzeta replied, somewhat baffled by the question.

Only then could Andja find the strength to recount everything that had happened during her exploit.

“If you’ve managed to come through all that,” Mevzeta continued “you’ll be getting other assignments from now on.”

At peace with the answer she had received, Andja returned to her home and family.

Andja Jakovljević

awarded a Righteous among Nations

in 1992



THERE WAS ALWAYS ROOM FOR PERSECUTED JEWS AT ZANKOVIĆ'S

Sometime before the end of World War One, Ivan Zanković met Milan Richter, an Austrian officer in reserve and a Jew. Following the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, a new state was born, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, soon joined by Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and certain parts of Macedonia. Milan Richter lived with his family in Belgrade, but over the period between the two wars the friendship between the Richter and Zanković families became steadfast despite the distance between Belgrade and Sutomore in Montenegro.

In the aftermath of the surrender of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1941 Jews were the first to feel the terror of the Fascist invader. Arrests were made, Jewish people were driven to forced labour and soon mass executions by firing squad began. Not only Jews were terrorized; all who stood up to the occupying authorities and their instated Fascist ideology were ardently persecuted. Perceiving the scope and turn of events engulfing them, Milan Richter decided to leave Belgrade with his family as soon as possible. He and his son Marjan, who had over the years become a close friend of Ivan's son, Petar, were the first to leave. They found shelter in Sutomore with the Zanković family. Soon after Milan's wife, Adela, daughter Stanka and younger son, Ivan, accompanied by a friend of theirs, Elsa Piliš and her son, Leo, found their



Milan Richter

way unhindered to Sutomore. They all moved into the Zanković's home.

With the invasion of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Montenegro became a territory under Italian authority. The Italians were not supporters of Hitler's idea to exterminate a whole people and Jews were relatively safe in territories under the Italian protectorate. However, Milan Richter was aware that their stay in Zanković's house was only bringing trouble to their hosts. During the summer of 1941 they decided to move to a hotel in Petrovac where a couple of other Jewish families were staying. Next to leave the Zankovićs were Elsa Piliš and her son, Ivan, also in July of 1941. The Italians had established camps for Jews along the Adriatic coast and on some of its islands. These camps were not Nazi-type death camps; nevertheless, the right to move freely was restricted for Jews. Word that all the Jews staying in Petrovac had been arrested and taken to Bar reached Zanković one day. Some of the detainees, among them Milan Richter, had been deported to the camp Klos in Albania.

The Zanković family was well acquainted with archbishop Dobričić. In their desire to free Milan from the camp, they asked the archbishop for help. At the intervention of the archbishop, Milan came home and in December 1941 the entire Richter family was once again living in the Zanković home. By then, the Richters had no more money of their own, but that had no bearing on the conduct of their hosts. They were simply looked on as part of the family. Throughout the years of war, Jews constantly fled before Fascist raids. They were on the move from one place to another and so, in 1942, Soros Kornelija and her son, Ivan, also found shelter in the Zanković home. All of them stayed there up to September 1943 when Italy capitulated.

Upon the capitulation of Italy, Montenegro fell under German authority. From that moment persecution and



transfer of Jews to death camps, mainly Bergen-Belsen, positioned in the north-west of Germany, were set in motion. Soon Petar Zanković realized that the Richters could no longer stay in their house. A follower of the Catholic faith, Petar once again approached the archbishop of Bar for help. Archbishop Dobričić took the Richter family inside the Bar monastery. Before leaving the Zankovičs, Milan checked all his personal documents - birth certificate, school reports, business documentation - which were subsequently hidden underneath the wooden floor boards. "I leave everything I have with you", he told them at their parting. The Richters stayed in the monastery for one week. Under the supervision of the archbishop, they were then transferred over mount Rumija to an out-of-the-way village, Livari, where they remained up to the middle of March 1944.

In March 1944 a report that the Jewish family Richter was hiding in Livari brought Chetnik soldiers to the village within the day. The whole village stood up to the Chetniks, protecting their new friends when they tried to arrest them. The soldiers left without the Richters only to return the next day. This time they arrived in the company of Nazis who forthwith arrested both the priest of Livari and the entire Richter family. They were all transferred to the prison in Cetinje. At the same time, the Zanković family had also been arrested in Sutomore. The abusive methods applied by the new invader on all Zanković family members brought no results. No confession was obtained. In retribution for harbouring Jews, all their houses were sequestered by the Wermaht, their property looted and the threat of

death sentences loomed over their heads. Enemy soldiers ransacked the house several times in pursuit of evidence that the family had deliberately helped Jews. They tread over the floor boards where the Richter documents lay hidden a hundred times, but did not find them.

After being detained in the Cetinje prison for some time, the Richter family was ultimately deported to north-west Germany, and imprisoned in Bergen-Belsen camp. The Zankovičs were released from prison in due course, but Ivan was frequently summoned to the head office of the German police for renewed interrogation. Petar did not wait for his turn to come. He joined the Partisans and stayed with them up to liberation.

The Richters managed to survive the horrors of Bergen-Belsen camp. During the last months before liberation the camp was ridden with typhoid. Deprived of medical care and left to tend to themselves, thousands of inmates died before the camp was liberated. Milan also fell ill, but when the

British army freed the inmates on April 15th, 1945, he hastened to return to Belgrade with his family. Together they came all the way to Budapest from where Milan could go no further. He died and was buried there. Adela returned to Belgrade together with her daughter and sons.



Petar Zanković

Petar Zanković

awarded a Righteous among Nations
in 2006



I WILL NOT LET THE CHILDREN GO TO CAMP

Emil Schosberger made friends with Marieta's brother from the Alkalai family while working together in a bank in Tuzla. The meeting with Alkalai was fateful; without him Emil would never have met his future bride. When Emil Schosberger went off to fight in World War I, he left at home Marieta and their three small children: Irma, Erika and Arthur. The war ended in 1918, but not for Emil. He was taken prisoner in Russia and was released in 1922 when he finally returned home. Knowledge of business administration acquired during his prewar employment in Tuzla became a major asset to him when he moved with his family to Belgrade.

The children grew up all too soon - a thought shared among parents in general - and one day Irma married a Jew from Zagreb. Erika fell in love with a Serb, Stevan Čonkić. In order to get married, she had to convert to her husband's faith. At the time, the institution of civil marriage had not yet been introduced, i.e., legalized, in central Serbia, and on entering the Orthodox faith she was christened Vera. Vera got married to Stevan in 1932 and one year later their son, Predrag, was born. Their daughter, Gordana, came three years later. The children were christened in the Orthodox Church, celebrated the Serbian traditional family saint's day ("the slava") with a feast, and had no knowledge of their Jewish descent. Emil and Marieta's youngest child, their son, Arthur, got married on April 5th, 1941, one day before the bombing of Belgrade. It was Arthur that went off to war this time while his wife, Nada, stayed at home. Vera's husband, Stevan, had also been drafted and was eventually taken prisoner after the short-lived war. He ended up as a POW in a camp in Germany. Arthur managed to escape imprisonment and returned home.

Once the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was occupied and

the German rule instated, the persecution of Jews commenced in Belgrade. After the incident in July 1941, when the Jew Guta threw a Molotov cocktail on a German truck, a warrant for his arrest was issued. At the same time, the Germans selected a group of 122 Jews at Tašmajdan as hostages. Guta was given 24 hours to give himself up and with that deadline, the 122 Jews became threatened with immediate death. Arthur Schosberger was in this group. As Guta did not come forth, Arthur and the entire group of Jewish hostages was shot on an execution site near Belgrade.

The persecution of Jews continued. The fanatical Nazi search for Jewish lineage went as far back as three generations. The fact that Vera was a Serb converted by marriage was discovered, putting her life and the lives of her children, Predrag and Gordana, at risk. Vera lived with her parents, Emil and Marieta. Emil was taken to Topovske šupe camp and executed with a group of Jews on October 14th, 1941, in Jajinci. A mass deportation of Jews was in preparation at the end of 1941. Imprisonment of Belgrade Jews in the new founded camp Sajmište in Zemun was set for mid December. Jews that had not yet registered with the authorities were requested to do so by announcements in the newspapers and posters plastered throughout the city. Those who failed to report to the Special police for Jews were threatened with death as were all others who helped or sheltered them. Jews registered with the Special police were presented with hand delivered summons stating the date when they had to come to Special police headquarters from where they were to be transported to camp Sajmište. When on December 9th a gendarme appeared at the Schosberger flat with summons for mother Marieta, Vera bribed him to report to the police that he had not found her at home. Vera realized she had little time to hide her children somewhere safe. She turned to Stevan's aunts for help and when they refused to take the children in, she sought out Stevan's brother. He also



refused help. Fear of German retaliation was stronger than family ties. Marieta was taken to Sajmište camp a few days later in spite of Vera's efforts.

Stevan's aunt, Emilija Vukov, was living with her son, Branislav, and daughter, Vukosava - Vukica, in Cvijićeva Street in Belgrade at that time. The house they had lived in until the war was demolished in the bombing of Belgrade. They had had to rent a small flat for themselves at the new address. Emilija's husband, Dušan, brother to Stevan's mother, had also been taken as POW after the April war and deported to Germany. Emilija had read in the newspapers that the Germans were evacuating the hitherto spared Jews left in Belgrade to the Sajmište camp, and had immediately realized the danger Vera and her children were faced with.

She sent her daughter, Vukica, to bring Predrag and Gordana to their two-room flat. Emilija's sister and her friend were visiting Emilija when Vukica arrived with the children. "Have you gone out of your senses?" the friend asked Emilija. "You are hiding Jewish children and thus putting yourselves in mortal danger!" Emilija's reply was just as brittle: "They are the children of my husband's nephew. I have known Stevan since he was a child and I will not let his children be taken to camp." The children stayed with the Vukov family.

In the meantime, Vera was trying to find a way to free herself from the obligatory yellow band worn on the sleeve. The situation for marked Jews was getting worse by the day; moving from one part of the city to another had become harder, and

frequently after waiting in queues, she was left with nothing to buy. Jews could buy bread only after everyone else had bought their share. She dared not hide the yellow band under the turned up sleeves of her yellow cardigan once the deportation of women, children and the old to camp Sajmište had begun. It was an offence punishable by death. Vera never learned when her mother was suffocated inside the truck adapted to a gas chamber on the way from Sajmište to Jajinci. Like others, Marieta had been killed and thrown into the Jajinci mass graves for Jews.

Left with no alternative, Vera wrote a request to the Gestapo. A converted Jew, christened in the Orthodox Church, she hoped they would release her from the obligation to wear the yellow band but knew not where

nor how to hand over the document. Someone suggested that a very attractive Belgrade lady take Vera's appeal to the Gestapo. And that is what she eventually did. One can only imagine what the guard must have thought when he saw the attractive woman and heard her say she had a meeting with the chief of the Gestapo. Before long, Vera was granted permission to take the yellow band off. On January 19th, 1942, Vera returned the children to their flat in Jevremova Street where she had managed to stay on only by a stroke of luck. The flat was on the first floor of the building where her father's business offices had been. The office premises were separated from the flat by a door fastened with nails. When the Germans came to requisition the offices for their requirements, they failed to notice that



Emilija and Dušan Vukov



a Jewish flat was right behind the door. That is how the Schosberger family, Vera and the children had managed to stay in their flat.

However, the Germans constantly redesigned regulations pertinent to Jews, and arrests began once again. This time all those who had up to then been spared were at risk of being imprisoned. The Germans were pressed for time to “liberate” Belgrade of Jews. In the spring of 1942 Emilija’s son, Branislav, found employment in Bečkerek (Zrenjanin). His mother and sister, Vukica, moved to Bečkerek with him. Emilija was once again in a position to give shelter to Predrag and Gordana. She sent Vukica to take the children out of Belgrade. The Serbian surname, Čonkić, made it possible for Vukica to cross the border between Serbia and Banat, which was under German rule, with the children. They were full of fear, but they made the journey without encountering any problems. Unfortunately, their stay in Bečkerek was not long. Branislav fell ill and had to be returned to Belgrade for treatment, so they all came back with him. The fatal disease ended his young life at the beginning of November 1942. Once again Vera and her children found themselves living in Jevremova Street in fear for their lives.

The summer of 1943 came and Emilija, who was of German origin, spent increasingly more time in Bečkerek. Her husband’s family lived in Orlovata, a village near Bečkerek. Living near them meant she had someone to turn to for help. Emilija sewed, while Vukica gave private lessons in mathematics and German. Once they



Predrag, Vukica and Gordana

were able to manage on their own, Emilija sent Vukica to bring Predrag and Gordana to stay with them once again. The children were fine up till the moment Predrag became ill. Whether it was a rash, an allergy, or something else that caused the illness, the children had to be returned to their mother in Belgrade. Predrag soon got better but could not go to Bečkerek any longer. Gordana would not go by herself and so the Čonkić family, living in daily danger of being found out, stayed in Belgrade right up to October 1944 when Belgrade was liberated. Vera’s husband, Stevan, returned from the POW camp in 1945 and the Čonkić family was reunited again. Vera made a list of all the members of both the Schosberger and Alkalai families who had perished in the war. 24 of their most immediate relatives did not live to see liberation day. Emilija’s husband, Dušan, also returned from camp. The ties that the war had created between the Čonkić and Vukov families stayed fast and true.

Good deed

Emilija and Vukica Vukov
in the process of assessment
of Yad Vashem Award Committee





DON'T FIGHT BECAUSE OF ME

When the Kingdom of Yugoslavia capitulated in April 1941, Zemun was suddenly packed with Ustashi Fascist formations and Germans. The persecution of Jews began immediately, aided by the *volksdeutsche*. Kamenko Raca was a Serb, but his wife, Feodora, was Jewish. This fact was not common knowledge since Feodora's deceased father, whose surname was Koristka, was not a Jew. Her mother was a descendant of the Jewish family Schreiber. In their pursuit of Jews, Fascists made meticulous checks of marriages to determine whether there was a concealed Jewish wife somewhere. If that was the case, it meant that her children were also marked. Fully aware of what could happen to his family, Raca decided they would leave Zemun as soon as possible and move to Belgrade. Upon the division of Yugoslavia, Zemun had come under the rule of the Independent State of Croatia and Raca believed that in another country, i.e., Serbia, no investigation as to the maiden name of his wife would be made.

Feodora's sister, Margareta, remained in Zemun. She was employed in the Svilara AD, the Zemun branch of the silk factory Osijek based firm. She bore her father's surname, Koristka, but her Jewish origin was known inside the firm. When war broke out, the company head office closed its branch in Zemun. All laid off employees, except Margareta, received compensation. She was left without a source of income. Living with her mother she could barely make ends meet. A few days



Feodora and Kamenko Raca - 1942

later, their neighbour, Perić, came by and brought an application form for Margareta to fill in. She told her to write that she was of Arian descent in the corresponding box. Margareta did as told and soon obtained a job in the Ikarus plane factory. The operation of the factory had not been discontinued; however, it was now under joint German-Croatian management. Her application and subsequent employment proved to be a mistake since security measures in Ikarus were tight and, after one check, Margareta's Jewish origin was discovered. She was informed of the fact and left with only a few minutes to flee from the factory, she left all her personal papers behind in the company's administration.

To make matters worse, a *volksdeutscher*, a certain Spitz, appeared at the flat. Their fear was fortunately, unfounded. Spitz had only good memories of Jews and had come to warn Margareta that on no account must she stay at home that night. Before the war Spitz had worked for a Jew from Banat and had not forgotten how his proprietor had always been generous to him and the other employees. All this was happening in mid 1942, prior to the deportation of Zemun Jews to Jasenovac and Stara Gradiška death camps. Margareta spent the next couple of days with the Nedić family, who had a work-shop for soda production. She had no one else to turn to in the grim situation she was faced with. Her brother-in-law and sister were already in Belgrade and her fear of staying in a town full of informers was completely understandable. She realized that Kamenko Raca and Feodora were her only hope of survival. Through a member of the Resistance movement she managed to obtain a



pass to go to Belgrade but without right of return. The man who had supplied the document was afraid that if she returned and was caught, she would disclose who she had got the pass from. Margareta reached Belgrade by boat without encountering any problems; the pass she had obtained had done its job.

Kamenko had rented a flat in the very centre of the city when the Raca family moved to Belgrade. Although an engineer of technology by profession, he had lost his job back in Zemun. Still unemployed in Belgrade, he took Margareta into the flat without a word. They began selling what possessions they had; each slice of bread was measured with care, nothing could go to waste, not a dinar could be squandered as food, scarce as it was, had to be bought in order to survive.

When Margareta heard her sister, Feodora, and brother-in-law, Raca, quarrelling, she thought that she was the cause. Desperate, without identification papers and money, she knew not what to do. She begged them not to fight in front of her, although it was obvious that they had nowhere else to air their differences: she was always there. Raca calmed Margareta down telling her that the quarrel had nothing to do with her. Times were hard and each individual reacted to the circumstances they were faced with in a different way, even if it was sometimes the wrong way. And then again, who was to say what was right, as one had to go on living despite the desperate odds they were up against.

Fortunately, Kamenko soon got a job in the Department of economy through the Refugee bureau. Although their



Margareta Koristka

lives were still threatened, at least the problem of obtaining food was resolved. Flats were constantly being raided and the fact that Raca was now employed was no guarantee that Gestapo men from the Special police for Jews would not appear at their door-step. If they happened to learn who was living there, the two sisters and his children would be taken to camp. Not even Raca would fare better. He was well aware that hiding Jews was punishable by death.

In mid 1943 Kamenko finally managed to register Margareta as a Serb refugee from Zemun. In the application form they entered that Margareta was of the Evangelistic faith so that she was not obliged to go to the Orthodox Church services where her lack of knowledge of Orthodox traditions could be easily detected. From then on, Margareta could move around Belgrade freely. One day soon after, she moved in with her friend, Milena, married to Rudi Stein. Rudi Stein had been taken prisoner as a soldier of the Yugoslav King's Army after the short April war of 1941 and was held in a German camp. Milena, an entrepreneur at heart, soon obtained a clientele she provided meals for. The two women were no longer hungry. When Belgrade was liberated in 1944, Milena and Margareta were still together and overjoyed that the war was finally over. In 1945 Rudi was released from captivity and returned home. Margareta was still staying with Milena. Rudi and Milena immigrated to Israel in 1949 leaving Margareta to live in the flat.

Good deed

Kamenko Raca

in the process of assessment
of Yad Vashem Award Committee



HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Prof. Dr. Milan Ristović
JEWS IN SERBIA DURING WORLD WAR TWO

and

Dr. Milan Koljanin
THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN SERBIA AND
THE STATE OF YUGOSLAVIA (1918-1941)



Prof. Dr. Milan Ristović

JEWS IN SERBIA DURING WORLD WAR TWO

Between “the final solution to the Jewish question” and “the Righteous among Nations”

Painter and writer Zuko Džumhur described the poignant first service held upon liberation in the only surviving Jewish temple in Belgrade, the Ashkenazi synagogue - the same synagogue that had from the start of the war been turned into a brothel for German soldiers: “In the monstrosly ravaged premises of the so long abused temple, I came across a small group of tear-ridden and pain-stricken women dressed in rags. Among the women there were only two or three older men still disorientated from the enormity of the fears they had lived through. All of them were Belgrade Jews who, with their wives and relatives, had come to attend this solemn memorial service. I stood among them with head bowed thinking of all the horrors all of us, Jews especially, had lived through during those atrocious years of Nazi iniquity and insanity”.¹ These people were rare war survivors who had hidden inside Belgrade. In subsequent months they were reunited with their compatriots who had found shelter in villages and towns in the interior of the country. Together they would attempt to revive the heavily impaired Jewish Community which had gone through its worst trials in the 2000 years of its history and existence in these parts.²

During 1941-1945, the four years of war, the Jewish Community in the territory of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia had been exposed to brutal acts of the occupying authorities and local collaborators’ anti-Semitic politics. The number of Jews killed inside the camps in Yugoslavia, or upon deportation to concentration and death camps in the territory of Germany and Poland, amounted to 80% of the Community membership. Together with people of other nationalities, Yugoslav Jews were

also murdered as hostages by firing squads in places of execution. Of the total of 82.000 Jews who lived in Yugoslavia at the start of World War Two only 15.000 managed to survive the war by hiding, changing their identity, or escaping from one occupied zone to another. In relation to their percentage in the total Yugoslav population, a significant number of Jews (4.572) joined the Partisan resistance and fought in units of the Yugoslav Liberation Army.³ There were also men survivors who spent the years of war in POW camps⁴ as officers and soldiers of the Yugoslav army. A similar fate was shared by those members of the Jewish Community who were detained in internment camps in Italian territories. The number of those who managed to get to one of Europe’s neutral states, or from there reach even farther (and safer) overseas destinations, was very small. The cold “language of numbers” speaks for itself about the scope of the slaughter of Jews in Serbia. Thus only 1.115 members of the Belgrade Jewish Community, amounting to approximately 16% of its prewar count (a total of 11.870), survived the war.⁵ Other Jewish Communities in the interior of Serbia and in the region of Banat were exterminated to the last. All that is left of them are overgrown graveyards and the memories of some of their fellow citizens who speak “of their neighbours that are no more”.

Jews in Serbia and Yugoslavia up to 1941

According to a number of assessments, some 82.000 Jews lived in Yugoslavia prior to World War Two.⁶ Inside the territory of Serbia (i.e., its contemporary boundaries) up to World War Two there were 30.000 Jewish inhabitants, i.e., 40% of the total Jewish population living in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.⁷ Ashkenazi Jews were predominant in the territory of Vojvodina while in regions south of the rivers Sava and Danube the majority of Jewish inhabitants were Sephardim Jews by



tradition. From the mid nineteenth century, Ashkenazi Jews, mostly from Austro-Hungarian countries, began to settle in Serbia. Acts of anti-Semitism were not an unfamiliar event in the Principedom and Kingdom of Serbia. However, despite occasional incidents and adverse situations (arising mostly from the pressure of the newly established domestic class of traders who looked on Jews as fierce competitors in the domestic market), they were marginal group events. Full civic equality was granted to Jews by the decisions of the Berlin Congress; however, they were put into practice later, in 1888. Jewish integration into the major comprehensive surroundings to which the Jewish Community, despite its small numbers, gave important economical and cultural input, would be significantly intensified from the end of the nineteenth century right up to the beginning of World War One.⁸

New circumstances, subsequent to 1918, and the founding of the new Yugoslav state came with a myriad of different collective historical experiences of its population. Such was also the case of Jewish Communities from territories which comprised the new state; on many points, they differed from one another. Social equality of the new state's population, despite certain intimations perceived in the second half of the thirties that spoke to the contrary, was not critically impaired up to October 1940. It was only then that, under German pressure from outside and the growing of anti-Semitic tendencies among the Yugoslav public⁹, the Government adopted a regulation introducing *numerus clausus* for Jewish pupils and students, and a second regulation on measures regarding Jewish engagement in businesses dealing in human nutrition articles. These regulations seriously impaired Jewish civic equality and at the same time marked the "general trend" of anti-Semitic politics which, spreading from its ideological centre, Nazi Germany, gained supremacy throughout most of Europe; they also intimated the future fatal measures¹⁰ that stood in wait for

the Jewish population of Yugoslavia and Serbia.

During the period of 1933 -1941 approximately 55.500 Jewish refugees from Central Europe passed over the territory of Yugoslavia. Approximately 40,000 Jews entered Yugoslavia between 1938 and 1940.¹¹ The arrival of Jews in masses was an added incentive for the Yugoslav government to bring directives to prohibit their entry and stopover in the country, and enforce the 1940 anti-Jewish regulations.¹² Although aided by the International Jewish Organization, their upkeep was too exertive for the relatively small community of Yugoslav Jews, who nevertheless, showed enormous solidarity and sacrifice in their relief endeavor. Refugee camps were set up in Serbia - in Niška Banja (160 persons), in Kuršumlijska Banja (380 persons). The largest camp was in Šabac on the river Sava where the stranded travelers of the "Kladovo transport", 1.210 immigrants to Palestine from Austria, Germany and Czechoslovakia, were placed. Their journey down the Danube was stopped in October 1939 when, in addition to British



Ships boarded by Jews from Europe in their attempt to reach the Palestine – Kladovo transport



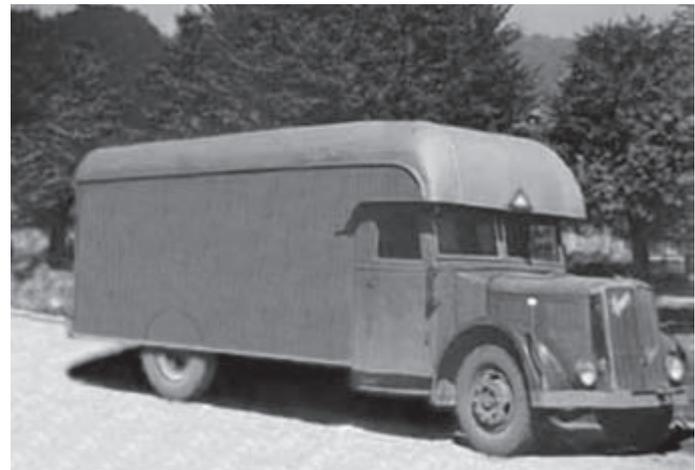
government pressure to put a stop to further immigration into the Palestine coupled with the overall deteriorating situation caused by the beginning of war, the Romanian authorities banned further travel down river. The refugees were transferred from Kladovo to Šabac after its mayor indicated that the city would see to the accommodation of the exiles. The expense for providing such accommodation, i.e., their board and lodging, was borne by the Yugoslav Jewish Community devotedly. The Community's leadership made unsuccessful attempts to persuade international Jewish organizations to intervene and secure the further progress of their journey. The destiny of the "Kladovo transport" was by far more tragic than that of the much noted destiny of the "St. Louis" ship, which ended in the death of 1.050 Jews¹³ at the beginning of the German occupation. During the Holocaust some 3,000 to 5,000 Jewish refugees perished inside the territory of Yugoslavia.¹⁴

Certain specifics of the Holocaust in Serbia

Among the specifics regarding the overall tragedy of Jews in Serbia (although one might doubtlessly say that each individual case, i.e., each country where Jewish citizens were exterminated in mass in the framework of the Nazi plan "of the final solution to the Jewish question" could lay claim to *specific circumstances*), one element was the horrific efficiency and the exceedingly short time period in which the greater part of Jewish victims perished. At the time of the conference of Nazi officials, organized by the Chief of Security police and SD, R. Heydrich held on Berlin lake Wan (the Wanseekonferenz) in January 1942, when the planned strategy and coordination of various divisions of the Nazi mechanism in the intensification of the "final solution"¹⁵ were discussed, the very same issue was in its final stage in occupied Serbia. By then, systematic mass slaughter by firing squad in places of execution, - which

were not carried out by SS or operational groups (Einsatzgruppen) as in the case of the majority of occupied European countries, but by Wehrmacht units, wiped out nearly all the adult male Jewish population of Banat and central Serbia (over 5.000); by the beginning of May 1942, women and children interred in the *Judenlager Zemlin* (Sajmište) camp were all murdered in a specially equipped gas-chamber vehicle sent to Belgrade¹⁶ for this purpose.

Beside mass atrocities against the Serbian population by Wehrmacht units, their leading role in killing Jews marked the Holocaust in Serbia. In the initial executions of large groups of hostages, the greater part of victims were apprehended Jews. As one researcher of Nazi atrocities carried out in Serbia during World War Two (V. Glišić) noticed, the executioners and their superiors paid no heed to the fact that the Jewish hostages, as well as the greater part of Serbian citizens executed during 1941-42 "in reprisal" for Resistance movement actions, had absolutely nothing in common with either the Partisan movement or that of the Chetniks. When it came to Jewish citizens, the sole aim was their physical elimina-



The gas vehicle, Saurer model, the so-called "suffocating" truck, ordered by Harald Turner for the requirements of the Sajmište camp (Judenlager Semlin)



tion as conceived by the “general politics” of the Nazi regime. Naturally, the additional intimidating effect of such acts on the Serbian majority, also exposed to mass killing, was counted on.¹⁷

As Christopher R. Browning pointed out, the annihilation of the Jewish Community in Serbia came at the outset of the “final solution” in Europe; the first mass execution of Serbian Jews in the autumn of 1941 took place a few days before the planned deportation of German Jews. Further, the murder of Jewish women and children by exhaust gases inside gas trucks was already completed by the beginning of May 1942, “... before the gas chambers in Sobibor were put into operation.”¹⁸

Apart from the observance of “general guidelines” under which the extermination of the Jewish population functioned in the framework of “the new European order”, the defining specifics already mentioned were the product of complex local circumstances: primarily, the tearing up of Serbia (within its current boundaries-MR) into occupied zones and annexed territories; secondly, the eruption of a mass guerilla uprising in Serbia in the summer of 1941 which resulted in widespread military campaigns of German occupying forces and their allies intended to suppress mounting resistance, and thirdly, the ensuing brutal reprisal measures against the civilian population, including camp detention and mass executions by firing squad of “hostages” with Jews regularly placed in line to the fore, until the moment this “source” simply petered out. Furthermore, contrary to the destiny of victims in the best part of European countries, the majority of Jews in Serbia did not perish inside Nazi “death factories” in Germany and Poland, but were murdered only tens of kilometres, sometimes even less, from their homes (execution sites in Jajinci, Pančevački rit, Banjica, Sajmište...). In January 1942 during the Novi Sad “raid” and in other places in south Bačka, Jews were even killed in their own homes. However, it should be noted that everything that was happening

in the territory of Serbia under German occupation, the mass crimes against the civilian population, Jews included, was by “methodology” and goals achieved, akin to circumstances and events taking place in the East of Europe and was integrated into the Nazi “general plan” to eradicate the Jewish population of Europe.¹⁹

The general framework of the Holocaust in Serbia

In order to better understand the circumstances of each survivor’s life story and how Jews stayed alive with the help of their cohabitants of different nationalities and religious beliefs - frequently completely unknown to them up to the moment when, risking their own lives and the wellbeing of their families, they gave shelter to Jewish escapees - one must point to the extremely complex circumstances brought on by the division of Yugoslavia (and Serbia) and, in its aftermath, the annexation and formation of a series of occupying and collaborationist regimes that had direct bearing on the destiny of Jewish Communities living within the territories, exposing them to a wide range of anti-Semitic politics and outright genocide with tragic consequences for the majority of Yugoslav Jews.

The general scene on which the drama of Jews in Serbia and their Serbian compatriots took place was a result of a tangible convoluted enemy division of Yugoslavia and Serbia. The basis for such a division of Yugoslav and Serbian territories were Hitler’s guidelines of March 27, built-in and concentrated in the *Generalplan zur späteren Verwaltung des jugoslawischen Gebietes* (*The general plan for governing Yugoslav regions*) dated April 6, 1941 and the *Vorläufigen Richtlinien für die Aufteilung Jugoslawiens* (*Provisional guidelines for the division of Yugoslavia*). At the Vienna conference of representatives of Axis forces, held on April 21 and 22, 1941, the official division of territorial spoils of war was approved.²⁰ Already on April 10, 1941, as German



troops entered into Zagreb, members of the Croatian Fascist Ustashi movement inaugurated the Independent State of Croatia. Apart from Croatia, the inclusion of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the eastern part of Srem, as well as a part of Sandžak and Montenegro, was envisaged inside the boundaries of the newly founded state.²¹

The territory of Serbia was reduced to its pre 1912 borders, approximately 51.000 square kilometres and a population of 3,8 million citizens. It was placed under direct German military occupation authority, with a complex and numerous organizational apparatus headed by the Commander of Military Administration; later the Bevollmächtigter Kommandirender General in Serbien - Official commanding general for Serbia. Serbia was divided into four Feldkommandature. East Srem with Zemun was handed over to ISC in autumn 1941.²² Parts of southeast Serbia (with the towns of Pirot and Vranje), as well as a part of east Kosovo, were annexed by Bulgaria; Bačka was occupied and then annexed by Horthy's Hungary, while the remaining part of Kosovo and Metohija, with a part of Sandžak (the Raška region), was included in the Italian protectorate of "Great Albania".²³

Once implemented, the map of enemy division of Yugoslav territory and that of Serbia had substantial bearing on the varied "nuances" of anti-Jewish politics and the practice employed by each newly instated regime. It ranged from the monstrous, systematic and planned implementation of the procedure of physical extinction of the Jewish population (as part of the general European Nazi politics of "the final solution to the Jewish question"), as was the practice applied by German occupying authorities in Serbia, to the brutal Ustashi anti-Jewish politics of extinction linked to the pivot "programme resolution" of the Ustashi ideology – the extinction of the Serbian population under Ustashi authority. Next within this range came various phases and methods applied by Hungarian and Bulgarian authorities in certain parts of the occupied and annexed territory, followed by

the somewhat milder politics of the Italian authorities, which allowed those who reached the Italian occupying zone or Italy, to await the end of the war, liberation and the likelihood of survival in comparatively safer circumstances. The difference in the degree of "efficiency" and consistency of the implementation of anti-Semitic politics provided "gaps" in the complex system of extinction and repressive politics, which, although slight, offered the faintest chance for those who had a better insight into the situation, more audacity and determination, funds or connections, or simply more luck and stronger survival instincts to – despite all odds – "squeeze" through them and survive. In the territory of Serbia under German occupation and the territory of the Ustashi ISC the odds of survival were minuscule.

To this depiction of the complexity of the state of affairs in Serbia one must also add an exceedingly important element – the magnitude of both passive and active resistance of its citizens, which, in its essence, was polycentric with two politically and ideologically opposed Resistance movements, the Partisan (People's Liberation Movement) led by Communists, and the Royalist Chetnik movement (Yugoslav Home Army). Their initial cooperation in the mass uprising, instigated in the summer of 1941, upheld by the whole of Serbia, was practically almost immediately turned into open civil war. The widespread liberation battles and actions against the enemy in towns in Serbia during 1941 greatly affected the destiny of Jews since they were amongst the first victims of the German instated practice – execution of hostages as a form of reprisal.²⁴

The Holocaust in Serbia: executioners and their collaborators

The history of the Holocaust in occupied Yugoslavia, thus also Serbia, must be regarded as an episode of the destructive wave that spread over Europe. The Holo-



A map of the division of Serbia and Yugoslavia



caust in territories of Yugoslavia took place alongside other destructive genocidal politics against the local population (above all the Serbian population in almost all occupied territories: in the ISC, in regions under Hungarian and Bulgarian occupation, inside Kosovo - which became part of “Great Albanian” state -, as well as in Serbia itself under German occupying authority), in the background of mass Resistance movements that ignited an ideological civil war and inter-ethnic battles. Already at the time of the short lived “April 1941 war”, Jews in Serbia were exposed to the brunt of German occupying forces. On entering Belgrade and other towns in Serbia, the occupying forces and their soldiers began to plunder Jewish stores and other property with the help of the domestic German minority.²⁵ In the spring of 1941, the occupying forces in Serbia immediately initiated the passing of a series of anti-Jewish regulations; alongside the obligatory “registration” of Jews, the wearing of the yellow arm band, “Arianization” of Jewish real estate was set in motion by placing “commissars” inside Jewish establishments who, in many cases, were once again



From glory to treason; Chetniks sitting side by side with the Ustashi and Germans

*volksdeutsche*s. In Srem, *volksdeutsche*s competitors for the “post” were members of the Ustashi movement. The initial measures were soon supplemented by new ones limiting living conditions for Jews in Serbia to the extreme.²⁶

An order by which Jews were obliged to register with the City protection police on April 19 was issued by the Chief of Operative Police security and the Security Services (*Chef der Einsatzgruppe der Sipo und des SD*) Dr. Wilhelm Fuchs as early as April 16, 1941. Violation of the order carried punishment by death.²⁷ The brief phase of anti-Jewish terror lacking in organization (referred to by W. Manoschek as “uncoordinated”) was quickly reaching its “organized” stage.²⁸ The first days of occupation saw the formation of the *Einsatzgruppe der Sichertspolize und des Sichertsdienst* (EG Sipo und SD), with its IV department – GESTAPO – inside which, in keeping with established practice, the *Judenreferat* (IV D4)²⁹, was established. A special *Commissariat for Jews* was also instated.³⁰ After banning all Jewish organizations, the German authorities founded a *Custodian Office for the Jewish Community in Belgrade*. Its projected role was a form of *Judenrata*. Barely any traces of its short lived operation exist.³¹

By April 19 the occupying forces formed a special “Jewish police” inside the Belgrade City Administration, as a branch of their own Special Police supervised by a German commissioner responsible directly to the GESTAPO officer for Jewish issues. Soon mass arrests began as an introduction to the ensuing measures of organized mass executions.³²

Action taken to eradicate Serbian Jews was organized in three phases. In the period from April to August 1941, registration and marking of Jews with yellow bands was carried out with the help of domestic collaborationist authorities. Registration of Jewish inhabitants inside the capital lasted three days and totaled approximately

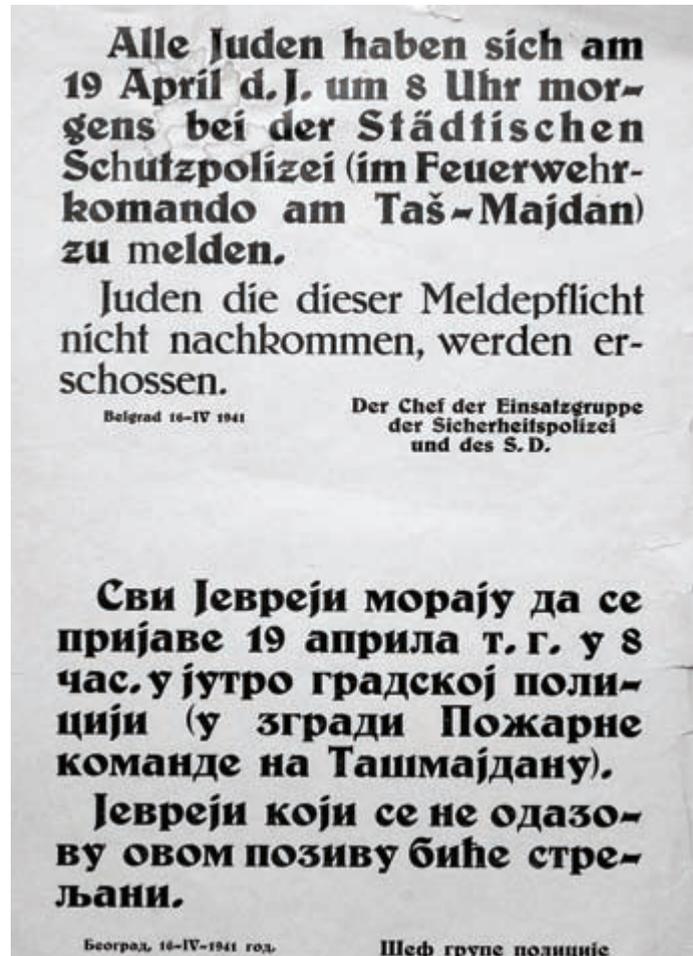


8.500 individuals. In June 1941 out of approximately 12.000 Jewish people that had lived in Belgrade up to the war, the final list of registered Jews counted 9.145 names. The remaining 3.000 never responded to the German order to register and went into hiding inside the city or sought shelter by escaping to the interior of Serbia or territories beyond German authority.³³

In presenting a detailed systematization of all measures introduced by German occupying authorities in Serbia (including Banat and Sandžak), J. Romano lists them into three groups: “a) Measures to destroy Jews economically including looting and demolition of Jewish cultural and historical values; b) Measures for mental impediment ...; c) Measures for physical extinction of Jews - genocide”.³⁴

The aforementioned activities of occupation authorities and the engagement of domestic police forces placed under German command (the formation of the *Jewish police* as a division of the *Special police*)³⁵, was a sinister intimation of the fast approaching physical annihilation of Serbian Jews by occupying forces. At the beginning of May, the German military commander for Serbia issued an order for blocking and seizure of all Jewish holdings, accounts and other valuables deposited in banks while at the end of the same month by “Order No. 7” the military commander proclaimed the obligatory registration of Jewish property and appropriation of Jewish shops in the territory of Serbia, Banat and Sandžak with commissars taking charge (in Serbia and Banat the commissars were mainly recruited from *volksdeutsche*s whereas in Novi Pazar from the ranks of Muslim citizens); furthermore, the Jewish Community was burdened with a high rate of contributions.³⁶

An additional “legal regulatory measure” was implemented by the passing of the “Regulation pertaining to Jews and Gypsies”, dated May 31, 1941. By the said Regulation German military authorities publicly



Order for compulsory registration of Jews

proclaimed persons who, in accordance with the “principles” determined by Nuremberg racial laws, were to be considered as Jews and ordered to register and be marked as such; also, to be forbidden employment in all public services and trades, banned entry into public places, forbidden to use public means of transportation and to be stripped of almost all possessions. They were furthermore compelled to forced labour duty which was obligatory for men from 14 to 60 years of age and



women from 14 to 40 years of age.³⁷ As justly noted, the May 31, 1941, Regulation was “a sort of codification of all anti-Jewish measures decreed by then and intended to “legalize” all such ongoing persecution, as well as to publicize that Jews were a baser class of people whose defamation would not be penalized.”³⁸

Jews in Banat (approximately 4200)³⁹ shared a similar destiny in the first days of war; the major part of looting of their possessions, arrests and maltreatment, coupled with unavoidable physical abuse and degradation, was carried out by their neighbours, *volksdeutsche*s. The Jewish Community in Banat was the first to experience almost total physical annihilation.⁴⁰ Jews of Banat, together with their Serbian cohabitants, were among the first victims of German occupation formations and their *volksdeutscher* collaborators. Such was the case of hangings and firing squad executions in the Serbian Orthodox cemetery in April 1941. In an operation headed by the GESTAPO and aided by members of the *volksdeutsche*s *Deutsche Mannschafta* and German civilian population, Jews of Banat were arrested and transferred to Belgrade by the end of summer 1941. Men were imprisoned in the former artillery hangars («Topovske šupe») turned into a camp, together with Belgrade fellow sufferers, while women and children were taken to the Jewish camp at Sajmište.⁴¹

The first arrest of hostages was carried out in Belgrade on April 22, while the proclamation of Commander-in-Chief of the German 2nd army, Maximilian von Weichs, regarding execution of persons caught carrying weapons or wearing the uniform of the Yugoslav army, was publicized on April 28. The proclamation contained an announcement that in retaliation to an attack in which a few German soldiers had lost their lives, 100 hostages had been shot, “...Serbs from all ranks of society”. Future sanction for each wounded German soldier “would result in the execution of 100 Serbs”⁴² ⁴⁰. From August to November 1941, occupation forces rounded up adult

Jewish males and imprisoned them in the improvised camp “Topovske šupe” where the Jews from Banat were also kept. The camp was the main “reservoir” of hostages to be shot. Thus in autumn of 1941, each act of intensified Partisan and Chetnik units warfare was penalized by mass executions carried out by Wehrmacht units.⁴³

In the aftermath of the subversive act of seventeen-year-old Elijas Almosino when he attacked a German truck on July 25, 1941, 122 Jewish hostages were shot.⁴⁴ Once the concept to transfer Jews from Serbia and concentrate them somewhere in Poland or Romania, preferably an island in the Danube delta, had been abandoned in September 1941, the occupation authorities concluded that the “Jewish question” in Serbia should be treated radically and swiftly within its own territory. On the very day of the appointment of the new German Commander-in-Chief Bohme (Bevollmächtigter Kommandirender General in Serbien, Franz Bohme), the Prefect of the OKW Keitel issued an order by which hostages were to be executed in a ratio of 100 to 1 for each killed, and 50 to 1 for each wounded German thus legalizing the practice already in process.⁴⁵

The chief of the German civilian administration, Turner, (H. Turner, der Chef der Militarverwaltung in Serbien, SS-Gruppenführer der Chef der Militarverwaltung in Serbien) explained how mass executions by firing squad had a double purpose: “retaliation” for rebel actions against German authority, and a quick elimination of Serbian Jews, passing on “responsibility” for mass crimes against Jews to the Resistance movement. Inclusion of Jews in the “quota” 100 to 1 (a hundred Serbian hostages for each killed member of the German occupation authority) was explained how “...they, too, were in fact Serbian citizens and must also be dealt with to extinction”.⁴⁶ In these mass executions of civilians, according to certain approximations, some 5000 Jews above the age of 14 were shot. Thus at the beginning of



November "...there were almost no living male Jews and Roma who could be used as hostages".⁴⁷

In the first half of December, the rounding up and imprisonment of primarily Jewish women and children in the newly established *Judenlager Semlin* was put into effect. A special vehicle-gas-chamber had been sent for their obliteration. From March to the beginning of May 1942, all of them were put to death.⁴⁸ This precisely planned operation implemented by the German occupation authorities resulted in the fact that sometime later in August 1942 Haral Turner could inform the Commander of the South-East General Lohr, (A. Lohr, *Wermachtbefelshaber-u Suedost*) that "...the Jewish question, as well as that of Gypsies, has effectively been completed. Serbia is the only country where the Jewish and Gypsy question has been fully resolved."⁴⁹

Dr. Emanuel Schäfer, the chief of Sipo in Serbia (*Befelshaber der Sipo Serbien*), reported at the meeting of high ranking German commanders for the South East on June 8, 1942, that in Serbia "there were no more Jewish issues. The only Jews still living were Jews married to other nationals".⁵⁰ The final "result" of the whole operation was the death of 11.000 Jews in central Serbia and approximately 3.800 Banat Jews.⁵¹ According to more recent research, of the 16.000 Jews who lived inside the German occupying zone in Serbia, 13.600 died in the Holocaust. In the case of Banat, out of its 3.504 Jews, 2.904 perished.⁵²

Collaboration and the Holocaust

The network of occupation authorities' military and civilian organizational bodies was initially reinforced in May 1941 by the establishment of a domestic collaborationist apparatus, the so-called Commissioner government, which, due to German discontent with the outcome of the counteraction against the Resistance was replaced by general Milan Nedić's "Government of

National Salvation" by the end of August. The domestic government was placed under full control of occupying authorities and turned into yet another instrument of brutal occupation oppression.⁵³ In June 1941 the Ministry of Interior issued an order to all county councils and to the Administration of City Belgrade to give notice to all Gypsy and Jewish employees. Within the same Ministry there existed a separate subdivision of its Special Division, the Office for state protection responsible for Jews and Roma. In June 1942 prime minister of the "national salvation government", Milan Nedić, made a request to the German military Commander Bader, to "take measures" against Jewish Yugoslav army officers – POWs in Osnabruck - for spreading "infamous Communist propaganda" inside the camp.⁵⁴



Milan Nedić paying a visit to Adolf Hitler in 1943

In the Holocaust in Serbia, the German occupation authority assigned the role of assistant instruments to domestic civilian, police and military collaborationist authorities which were responsible for the registration, apprehending and imprisonment of fugitives and coordinated running of the concentration camp Banjica in Belgrade, since the camp had dual, domestic and German administrations.⁵⁵ The occupation authority issued guidelines and had a leading role in the realization of



“the final solution for the Jewish question” in Serbia with GESTAPO’s Operational group (Einsatzgruppe) and its network of commands and departments in the forefront.⁵⁶ German occupation forces presided over “the death monopoly”: killing of Jews and Serbs was in their power, but the role of the collaborationist authorities must not be disregarded, since they functioned as a subservient instrument of the German administration.

In May 1941 the operation of the Administration of the City of Belgrade⁵⁷ and its subordinate Special police, was reinstated. The Special police with its large number of organized regional bodies, was given broader authority over the entire territory of Serbia. The domestic police answered to the German commander of the SS and police (Befelshaber der Sicherheitspolizei und des Sicherheitsdienstes)⁵⁸, while inside the GESTAPO IV Department for fighting political adversaries the police had an Office for Jewish issues (IV D4).⁵⁹

The collaborationist police had three sectors: beside the (III) sector for foreigners it also had the (IV) sector for “suppression of Communist actions”, and a separate sector for “Jews and Gypsies” responsible for effecting orders and regulations issued by the occupation authorities regarding Jews and Roma.⁶⁰ This section functioned from April 1941 till the spring of 1943. Beside the existing subordination to German police authorities, primarily that of the GESTAPO, after the establishment of the Commissioner administration, the Special police was also answerable to the Commissariat of home affairs. Apart from his position as first man of the Commissioner administration, Milan Aćimović held

the post of chief of the home affairs Commissariat. The police numbered 850 policemen and was a docile instrument of the occupation authorities in the business of suppressing “all subversive activity” and persecution of enemies of the occupation order.⁶¹

Compliance with the horrific results achieved by the occupying forces in annihilating Jews in Serbia was ex-



Nedić, delivering a speech in the presence of a German officer

pressed in one document of Milan Nedić’s “Government of national Salvation” by putting accent on the fact that “how, owing to the occupier, we have freed ourselves of Jews, and that it is now up to us to rid ourselves of other immoral elements standing in the way of Serbia’s spiritual and national unity.”⁶²

For reason of peremptory realization of all assigned orders, the role which collaborationist armed units (Serbian State Guard, Serbian Volunteers Corps) and the



domestic police under both “Commissioner” and Milan Nedić “National Salvation” governments, (primarily the VII department of the Special police) had in raids, arrests of Jewish cohabitants and their subsequent delivery into the hands of occupying authorities, ranges among the most hideous episodes of collaborationism in Serbia during World War Two.⁶³

Camps in Serbia

A number of camps for mass imprisonment, killing of civilians and members of the Resistance movement were founded in the territory of occupied Serbia. Three camps were set up in the territory of Belgrade located in the city core and its near surroundings.

The Banjica camp (Anhalteleger Dedinje), founded on July 9, 1941, had a distinct role in the history of the Holocaust in Serbia. According to preserved records based on camp registrars containing more than 23.000 names, 688 individuals of Jewish nationality of both genders and all age groups, including children and babies, were prisoners in the camp.⁶⁴ Apart from Belgrade Jews, Jews from Serbia’s interior and Banat were brought to the camp; Jews of foreign citizenship, mostly refugees from various European countries caught up by the war that broke out in Yugoslavia, were placed inside the camp. 382 Jews were killed in camp Banjica, another 186 were transferred to the Zemun Camp for Jews (Sajmište), 103 Jewish prisoners were taken from the camp by the SS and the GESTAPO, while a small number of Jews listed in the registrars who stayed alive were sent to forced labour, released, transferred somewhere else, or have not been accounted for due to lack of information. Researching documented facts B. Božović perceived that the relevant data, compared to data from other sources, is sufficient ground to assume that the number of Jewish prisoners and victims of Banjica camp “was greater by 100 to 200 individuals.”⁶⁵

Responsibility for crimes against Jews and other victims of the Banjica camp “rests with a number of entities, i.e. individuals from invader and collaborationist encampments accountable in one way or another for taking part in these crimes. The actual “feats” of these entities varies from less to great in both importance and scope. Again, in the case of camp Banjica the GESTAPO and the German army took on the role of decisive factors and executioners. Among the collaborationists who were given a supporting part, the bulk of responsibility in contributing to these crimes rests with the camp administration staff and camp employees answerable to the Special police”.⁶⁶

Research work regarding Topovske šupe camp has yielded the least information because of the lack of relevant data. The camp was founded on August 20, 1941, in Belgrade inside abandoned artillery garrison buildings. Initially, the camp was set up to receive and detain Jewish men from Banat. However, these first prisoners were soon joined by imprisoned adult male Jews from Belgrade. The GESTAPO was in charge of the camp; it was guarded by the domestic gendarmerie. The camp inmates became a source of hostages to be killed in mass in reprisal for acts of resistance and sabotage. Executions by firing squad were carried out in locations in Jajinci and Jabuka where the dead were buried in mass graves. Already in the first half of October, soldiers of the German garrison in Belgrade executed by firing squad approximately 200 Jews and 200 Roma. By October 18, 1941, when new prisoners, (rounded up in the last great raid on Jews) were brought to the camp, there were barely some hundred survivors from the initial group of prisoners. They too, met with their end in mass executions during November that same year.⁶⁷ One author justly asserts that “the involvement of units of the Belgrade garrison in the killing of Jews and Roma was evident in both massacres... in both instances...during October and November 1941, when 2.200 people (per



episode) were executed. With 4.400 Jews and Roma murdered in just two reprisals, Belgrade became the leading death pit of the Holocaust and according to the total of victims, a truly gunned-down city.”⁶⁸

Once the plan to build a camp in Zasavica near Šabac was abandoned, the camp at the Belgrade Fair (Sajmište), today’s Staro sajmište, was founded on October 28, 1941.⁶⁹ From the end of 1941 up to April 1942 the camp was called *Jewish camp Zemun* (Judenlager Semlin). The inmates, Jewish women and children, were taken from Sajmište to execution locations and mass graves in Jajinci. The premises of the Belgrade Fair, which had been demolished in the April bombardment of Belgrade, were subsequently partly refurbished and turned into accommodation space for prisoners and camp guards. The camp was situated on the left bank of the river Sava, a territory within the independent State of Croatia.⁷⁰ The GESTAPO Office for Jews appointed SS Untersturmfuhrer Herbert Andorfer, as commander of the camp. The number of inmates cannot be strictly determined as no lists of inmates have been preserved.



Prisoners of Sajmište camp

In January 1942 there were some 6.500 prisoners, in mid February round 5.500 (332 men, 3.933 women and 1.238 children), while at the end of the same month there were 5.780 prisoners. By April, the number decreased to a count of 1.884. The changes in the number of inmates speaks of the “pace of the crime” and the pattern of inmate extermination.⁷¹

The camp was later renamed to *Concentration camp Zemun* (Anhaltelager Semlin) and served for temporary imprisonment of last surviving groups of Jews arrested upon the capitulation of Italy, for imprisonment of captured Partisan members and those of the Chetnik movement, members and sympathizers of the Greek and Albanian Resistance movements, Serbian peasants from villages in Srem, from the area of mountain Kozara and other territories under Ustashi rule transferred from Jasenovac to the camp in Zemun.⁷²

Along with a number of prisons and improvised camps, the largest camp with a brief, but exceptionally bloody history, was the makeshift camp in Šabac and the camps in its vicinity where in autumn 1941 inhabitants of Šabac

and neighbouring villages were imprisoned and killed. Members of the small Jewish Community that existed in Šabac, as well as Jewish refugees from central Europe, the “Kladovo transport”, were also killed in these camps. Inside camp Šabac in October 1941 there were 20.000 prisoners, captured in the massive action of “sweeping up the terrain” of Resistance forces in Mačva. The inmates lived in rudimentary conditions, sleeping in the open for lack of space. By October



Concentration camp Crveni krst (Red Cross) in Niš

20, for reasons of “easing” camp conditions, some 5000 were set free while 1000 inmates were executed by firing squad. The total number of murdered inmates in the period September 21 to November 15, 1941, was 2.685, including Jews from the “Kladovo transport”.⁷³

In central Serbia the largest concentration camp named “Crveni Krst” (Red Cross) was in Niš. It was initially a transitional camp – Durchgangslager – however, from September 1941 it was turned into concentration camp Niš (Anhalterlager Nisch). The camp was inside the garrisons of the Yugoslav Army. Jewish prisoners were completely separated from other prisoners. During the winter of 1941-1942 there were 500 Jewish prisoners. Jews from other central Serbian towns beside Niš, like Leskovac, Zaječar, Valjevo, were also taken to camp Niš. After the February 12, 1942 camp break-out and escape of 105 inmates (42 perished during the break-out, 6 escapees were captured later) from the part of camp where Serbians were held, German authorities initiated mass executions of Jewish prisoners. Women and children were transferred to the Belgrade Sajmište camp and killed there.⁷⁴

The agony of Jews in other areas of Serbia under enemy occupation (Bulgarian, Hungarian, Albanian and the ISC)

From the end of April 1941, parts of southern Serbia (the towns of: Vranje, Pirot, Caribrod, Bosilegrad and part of the Leskovac region), a part of Kosovo (Gnjilane, Kačanik), and a greater part of the territory of Macedonia along the Vardar river, came under occupation of the Bulgarian army and were soon after annexed by Bulgaria. In January 1942 due to relocation of German troops to the Eastern Front, the Bulgarian zone grew larger by yet another five eastern Serbian counties (Niš, Leskovac, Jagodina, Knjaževac and Čuprija). Further relocation of German troops saw the greater part of “Rumpf Serbien” (Remaining Serbia, or “Serbian Torso”, as the territory was named in German documents) handed over to Bulgarian troops.⁷⁵

Jews from Pirot shared the destiny of their nationals from other territories under Bulgarian occupation and subsequent annexation (Vardar Macedonia, Thrace). On March 12, 1943, Bulgarian authorities rounded up all Pirot Jews. After a week of imprisonment, they were transported by cattle wagons to the Danube port of Lon in Bulgaria where they were placed on steam ships and, together with Jews from Thrace and Vardar Macedonia, shipped to Vienna. Their final destination was the Treblinka death camp where all the Jews of Pirot perished. The only members of the Pirot Jewish Community who survived the war and lived to see its end were a few men who spent the war in German imprisonment as POW officers and soldiers of the Yugoslav army and a few others who had escaped arrested by fleeing the town.⁷⁶

After the April war, the territory of Kosovo and Metohija was occupied by German troops. Once the border lines between occupation zones were in place, the greater part of this territory became a part of the zone under Italian “influence”. That part of Kosovo and Metohija,



integrated into the Italian protectorate of “Great Albania”, was governed by domestic Albanian collaborationist authorities. The North of Kosovo with its town Kosovska Mitrovica remained within the boundaries of Serbian territory under German authority for reason of control over the Trepča lead mine. A part of Sandžak was attached to Italy’s Montenegrin occupation zone.⁷⁷

Inside this territory there lived a small Jewish Community (approximately 400 members) which was initially joined by a group of some 50 immigrants from Central Europe and later a large number of refugees from Serbia occupied by Germans seeking refuge in these parts on account of a more tolerant Italian policy toward Jews. The greater part of these refugees was interned inside an improvised camp in Priština at the beginning of 1942. In March 1942, a part of the inmates-refugees was handed over to German authorities and transported to the Belgrade Sajmište camp where they were killed during the month of April. Other Priština prisoners, both Kosovo Jews and refugees from Serbia, were transferred to Albania to the camp in Berat where they remained up to the capitulation of Italy. After Italy’s capitulation, authority over Kosovo was handed over to domestic Albanian Fascists endorsed by Germany. In May 1944 Albanian collaborationists, primarily members of the Wafen-SS division “Skenderbeg” - a volunteer formation of chiefly Kosovo Albanians - together with the local Albanian police and GESTAPO, arrested the remainder of Jews in Priština and other Kosovo towns and transported them to the Belgrade camp Sajmište. From there some 400 Jews, together with a group arrested in Montenegro (mostly refugees from Serbia), were transported to concentration camp Bergen-Belsen. Out of this group, around 100 Jews survived the war.⁷⁸ In March 1942 the GESTAPO arrested almost all members of the Novi Pazar Jewish Community (230 out of its 292 prewar membership). Jews from Novi Pazar were transported to the Sajmište camp and all perished inside

the gas chamber vehicle.⁷⁹

The region of Bačka (the area between the rivers Danube, Sava and Tisa), with a population of predominantly Serbs, as well as a large numbers of Hungarians, Germans and other ethnic minorities, was occupied and annexed by Hungary in 1941.⁸⁰ The neighbouring region of Serbian Banat with a similar ethnic structure, due to disagreement between Hungary and Romania, remained officially within the borders of Serbia although complete control and authority was given to the leadership of the German minority.⁸¹

The incursion of Hungarian troops into Bačka in the spring of 1941 was marked by atrocities against Serbian civilians when approximately 3.500 individuals were killed. Among the victims was a smaller number of Jews. From the first days of Hungarian occupation, Jews were exposed to plundering of property, maltreatment, forced labour, payment of contributions to Hungarian “commissars” placed inside Jewish shops, and internment into camps and prisons.⁸² Jews who had not been domiciles of Bačka prior to 1918 were banished to Serbia, to the territory of Banat, Croatia, or were directly handed over to German occupation authorities in Serbia. Apart from this prerequisite, Hungarian occupation authorities called for additional “verifications of status” as an excuse for further extortion and blackmail.⁸³

At the end of 1941 Hungarian anti-Semitic legislature was officially enforced in the territory of Bačka, a step which ostensibly proscribed “legal grounds” for the ruinous practice already adopted by Hungarian authorities regarding the Jews of Bačka, especially when it came to requisitioning of their property and complete banishment from public economic activities.

The joint engagement of the Hungarian army and the gendarmerie, assisted by one segment of domestic Hungarian Fascists and *volksdeutsche*s, initiated in January 1942 in Novi Sad and south Bačka under the pretext that



it was triggered by acts of Serbian “rebels” and “Chetniks” against the Hungarian armed forces, announced an even more dramatic phase. The actual activity had been prepared, planned, and the reason for it fabricated in order to eliminate by one stroke any future resistance as well as Serbs and Jews “en masse”. Yet another incentive for the activity was to show Germany that Hungary’s priority was maintaining “order and peace” in the territory under its control. Since this required substantial engagement of military and police forces, Hungary was not in a position to send to the East Front the number of soldiers requested from the government in Budapest.

In the Novi Sad “raid” that took place from January 21 to 23, 1942, according to incomplete data, approximately 1250 Serbs and Jews (of which 819 were Jewish victims of both genders and all ages) were killed in a most brutal way (drowned in the ice-coated Danube, murdered by mallets and knives). In the territory of Šajkaška, arrests and killing commenced at the beginning of January and continued in stages up to the end of the month. In Stari Bečej, of the 215 victims, 110 were Jews, in Čuruga of the approximately 1000 victims, a hundred were Jews; in Žabalj, of the 30 Jews that lived there, 29 were killed. The result of the “raid” was that in many places in Bačka there were no more Jews. The total number of victims of the “raid” was approximately 4000 people.⁸⁴

Horthy’s stepping down from duty and replacement by the leader of Hungarian Fascists, Salashi, and the German occupation of Hungary in the spring of 1944, marked the start of a new phase of terror against the non-Hungarian population which spread over the entire territory of Bačka. It began with the imprisonment of all remaining Jews in Novi Sad and other towns by the GESTAPO during April 1944. The prisoners were first taken to the Bačka Topola camp from where they were transported to Auschwitz. A concentration camp for up

to 4000 people was founded in Subotica, too. Camps existed in neighbouring towns in Hungary; Bacalmas and Segedin. Some 8000 Jews from Vojvodina were imprisoned inside a camp in the Hungarian town Baya by mid May. A total of 14 to 15 thousand prisoners, mostly women, children, the old and ailing were sent by transport to their final destination, Auschwitz. A very small number (approximately 700) was sent to Austria as forced labourers. Round 1500 Jewish forced labourers, sent earlier as a “work unit” to the Ukraine, had already been killed; 2500 Jews from Bačka had been mobilized into “work units” in various parts of Hungary; the greater part of them perished near Sopron at the end of December 1944.

Moreover, the fate of Jewish forced labourers in the Bor copper mines, mostly Hungarian Jews (grouped in two lines for retreat into Hungary, one line numbering 3.600 and the second 2.500 prisoners), should also be taken into account. During the retreat of German and Hungarian troops from Serbia they were murdered (in the vicinity of Pančevo near the village Jabuka, in Srbobran, Crvenka, Sivac). Out of the first line, only 1200-1300 prisoners reached Baya alive. From there the greater part was transferred to camps in Germany. Of the 600 Yugoslav citizens working as forced labourers in the Bor mine, only 9 survived.⁸⁵

Out of the total of 13.590 Jews living in the territory of Serbia under Hungarian occupation, i.e., in Bačka, 10.527 were killed, mainly inside death camp Auschwitz.⁸⁶

The proclamation of the Independent State of Croatia on April 10, 1941, announced the beginning of a four-year period of misfortune, suffering and mass murder for Jews, Serbs and the Roma living within its boundaries as well as all living in parts of Serbia like Zemun and Srem, basically the hinterland of Belgrade but nevertheless territories under ISC control.⁸⁷ In Zemun,



Jews were initially persecuted by German units and the GESTAPO immediately upon their entering the town on April 12, 1941. Soon domestic *volksdeutsche*s joined up with the Germans in the plundering and killing of Jews. The usual restraining measures, standard procedure in territories under German occupation (forced labour, restricted movement, exclusion from engagement in all fields of economy, marking with yellow bands, forbidden access to public institutions, eviction from homes, requisitioning of property especially business facilities, shops and workshops) were enforced.⁸⁸

Upon the surrender of Zemun and east Srem to the Ustashi, the first weeks of their terrorizing rule in cities with Jewish Communities were marked by chaotic plundering of Jewish property, eviction of Jewish families from their homes and unsuppressed “wild” violence, imposition of forced labour duty, extortion and ransome of Jewish Communities, plundering and destruction of temples and graveyards (Sremska Mitrovica, Zemun).⁸⁹ When it came to the plundering of Jewish property in Srem, the Ustashi had competitors in the *volksdeutsche*s.⁹⁰ From nightfall of July 26 till



Jews engaged in forced labour duty in Zemun, 1942

daybreak on 27, 1942, the Ustashi rounded up Jews of Zemun; before dawn on July 27th men were transported to Jasenovac, while the women and children were taken to Stara Gradiška. The greater part of the 573 Holocaust victims of Zemun as well as Jews from other parts of Srem, were killed in these Ustashi death camps.⁹¹

Out of the total of 2.800 Jews who lived in Srem up to World War Two, 2.515 (89,82%) were killed, which made Srem the region with the largest number of Jewish victims.⁹²

Survivors

Another side to the history of the Holocaust in Serbia is its finer part which speaks of the care shown by its citizens to victimized Jews. Providing shelter to their Jewish cohabitants inside their homes, assistance in procuring false identity papers for safe passage to destinations out of harm’s way, accepting and protecting parentless Jewish children inside family circles for the duration of the war, meant placing one’s life at risk and jeopardizing the existence of one’s own family members, but also solidarity with a victimized nation. Just like other European countries that had to face up to and live through the challenging years of war under enemy occupation, in Serbia too, there were “onlookers” to the tragedy of their Jewish neighbours, but also sincere and courageous “supporters” of their struggle to persevere and stay alive.⁹³

From May 30, 1941, a rigorous ban on “aiding and abetting” Jews (*Beherbung-sverbot*)⁹⁴ was enforced. The sanction for breaking the rule and helping Jewish fugitives in any way was to share their terrifying fate in one of the camps or places of execution. War imposed conditions in Serbia and the very state of affairs Serbians had found themselves in by being placed at the top of Hitler’s list of enemies (namely his admonishing statements regarding the Belgrade coup of March 27,



1941, the subsequent brutality of Germany's retribution against Serbia in its April attack on Yugoslavia, and later the reprisals as sanction for mass Resistance uprising against the occupier in the fall of the same year) were such that the survival of the prevailing Serbian population was seriously threatened. The population was exposed to acts of vengeance (execution of hostages, mass internment into camps, arrests, police torture, burning of entire villages as retribution, etc.) from various invaders and collaborationist authorities. The Serbian population was additionally embroiled in the confrontation on its domestic scene between former short-lived allies of the 1941 Resistance movement, the Partisans (NOV) and Chetniks (JVUO), which by the end of the same year, turned into outright civil war. Furthermore, Serbia had to deal with a stream of refugees (round 400.000) from territories under Ustashi, Hungarian, Bulgarian, Albanian-Italian occupation. All this strained living conditions in Serbia, already exposed to deprivation and plunder by its own occupying authorities. Daily life in war-time Serbia meant living in and surviving such conditions.

Individual insecurity and suffering caused by such brutal force and the ideology behind it, all brought closer to home the reality of life of those facing a much graver situation, and the need to do something about it by extending help. What should also be stressed is the collective historical experience Serbia had to overcome during the Austro-Hungarian-Bulgarian occupation during World War One and Serbia's long tradition of resistance and uprisings.

Fleeing towns in search of safer shelter before the approaching persecution began in the first days of the April war in 1941, Jews from Belgrade fled to villages and smaller settlements on the edge of the urban perimeter; subsequently their refugee trails continued mostly southward as far as possible from the German occupying zone. The majority of Jewish refugees from Serbia sought shelter in territories under Italian occupa-

tion along the Adriatic coast or in its hinterland; inside Serbia Jews headed for the territory under Bulgarian occupation, especially Toplica, or to the territories of Macedonia and Kosovo, again further south.

Jewish refugees from Serbia mostly sought provisional shelter inside Kosovo, which was under Italian occupation. In March 1942 Italian and Albanian authorities turned part of these refugees over to the GESTAPO while the remainder were arrested and deported to camps inside Albania.⁹⁵ Approximately 300 Jews from Belgrade escaped to Skopje during 1941. In October 1941 Bulgarian authorities handed over 60 individuals from this group to the GESTAPO. The incident initiated escape to the part of Macedonia's territory under Italian occupation and further on to Albania.⁹⁶

Some 300 Jews, mainly from Belgrade and a smaller number from Sarajevo, managed to reach Boka Kotorska in April 1941 from where they were transported to camps in Albania⁹⁷, and in September shipped to the Ferramonti camp for foreigners near Consenza in the south of Italy.⁹⁸

An undetermined number of Jews from regions of occupied Serbia managed to reach some neutral countries (Spain, Portugal, Switzerland, Turkey) from where the greater part tried to escape to the United States or some Latin-American countries.

Living illegally in hiding in towns or taking flight to the interior of Serbia were options ventured into by a number of Jews. In making such a choice they were obliged to seek help primarily from their "Arian" spouses or friends; however, help very frequently came from people completely unknown to them who chose to disobey the enforced occupation authorities' bans and expose themselves to death punishment rather than forsake or transgress norms of humanity.⁹⁹

In his report to the Yugoslav government in exile on the state of affairs in the country and the life of Belgrade



Jews during the first months of occupation, the chief rabbi of Yugoslavia, Dr. Isak Alkalaj, stressed how, in conditions of depraving measures of the occupation authorities in Serbia “...Jews could carry on and live, if one can call it life, only by the grace of their non-Jewish cohabitants, who try as best as they can to be of help and ease their terrible fate.”¹⁰⁰ Touching on the same subject in his letter to the Presidency of the Jewish God abiding community dated November 2, 1945, Dr. Lavoslav Glesinger reflected that “...in Serbia peasants hid not only Jewish children in their homes but adults also, with sporadic success; however, the goodwill of the people to save victims of persecution was evident. I believe that a few peasants in Croatia did the same.”¹⁰¹ The exact number of individuals who found shelter in Serbia during the war is hard to determine, but the assumption that a couple of hundred persons managed to survive the war in villages inside the country is credible; to survive in Belgrade meant assuming a false identity and living with fake documents.¹⁰² Larger groups went into hiding in Toplica, in the south of Serbia, on the slopes of mountains Kopaonik and Rudnik, as well as in villages of east Serbia.

When it comes to “Arians” who hid and rallied round their Jewish compatriots and neighbours in their wish to help them to survive, it can be surmised from available data that there was no single “behavioral model” applied within parts of the country or social groups. Furthermore, among those who helped, there was not one political or ideological orientation (members of parties and movements with clear-cut Fascist and anti-Semitic program stipulations - like the Dimitrije Ljotić “Zbor” in Serbia - excepted) that could be taken as decisive criteria. In deciding to act and carry out one’s resolution to aid the persecuted in conditions that existed in the territory of Yugoslavia during the war, an individual had to count on the resolve of a great number of other persons to also be of help (family members, neighbours,

at times even entire communities, like a hamlet). The social status and level of education of those who helped also varied; from peasants, the city poor, craftsmen to intellectuals and wealthy industrialists. Among them were very prominent and influential members of local communities; however, the greater part were ordinary people living in towns and in the countryside also afflicted by war-instated conditions. They were the ones who best understood how their Jewish cohabitants were up against a dire fate because of their ethnicity, religious beliefs and origin.

Helping persecuted Jews meant risking the safety of one’s entire family; furthermore, organized rescue of a Jewish cohabitant implied that a smaller or greater circle of accomplices, who frequently for a shorter or greater period of time took into their homes the persecuted as their “relatives”, had to be involved; it also meant that rescuers would have to provide clothing, medicines, food and fake documents and, if needed, search and find a new, safer place of refuge. Frequently facing danger, fugitives had to change up to ten families in several places. The families would hand them over from one to another as they would a sacred object or secret. To take on the task to provide shelter to the persecuted for prolonged periods of time (months or even years) in conditions that existed in Serbia at the time entailed not only a desire to provide aid and a safe haven, but to demonstrate resistance and protest, a specific intimation that one did not accept occupation and the inhumanity of its “laws”.

Such deeds at times necessitated risky alliances with representatives of occupation and collaborationist authorities willing to “turn a blind eye” or sell documents necessary for travel in exchange for money. In some cases (very rare instances!) they even volunteered to be of help.¹⁰³ According to one testimony, the former Prime Minister of the Yugoslav government, Dr. Dragiša Cvetković, during whose mandate anti-Jewish



regulations were passed in 1940, and whose signature introduced Kingdom Yugoslavia into the Tripartite alliance on March 25, 1941, sheltered an entire Jewish family inside his villa in Niška Banja.¹⁰⁴

“Local particularities” engendered by the war in Serbia shaped conditions for keeping Jewish refugees alive. The massive inflow of hundreds of thousands of Serbian refugees from Croatia, Bosnia, Macedonia, Kosovo and the banished colonists from Vojvodina all sought refuge in Serbia, so that frequently in their search of a new identity to shield them from persecution and death, Jews chose to become “refugees” from Bosnia. In reality, those who remained and sought shelter in towns, primarily Belgrade, or fled to smaller towns and country villages were actually turned into refugees inside their own city, i.e., country. Forced to abandon their identity, nationality, religious and “racial” individuality, they had to blend into their new social surroundings (while hiding in mountain villages) in order to become less conspicuous. Better conditions for hiding rested in villages far from the main roads. Occupation and collaborationist authorities had a harder time to reach such areas; however, for Jews cooped up inside cities guarded by sentries and extensive check points, such places of shelter seemed and frequently were unattainable.

The complexity of the actual act to save a Jewish life and its motives is specific for each case. In Toplica, where, according to agreement reached with Bulgarian occupation authorities (deadly enemies from World War One) and the acquiescence of Nedic and the Germans, the Chetnik Duke Kosta Milovanović – Pećanac was given run of the territory, some dozens of Belgrade Jews and fugitives from other parts of Serbia found refuge; furthermore, Jews on their way to Macedonia and Kosovo were also given provisional refuge on their way to safer locations. Peasants from villages around Toplica and mountain Kopaonik- like Konjuve, Blaževo, Grgure, Dankoviće - were aware who they were giving shelter

to. In an attempt to explain what induced him to provide help, a villager (Predrag Vasić from Dankoviće) reasoned that “I regarded everything I did to help Jews as my patriotic duty, for each one of the 98 souls I helped along.”¹⁰⁵



Predrag Vasić receiving the Righteous among Nations medal

Blanka Karić Alkalaj fled from Belgrade to the village of Stepojevci in the city’s vicinity. Milinka Lazarević, the peasant woman in whose house she was staying, on learning that Blanka was a Jewess and that the police was on the lookout for her, asked Blanka to explain “what a Jew was” and the reason why they were being persecuted and hunted down. After the talk they had, Milinka continued to shelter her fugitive and took into her house yet another refugee, Malvina Weiss from Zagreb. She hid both women right up to the end of the war.¹⁰⁶

The fifteen year old Julie Kameny, left without family members, came to the door of his school friend, Alexander Pejić in July 1941. For Belgrade authorities he



became the third child of the Pejić family and stayed with them up to liberation day.¹⁰⁷

A number of Belgrade's most prominent individuals well known to the general public, like the president of the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities in Yugoslavia, Dr. Fridrih Pops, or the famous psychiatrist and stage director, Dr. Hugo Klajn, remained in occupied Belgrade during the length of the war. Dr. Miloslav M. Stojadinović from Belgrade, who was high-posted at the beginning of the occupation in Belgrade City Authority, is one of Serbia's best-known "Righteous". According to testimonies, he saved approximately 80 Jews. Inside churches of Serbia wedding ceremonies between Serbs and Jewesses were held during the war even though a strict veto was imposed by occupation authorities.¹⁰⁸

After the war a number of them received recognition and the "Righteous among Nations" award as a token of gratitude.¹⁰⁹ 128 names of the "Righteous of Serbia" listed (as recorded in 2010) in Jerusalem's Yad Vashem fail to lend sufficient insight into conditions under which help was given to Jews in the territory of Serbia.

The support and solidarity of their often completely unknown rescuers, non-Jewish cohabitants, enabled a small part of the prewar Jewish Community in Serbia to stay alive and witness the end of the war. Together with refugees who returned to Serbia, POWs released from camps, survivors of Partisan guerrilla warfare, and the few who managed to survive the hell of concentration and death camps, the Jewish survivors of Serbia embarked on the difficult task to renew the life of one of its Communities ravaged by the atrocities of the Holocaust to a point bordering on extinction.

Endnotes

1. Citation as per: Ženi Lebl, *Do „konačnog rešenja“*. *Jevreji u Beogradu 1521-1942*, Beograd 2001, p.240, p. 241
2. *Zločin fašističkih okupatora i njihovih pomagača protiv Jevreja u Jugoslaviji.*, editor Dr Zdenko Levental, Beograd 1952, XIX.
3. Jaša Romano, *Jevreji Jugoslavije 1941-1945. Žrtve genocida i učesnici NOR*, Beograd 1980, p.14, p.84, pp. 201-202, pp. 302-306
4. On Jews, officers and soldiers of the Yugoslav army interred in German POW camps see: Jennie Lebl, *Jevreji iz Jugoslavije ratni zarobljenici u Nemačkoj. Spomen.album, pola veka od oslobodjenja 1945-1995-A Memorial of Yugoslavian Jewish Prisoners of War - Half a century after Liberation 1945-1995*, Tel Aviv, 1995.
5. Ž. Lebl, *Do „konačnog rešenja“*. *Jevreji u Beogradu 1521-1942*, pp. 333
6. The last census carried out in Kingdom Yugoslavia in 1931 recorded 68.405 Jews living in the country. Approximations of the actual number of Jews in the territories of Yugoslavia range from 70.000 to over 82. 000; Jaša Romano, *Jevreji Jugoslavije 1941-1945.*, p.14, p. 84, pp. 201-202; Holm Sundhaussen, *Jugoslawien*, in: *Dimension des Voelkermords. Die Zahl der juedischen Opfer des Nationalsozialismus*, Wolfgang Benz (hrbg.), Muenchen 1991, p.312, p.330; Nebojša Popović, *Jevreji i Srbiji 1918-1941*, Beograd 1997, p.195, p.196
7. Milan Koljanin, „Tokovi 'konačnog rešenja jevrejskog pitanja' u Jugoslaviji“, in: *Seminar o holokaustu*, Zbornik radova, Novi Sad 2009, pp. 47-48
8. N. Popović, *Jevreji u Srbiji*, pp.11-24
9. One such example would be *Jugoslovenski narodni pokret* "Zbor" whose leader was Dimitrije Ljotić, or the Croat Ustashi movement, whose activity during World War Two demonstrates the fact. On Ljotić see: Mladen Stefanović, *Zbor Dimitrija Ljotića 1934-1945*, Beograd 1984; On the Ustashi movement and the ISC see: Ladislav Hory-Martin Broszat, *Der Kroatische Ustascha-Staat 1941-1945*, Stuttgart, 1964; Gerd Fricke, *Kroatien 1941-1945. Der «USK» in der Sicht des deutschen Bevollmächtigten Generals in Agram Gleise von Horstenau*, Freiburg, 1972; Fikreta Jelić-Butić, *Ustaše i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska 1941-1945*, Zagreb 1977; Holm Sundhaussen, *Wirtschaftsgeschichte Kroatiens im nationalsozialistischen Grossraum 1941-1945. Das Scheitern einer Ausbeutungsstrategie*, Stuttgart, 1983
10. The chief spokesman and creator of anti-Jewish regulations was Dr Anton Korošec, Minister of education (and former Minis-



ter of Interior), a catholic priest and leader of Slovenian clerical National Party. Although some members of the government were opposed to these regulations they did not vote against their enforcement so as not to “stir matters up”; Mihajlo Konstantinović, *Politika sporazuma. Dnevničke beleške 1939-1941. Londonske beleške 1944-1945*, Novi Sad 1998, p.176, p.181, pp. 184 -190 More on the subject in: Милан Кољанин, *Јевреји и антисемитизам у Краљевини Југославији 1918-1941*, Београд 2008, pp. 404-462. M. Konstantinović was Minister of Justice in the Cvetković-Maček government which signed the accession to the Tripartite pact on March 25, 1941. Two days later the military backed by the bulk of the populace, especially in Serbia, brought down the government which Hitler saw as a personal offense and issued the order to attack Yugoslavia. On this see: Martin van Creveld, *Hitler's Strategy 1940-1941 The Balkan Clue*, London, New York, 1973, pp. 139-177

11. Harriet Pass Freidenreich, *The Jews of Yugoslavia. A Quest for Community*, Philadelphia, 1978, 180; *Pinkas jevrejskih opština Jugoslavije. Enciklopedija jevrejskih naselja od osnivanja do posle holokausta u Drugom svetskom ratu* (the manuscript of Serbian translation), Yad Vashem-Memorijalna ustanova za holokaust i herojstvo, Jerusalem, 5748-1988, pp. 496-498; Ženi Lebl, *Do «konačnog rešenja». Jevreji u Srbiji*, Beograd, 2002, p. 238

12. On Jewish refugees in Yugoslavia up to 1941 see: Milan Ristović, «Jugoslavija i jevrejske izbeglice 1938-1941», *Istorija 20. veka*, 1, 1996: same author, *У потрази за уточитом. Југословенски Јевреји у бекству од холокауста 1941-1945*, Београд 1998. pp. 23-64

13. Mara Jovanović, *Wir packen, wir auspacken...» u : Zbornik jevrejskog istorijskog muzeja*, No. 4, Beograd, 1979, pp. 246-174; Gabriele Anderl/Walter Manoschek, *Gescheiterte Flucht. Der juedische «Kladovo –Transport» auf der Weg nach Palestina 1939-1942*, Vienna 1993

14. *Albert Vajs, 1905-1964. Spomenica*, Beograd, 1965, p.127. Victims of the “Kladovo transport” should be included in the number.

15. Peter Longerich (Hrsg.), *Der Ermordung der europäischen Juden. Eine umfassende Dokumentation des Holocaust 1941-1945*, Serie Piper, München-Zürich, 1989, p. 69

16. *Zločini fašističkih okupatora*, p.15, p. 31

17. Венцеслав Глишић, *Терор и злочини нацистичке немачке у Србији 1941-1944*, Београд, 1970; Walter Manoschek, 'Serbien ist judenfrei'. Militärische Besatzungspolitik und Judenvernichtung in Serbien 1941-42, München, 1993; Hennes Herr und Klaus Naumann (Hg.), *Vernichtungskrieg: Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944*, Hamburg, 1995; Christofer Browning, *The Fateful*

Months. Essay on the Emergency of the Final Solution, New York, 1985; Ženi Lebl, *Do "konačnog rešenja". Jevreji u Beogradu 1521-1942*, Beograd, 2001, pp. 287-338

18. Kristofer Brauning (Christofer R. Browning), «Konačno rešenje u Srbiji-Judenlager na Sajmištu-Studija slučaja», *Zbornik Jevrejskog istorijskog muzeja-Beograd*, Beograd 1992, p. 407.

19. See: Christian Streit, «Wehrmacht, Einsatzgruppen, Soviet POWS and Anti-Bolshevism in the Emergence of the Final Solution», in: David Cesarani (Ed.), *The Final Solution. Origins and Implementation*, London and New York, 1994, pp. 103-118

20. On the division of Yugoslav territory see: Ferdo Čulinović, *Okupatorska podjela Jugoslavije*, Beograd 1970; Klaus Olshausen, *Die deutsche Politik gegenueber Jugoslawien und Griechenland von Maerz bis Juli 1941*, DVA, Stuttgart, 1973, pp. 153- 256

21. Fikreta Jelić-Butić, *Ustaše Nezavisna Država Hrvatska 1941-1945*. Zagreb 1977, pp. 69-96

22. First appointed to the post was Luftwaffengeneral Helmut Forster replaced later in June 1941 by General Ludwig von Schroder. Upon his death in the summer of the same year, Air Force General Danckelmann took over the post. In the second half of September 1941 he stepped down from duty and General Franz Bohme took over the post. In course he was replaced by General Bader in December 1941. On the occupation authorities in Serbia see: F. Čulinović, *Okupatorska podjela*, pp. 378-394.; D. G. Erpenbeck, *Serbien 1941. Deutsche Militaerverwaltung und Serbischer Widerstand*, Studien zur Militargeschichtliche, Militarwissenschaft und Konfliktforschung, Osnabruck, 1976; C. Browning, „Harald Turner und dei Militarverwaltung in Serbien 1941-1942“, In: D. Rebutisch; K. Treppe (Hg.): *Verwaltung kontra Menschenfuhrung im Staat Hitlers*. Goettingen 1986, pp. 315-373

23. Čulinović, *ibid*, id.

24. On this see: W. Manoschek, «Serbien ist judenfrei», pp. 155-168; W. Manoschek, «Gehst mit Juden erschiesen?» Die Vernichtung der Juden in Serbien». In: Hannes Heer – Klaus Naumann (Hg.), *Vernichtungskrieg Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941.1944*, Hamburg, 2. Aufl., 1995, pp. 39-56; W. Manoschek -Hans Safrian, «717./117. ID. Eine Infanterie-Division auf dem Balkan», u: Hannes Heer / Klaus Neumann (Hg.), *Vernichtungskrieg: Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 - 1944*, Hamburg, 1995, In: *Vernichtungskrieg...*, pp. 359-365

25. *Zločini fašističkih okupatora*, .1, 2.

26. Бранислав Божовић, *Специјална полиција у Београду 1941-1944*, Београд 2003, pp. 40-43



27. *Zločini fašističkih okupatora*, .1-2: Milan Koljanin, *Nemački logor na Beogradskom sajmištu 1941 - 1944*, Beograd, 1992, p. 23; Walter Manoschek, "Serbien ist judenfrei". *Militaerische Besatzungspolitik und Judenvernichtung in Serbien 1941-42*, Munchen, 1993, p. 35
28. Walter Manoschek, "Gehst mit Juden erschiessen?". Die Vernichtung der Juden in Serbien, in: Hannes Heer / Klaus Neumann (Hg.), *Vernichtungskrieg: Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 - 1944*, Hamburg, 1995, p. 39
29. Signatories of instructions against Belgrade Jews were Chief of SS Operation Command Major K.L. Kraus and his deputy SS-major Karl Hinze, head of Belgrade GESTAPO.
30. The first commissar was Oto Winzent (real name Franz Riegler), later replaced by Egon Sabukoschek; Ženi Lebl, *Do „konačnog rešenja“*. *Jevreji u Beogradu 1521-1942*, Beograd, 2001, pp. 289-291
31. Dtto, p.306, p.307. Germans delegated Benjamin Flajšer as head of this body due to infirmity he was subsequently replaced by Emil Deutsch.
32. 16.700 Jews lived in the territories of Serbia occupied by Germans, including Banat in 1941. On Holocaust in occupied Serbia see: Crimes of the Fascist Occupants and their Collaborators Against the Jews in Yugoslavia, Belgrade 1957; Venceslav Glišić, *Teror i zločini nacističke Nemačke u Srbiji 1941-1944* (Terror and Crimes of Nazi Germany in Serbia 1941-1944), Belgrade, 1970; Christopher R. Browning, *Fateful Months Essays on the Emergence of the Final Solution* (revised Edit.), New York-London, 1991; Walter Manoschek, "Serbien ist judenrein".....Holm Sundhaussen, *Jugoslawien*, in W. Benz (Hrg.) "Dimension des Volkermords. Die Zahl der jüdischen Opfer des nationalsozialismus, Munchen 1991, pp.325-326
33. *Zločini fašističkih...p.2.*
34. Jaša Romano, *Jevreji Jugoslavije 1941-1945. Žrtve genocida i učesnici Narodnooslobodilačkog rata* (next: *Jevreji Jugoslavije*), Beograd, 1980, p.59, p.61
35. The full name was Belgrade City's Administration Special Police Division, Department for Jews. Its commissioner was Jovan-Joca Nikolić. JIM, Branislav Božović, *Jevrejska policija Odeljenja Specijalne policije u Beogradu*, 2001-2 (manuscript).
36. J. Romano, *ibid*, pp. 62 - 65; *Zločini fašističkih...*, pp. 46 - 51.
37. *Zločini fašističkih...*, p. 7.
38. *Zločini...*, p. 7.
39. J. Romano, *ibid*, p. 14; Holm Sundhaussen, „Die Zahl der jüdischen Opfer des Nationalsozialismus“; in: *Dimension des Volkermords...*, p. 313.
40. J. Romano, n.d., 63; *Zločini fašističkih...*, pp. 9-15; B. Ivković, „Uništenje Jevreja i pljačka njihove imovine u Banatu 1941 – 1944“, in: *Tokovi revolucije I*, Beograd, 1967; Karl-Heinz Schlarp, *Wirtschaft und Besatzung in Serbien 1941- 1944. Ein Beitrag zur nationalsozialistischen Wirtschaftspolitik in Südosteuropa*, Stuttgart, 1986, pp. 294-302.
41. In some places in Banat arrests were made by members of Volksdeutscher organizations before the GESTAPO took over.
42. Branislav Božović, Beograd pod Komesarskom upravom 1941, Beograd, 1998, p. 36, p. 37. The subsequent quota was determined by the Chief Commander of military administration General Franz Bohme following Hitler's orders; from mid September 1941, for each wounded German soldier 50 hostages were executed, for each dead German 100 hostages. Manfred Messerschmidt, „Rassistische Motivation bei der Bekämpfung des Widerstandes in Srbien“ in: *Fascismus und Rassismus. Kontraversen um Ideologien und Opfer*; Hrsg. Von W. Rohr u.a. Berlin 1992, p. 322, p. 323
43. Thus, for instance in the vicinity of Šabac on September 12 and 13 approximately 400 Jewish men natives of Yugoslavia, Jewish refugees and some 160 Roma were shot; on October 7 soldiers of the 717 Wehrmacht infantry division executed 1,800 civilians in Kraljevo, on October 21 in Kragujevac 2,300 civilian hostages were slain; in Šabac and its vicinity the 1. Komp. Des Poliz. Res. Bat. 64 executed 1000 individuals in the Šabac prison, while in its "cleaning" actions the 342 infantry division under General Hinghofer command executed 2,200 civilians. Within the short period from beginning of August 1941 to mid February 1942 the number of civilian hostages executed in Serbia reached 20,149; Manfred Messerschmidt, *ibid*, p. 326; W. Manoschek „*Serbien ist judenfrei...*“, *ibid*, p.78, p.79; Milan Koljanin, *Nemački logor na Beogradskom Sajmištu 1941-1944*, ISI, Beograd, 1992, pp. 38-39
44. *Zločini fašističkih...*, 8; Ž. Lebl, *Do konačnog rešenja...*, p. 310
45. M. Meserschmit, *ibid*, id.
46. Die Ermordung, p. 276, p.287, doc. 119, Brief des Chefs der Ziwilverwaltung in Serbien, Turner, an den SS-Gruppenführer Hildebrandt: Judenerschiessung in Serbien, 17. 10. 1941.
47. M. Koljanin, *ibid*, p. 39.
48. Estimations of Jews killed in this camp rage between 7,000 to 8,000; M. Koljanin, *ibid*, p. 61, p. 62; Ž. Lebl, *Do „konačnog rešenja“...*, p. 328, p. 329. The choice of Belgrade Fair, less than 1 kilometer from the city centre was intended to intimidate civilian population. C. Browning, *Fateful Months. Essay on the Emergence*



of the Final Solution“, Rev. Ed. New York, London 1991, p. 82

49. „...Judenfrage, ebenso wie die Zigeunerfrage vollig liquidiert. Serbien ist einziges Land, in dem Judenfrage und Zigeunerfrage gelost“. Cit. po W. Manoschek, „Serbien ist judenfrei“, p.195

50. Keine Judenfrage Mehr. Nur Juden in Mischehen“) Keine Judenfrage Mehr. Nur Juden in Mischehen“. Cit. as per : Ž. Lebl, *Do «konačnog rešenja...»*, p. 322

51. J. Romano, *ibid*, p. 40, maintains that 210 Jews from Kosovo and Metohija were killed, 260 from Sandžak and 13, 500 from Bačka and Baranja.

52. M. Koljanin, „Tokovi 'konačnog rešenja jevrejskog pitanja', pp. 54-55

53. On collaboration in Serbia see: Branko Petranović, *Srbija u Drugom svetskom ratu 1939-1945*, Beograd 1992, pp. 217-228; pp. 245-252; pp. 363-431; pp. 455-595; M. Ristović, „General Milan Nedić-Diktatur, Kollaboration und die patriarchalische Gesellschaft Serbiens 1941-1944“. In: Erwin Oberlander (Hrsg.) *Autoritare Regime in Ostmittel-und Sudosteuropa 1919-1944*, Padreborn-Munchen-Wien-Zurich, 2001, pp. 633-689

54. Б. Божовић, *Страдање Јевреја*, pp. 208-219

55. Б. Божовић, *Страдање Јевреја*, pp. 257-265

56. Б. Божовић, *Страдање Јевреја...*, pp. 277- 279

57. The territorial authority of the UGB Belgrade City Administration was significantly reduced by the exclusion of Pančevo and Zemun, and was effective in the remaining ten boroughs. In restoring UGB's operation and the police apparatus, Dragomir-Dragi Jovanović's role was of great importance. As former UGB's Chief assistant and consultant of the Ministry of Interior, he was a man trusted by the occupation authorities, especially Hans Helm, Chief of GESTAPO Department in the Command group for Yugoslavia and Karl Kraus, Chief of Gestapo Command group and SD for Serbia. Jovanović was appointed "specially employed commissioner" for Belgrade. He was instrumental in changing the name of the Belgrade police organization renaming it: the Special police; Бранислав Божовић, *Специјална полиција*, pp. 12-16

58. Dr Wilhelm Fuchs held this post from the beginning of the occupation to January 1942, he was replaced by the notorious SS-general August von Meyszner who remained in office up to April 1944; *dtto*. pp. 76-80; W. Manoschek, *ibid*, p. 175 (SERBIAN EDITION)

59. Ženi Lebl, *Do „konačnog rešenja.*, pp. 290-291

60. Б. Божовић, *Страдање Јевреја*, pp. 230-323; Venceslav Glišić,

Teror i zločini nacističke Nemačke u Srbiji 1941-1944, Beograd, 1970, p. 67; *Zbornik dokumenata NOR*, I, 1, 571.

61. Б. Божовић, *Страдање Јевреја*, pp. 209-214

62. Vojni Arhiv (ranije: AVJ), Nedićeva arhiva (Nda), k-1, f 9. Predsedništvo ministarskog saveta, 1/9-5, «Osnovi jugoslovske propasti i nacionalnog preporoda srpstva», 1942.

63. Ženi Lebl, *Do "konačnog rešenja"*. Jevreji u Beogradu 1521-1942, Beograd, 2001, pp. 287-338

64. See: *Logor Banjica- Logoraš. Knjige zatočenika Beograd-Banjica (1941-1944) I, II*, Istorijiski arhiv Beograda (Belgrade Historical Archive), Beograd 2009

65. Бранислав Божовић, *Страдање Јевреја*, p. 300, p. 301

66. *Dtto*, p. 308

67. Ž. Lebl, *Do „konačnog rešenja“*, pp. 312-315

68. Б. Божовић, *Страдање Јевреја*, p.186 i dalje.

69. Milan Koljanin's history of the Sajmište camp is most comprehensive, *Nemački logor na beogradskom Sajmištu 1941-1944*, Beograd 1992. Also: Menachem Shelach, "Sajmište. An Extermination Camp in Serbia", in: *Holocaust and Genocide Studies 2* (1987), pp. 243-260; Christopher Browning, "The Final Solution in Serbia. The Semlin Judenlager. A Case Study", *Yad Vashem Studies*, XV, Jerusalem 1983; same author: *Fateful Months. Essay on the Emergence of the Final Solution* (Revised Edition), New York-London, 1991. pp. 321-327

70. The Roma were also detained inside it.

71. Ženi Lebl, *Do "konačnog rešenja"*, p. 328

72. The labour camp of TOT Organization was in the neighbourhood (Arbeitslager OT). One part of this camp was an admission camp for prisoners (*Anfangslager Semlin*). Prisoners who were not executed as hostages or transferred to other camps inside the Reich and the territory of Poland became part of a multi million forced and "volunteer" workforce toiling for the German war economy. At the beginning of 1944 the camp was, due to "tactical reasons", with no bearing whatsoever on the life of its inmates, formally handed over to the SS Reichfirer's Administrator for Croatia SS general Kamerhofer and later in May to the Security Services of the ISC. M. Koljanin, *Nemački logor na beogradskom Sajmištu 1941-1944*, pp. 293-300

73. W. Manoschek, "Serbien ist...", p. 63- 86

74. Ženi Lebl, *Do konačnog rešenja*, p. 328

75. H. J. Hoppe, *Bulgarien-Hitlers eigenwilliger Verbundeter*, Stuttgart 1979, 121-124; Мирко Стојиљковић, *Бугарска окупаторска*



политика у Србију 1941-1944, Beograd 1989, pp. 57-63; pp. 81-100

76. Ženi Lebl, *Do „konačnog rešenja“*. *Jevreji u Srbiji*, Beograd, 2002, pp. 179-190. Data quoted by the author 187 individual by one source and 152 by a second one.

77. F. Čulinović, *Okupatorska podjela...*, pp. 523-527; Venceslav Glišić, „Albanizacija Kosova i Metohija 1941-1945“ in: *Srbi i Albanci u XX veku*, Zbornik radova, Beograd 1991, pp. 280-287

78. Zločini, pp. 131-132; pp. 134-135; Ž. Lebl, *Do „konačnog rešenja“*, p. 243; Nenad Antonijević, „Holokaust na Kosovu i Metohiji i njegov kontekst“, *Izraelsko-srpska naučna razmena u izučavanju holokausta. Zbornik radova s naučnog skupa, Jerusalem, Jad Vašem, 15-20. June 2006*, pp. 395-401.

79. Ženi Lebl, *Do „konačnog rešenja“*, p. 135

80. F. Čulinović, *Okupatorska podjela Jugoslavije*, Beograd 1970, pp. 558-566; pp. 579-582; Josip Mirnić, «Madjarski okupacioni režim u Jugoslaviji». In: *Les systemes d'occupation en Yougoslavie 1941-1945*, Belgrad 1963, pp. 425-493

81. Sandor Vegh, «Le systeme du pouvoir d'occupation allemand dans le Banat Yougoslave 1941-1944». In: *Le systemes...*, pp. 495-561

82. A number of camps for internment were opened in Bačka like the camp of the Palić road to Subotica, in Stari Bečež, Ada, in Begeč, Bačka Topola, Odžaci, Vizić.

83. Receipts as proof that either grandfather or father had paid county-imposed taxes between 1870 and 1880 payable inside the territory of Hungary as evidence of “moral conduct” and sense of nationality during the period 1918-1941; Zločini, p. 142, p. 143

84. Звонимир Голубовић, *Раџија у Јужној Бачкој 1942. године*, Novi Sad, 1992; same, «Genocid nad Srbima i Jevrejima u Bačkoj januara 1942.», *Vojnoistorijski glasnik*, p. 167, p. 168.

85. *Zločinifašističkih okupatora*, pp. 182-188

86. Milan Koljanin, “Jevreji-žrtve rata 1941-1945.u Vojvodini”, in: *Istina...*, Zbornik radova, Novi Sad 2004, p. 202; Ljubivoje Cerović and others., *Na putu ka istini*, pp. 303-304

87. Fikreta Jelić-Butić, *Ustaše i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska 1941-1945*, Zagreb, 1977, p. 106. J. Romano, *Jevreji Jugoslavije 1941-1945. Žrtve genocida i učesnici Narodno-oslobodilačkog rata*, Beograd 1980, p.14, stated data to the effect that the number of Jews in ISC was round 40.000.

88. Danilo Fogel, *The Jewish Community in Zemun Chronicle (1739-1945)*, Zemun, 2007, pp. 130 - 137

89. In the territory of the satellite Independent State of Croatia (with annexed territories of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbian territory of East Srem) persecution and killing of Jews (approximately in these territories 39.500 in all), Serbs and Roma began immediately upon “independence”, proclaimed on April 10, 1941. Already by the end of April the first camp was opened (“Danica” near Koprivnica) and on June 26 a Special Act was passed on the establishment of camps. Racial laws and a series of other legal by-laws “legalized” measures pertinent to “the final solution” for both the Jewish and Serbian question within the ISC. Jasenovac, a system of camps for mass extinction of Jews, Serbs and other opponents of the Ustashi regime was founded in the summer of 1941. Approximately 20.000 Jews perished inside the camp complex.

90. On Ustashi anti-Semitic politics and practice look in: Zločini fašističkih okupatora..., pp. 54-113; Hory. L.- Broszat M., *Der Kroatische Ustascha Staat*, Stuttgart, 1964; Fikreta Jelić-Butić, *Ustaše i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska 1941-1945*, Zagreb 1977, pp. 178-186; Antun Miletić, *Koncentracioni logor Jasenovac*, pp.1-3, Beograd-Jasenovac, 1986-1987; Ivo and Slavko Goldstein, *Holokaust u Zagrebu*, Liber, Zagreb 2001.

91. Danilo Fogel, *The Jewish Community in Zemun Chronicle (1739-1945)*, Zemun, 2007, p. 150, p. 157

92. Mladenko Kumović, *Stradanje sremskih Jevreja u holokaustu*, Novi Sad 2007, 250-251; Lj. Cerović i dr., *Na putu ka istini*, 251; M.Koljanin, „Tokovi 'konačnog rešenja jevrejskog pitanja'“, p. 51

93. On this European phenomenon see: David Cesarani and Paul A. Levine (ed.), *'Bystanders' to the Holocaust .A Re-evaluation*, London-Portland Or., 2000.

94. *Zločini fašističkih...* p. 42. R. Hilber, *The Destruction of European Jews*, Chicago, 1961, p. 683

95. Pavle Dželetović-Ivanov, *Jevreji Kosova i Metohije*, Beograd 1988, p.139, p.140

96. Ženi Lebl, *Plima i slom*,p. 312, p. 385

97. Arhiv Vojske Jugoslavije (Yugoslav Army Archive), Nr. 23/4 a-1, k 551, Cable from prefect Scassellati to the governor of Dalmatia G. Bastianini, Kotor, 20. July 1941; Ibid. Nr. 34/4a, k 551, Gab. 552, Scassellati - G. Bastianiniju, 28. July 1941.

98. On camp in Ferramonti see: Francesco Folino, *Ferramonti un lager di Mussolini. Gli internati durante la guerra*, Cosenza, 1985; Carlo Spartaco Capogreco, “I campi di internamento fascisti per gli ebrei (1940-1943)”, *Storia contemporanea*, anno XXII, Nr. 4, agosto 1991.

99. One such case in occupied Belgrade has been stated by Ruth



Bettina Birn in her literary piece - Austrian Higher SS and Police Leaders and their Participation in the Holocaust in the Balkans, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, Vol. 6, No. 4, 1991, p. 359, p.369, note 65.

100. AJ 370, AKJ Ankara, f 37, dos. 14, no. 984, Unutrašnje prilike u Jugoslaviji (Internal affairs in Yugoslavia). Report by chief rabbi Dr. Isak Alkalaj “Naši doživljaji i utisci o poslednjim događajima u Jugoslaviji”, (“Our experiences and impressions regarding the latest events in Yugoslavia”) 14. July 1941.

101. JIM, k 63, Jewish Community Zagreb/1943, f 1, letter by Dr. L. Glesinger, Zagreb, November 2, 1945.

102. Zločini fašističkih... p. 42

103. An example is how the secretary of the Jewish Community in Skoplje Josef-Papa Alaluf received warning prior to the arrest of all Jews in Macedonia in March 1943 from the secretary of Skoplje county hall Mr. Železkov to flee the territory.: Ženi Lebl, *ibid*, p. 372

104. Ž. Lebl, statement made by the author in January 1997 in Belgrade. The Minister of labour in the marionette government of Milan Nedić, retired General Čolak-Antić issued a certificate to his class mate, former commander of Pančevo garrison, Colonel Avram Berah, as confirmation that German occupying authorities have exempted both Avram and his wife from anti-Jewish regulations, allowing them unrestrained movement without the wearing of the yellow band. The minister’s intervention enabled Behara and his wife to live through the war in Belgrade; Dr. Isak Eškenazi, *ibid*, p. 18

105. JIM, Dosije pravednika, pismo P. Vasića dr Lavoslavu Kadelburgu, 18. oktobar 1994.

106. Jaša Almul, „Šta je to Jevrejin?“, Politika, 6. maj 1989

107. Jaša Almul, „Pejićevi postaju „pravednici“, Politika, 3. maj 1989.

108. JIM, Dosijea “Pravednika”; Milan Ristović, *Upotrzi...65-82*; “Bez žute trake”, Večernje Novosti, dec. 1959, Jaša Almul, „Život i stradanje“, Politika, 8. maj 1989. Beginning with 1964 and up to January 1996, 135 individuals from Yugoslavia (of which number 75 from Serbia) received the award “Righteous among Nations”. By 2010 the number of Righteous from Serbia rose to 129. Marriages between “Arians” and Jews provided some kind of protection even for Jews in the ISC. A special aspect of induced refuge into a new identity was conversion to another faith most frequently Catholicism and Islam in Croatia and Bosnia. In the eve of World War Two a few hundred of Zagreb’s Jews converted to the Catholic faith which roused protest among their co-nationals. In Sara-

jevo in 1941 in fear of Ustashi slaughter 190 Jews converted to the Catholic faith and Islam (only 6 to the Orthodox faith since in light of Ustashi anti-Serbian politics it could not grant protection). However, Ustashi racial laws ruled out change of Jewish status by conversion to another faith.

109. In 1953 the Israeli parliament (Knesset) adopted an Act by which persons who, putting their lives at risk, helped in the rescue of persecuted Jews during World War Two were to receive recognition in the form of a special decoration “Medal of the Righteous among Nations” as a token of gratitude; Mordecai Paldiel, “To the Righteous among the Nations Who Risked Their Lives to Rescue Jews”, *Yad Vashem Studies XIX*, 1988, pp. 402-425. According to data of the Jerusalem memorial centre “Yad Vashem” up to 1991 the “medal of the Righteous” was granted to 135 Yugoslavs; more than a half of these individuals were from the territory of Serbia.



Dr. Milan Koljanin

**THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN SERBIA AND
THE STATE OF YUGOSLAVIA (1918-1941)**

**The Jewish Community in Serbia and the state of
Yugoslavia (1918-1941)**

In the Principedom and later Kingdom of Serbia Jews were a minority population and in comparison to Jews living in Central and Eastern Europe played no important role in the social and above all economic structure of the country. However, they formed a large part of the urban population foremost in Belgrade where their engagement in business, mainly trade was significant. Their residential zones and the total of their social-economic and cultural life set them aside as a compact ethnic and religious group and for a long time kept them apart from the general environment.

Inside rebelling Serbia at the time of the First Serbian Uprising Jews lived exclusively in towns, mainly in Belgrade. Around 1000 Jews lived within the city in 1804. When the Uprising was crushed in 1813, together with other citizens they fled from Belgrade before the Turks could leash their revenge on them. After the Second Serbian Uprising, during Prince Miloš's long reign, the life of the Jewish Community once again took shape. The functioning of the Belgrade Jewish Community was renewed and active; in September 1819 the refurbished building of the synagogue was consecrated. Once again the school for Jewish children began to work with teachers for both religious and secular subjects. According to the registrar of tax payers from 1827 there were 22 teachers, clerics and pupils exempted from tax obligations.

The greater part of Belgrade Jews lived almost exclusively on Jaliija and in Dorćol, the part of Belgrade that slants toward the river Danube. Heading the community

was the "*kmet*" (chieftain) who with other members of the Community administration looked after of the synagogue and school and represented the Community before state authorities. He produced a list of tax payers and twice each year collected tax duty which was handed over to the authorities in keeping with the rest of the tax paying populace on May 6th, Djurdjevdan and November 8th, Mitrovdan. He was also responsible for Jewish traders and craftsmen who for a long time were denied membership in guilds and were prohibited to take on non-Jewish apprentices and journeyman.¹

After Serbia's gained its autonomy by the 1830 and 1833 decrees and its substantiation by the Constitution of 1838 the number of Jews in Serbia, primarily in Belgrade rose gradually. According to the craft's records list from 1836, the number of tradesmen, i.e., shopkeepers among Belgrade Jews stands out in comparison to other crafts, there being 80 of them. There were also five tinsmiths, four exchangers, four cordsmen, two innkeepers, two commission store owners, two grocers, one tobacconist and one department store owner. The records from February 1837 show that out of 1.322 tax payers within in the city of Belgrade, 132 (10%) were Jews. The rising number of Jews had its roots in the politics of Prince Miloš who did not discriminate his subjects based on religion. Moreover, he was favourably inclined toward Jews among whom he had close business and personal friends. He invited foreign craftsmen and experts of all trades to settle in Serbia where they would be granted Serbian citizenship.

By right of bestowing privileges Prince Miloš gave Jews a special status releasing them of certain obligations that other citizens were required to honour. On account of this, at the beginning of the thirties an extensive correspondence between the Prince and the Administration of City Belgrade was carried on, the latter being indecisive as to the implementation of the above exemption. Moreover, according to the Prince's "Proclamation", settle-



Prince Miloš Obrenović – ruler of Serbia under whose reign Jews enjoyed exceptional rights and protection

ment of all disputes implicating Jews was solely at the discretion of his office. A few years later the Prince's privilege was annulled. From 1836 Jews were required to honour the same obligations as everyone else. In Miloš's Serbia incentive was given to Jewish cultural life. "Knjažesko-srbska tipografija" (The Prince's Serbian Typography), the first printers in re-established

Serbia, began work in 1832 and very soon procured a "čivutska", Hebrew letter type, so by 1837 three Hebrew books at the time referred to as Jewish books, had already been printed. The printing house soon won acclaim for its versatility so that books were not only printed by Serbian Jews but by those from: Bosnia, Bulgaria and other parts of the Ottoman Empire culturally influencing the life of Jews throughout the Balkans.

The acceptance of Jews into the Serbian milieu was acknowledged by recognizing their own self-definition i.e. their Jewish identity. The Turkish name for Jews, Čifut(in) or Čivut(in) was replaced by Jew(ish), as they named themselves. Within the Serbian Jewish Community the process of social differentiation was in progress and the number of their impoverished was not insignificant. Those classified as poor held low-pay jobs or worked as hired help. According to the 1838 registrar of guilds in Belgrade, out of the 179 Jewish tax payers, there were 20 paupers. The list from 1855 states that of the 68 Jews, Turkish subjects living in Serbia, 10 were

day labourers, 8 were servants, and 8 porters.

The setting up of institutions of a national state required unification of administration and businesses, a process that collided with deeply rooted traditions. The Serbian town milieu, thus far of multi-national origin, was swiftly acquiring a Serbian national physiognomy, which resulted in a noticeably increased delineation of Jews within their surroundings. Similar to other European countries, the pace of business and general civic life in Serbia was based on the Christian calendar. Argument developed on the matter of Christian and Jewish work-free days which did not coincide. On this issue Jews were again obliged to accept the unification system effected in Serbia at the end of 1839. A new step in the integration of Jews into Serbian society was asserted by the passing of the Decree on guilds dating from 1847 by which relations in this sphere were regulated. The ensuing incorporation of Jews into the guild organization had its many problems.²

On one hand, manifestations of anti-Semitism in Serbia were mainly an expression of the antagonism of the Serbian trade and craftsmanship populace contesting competition; they were also the product of a xenophobic predominantly agrarian society. As with other spheres of social development, in the issue of civic liberties, Balkan countries lagged behind developed European countries; among other, the establishment of complete equality of its Jewish citizens stood prominent. However, the fact that Jews were given full citizen rights in most of the west and central European countries as late as mid nineteenth century should also be noted.

The influence of the Serbian trade and guild populace on the issue of Jewish business competitors was especially felt during the reign of Prince Aleksandar Karadjordjević and the Constitution defenders, as well as during the second reign of Prince Mihailo. Serbian traders and craftsmen protested against the favouritism



enjoyed by Jewish/foreign subjects protected by capitulation - Turkish international contracts - which Serbia as its subjugated principedom was obliged to observe. By 1844, the scope of Jewish business dealings was restricted; ownership of real estate beyond Belgrade was prohibited. Many were forced to either wind-up their business or relocate from Belgrade or the country itself. Mid 1845 saw a total of 1.476 Jews living in Belgrade of whom 129 owned houses and stores while 235 had no property of their own. Permanent residence of newly arrived Jews into Serbia was hindered although such limitation was not strictly abided by. This was confirmed by the new Act passed in 1856.

Immediately on his return to power in 1859, Prince Miloš abolished all anti-Jewish laws by decree. However, they were reinstated during the reign of his successor, Prince Mihailo. By an Act of Parliament passed in 1861, settlement of Jews in interior Serbia was again prohibited. The major part of those barred settlement moved to Belgrade while others left Serbia. However, after a number of interventions made by representatives of European countries and the request of the “General Jewish Alliance”, the Serbian government again by decree endorsed settlement of Jews in Serbia and the return of those ousted. Residence and employment restriction in Serbia did not apply to Jewish physicians who played a major role in the organization of its medical (military and civil) services.

Everyday life brought Serbs and Jews together impelling them to maintain interaction. The shared threat of the Turkish army and the liberation wars fought by Serbia against the Ottoman Empire contributed to closer relationships and cohesion between Serbs and Jews within the Principedom. In Serbian towns Jews were equally exposed to all forms of violence from the Ottoman authority, which, in the end, erupted in a major conflict at the beginning of June 1862. The Turkish bombardment of Belgrade made Jews temporarily relocate from

the country by moving to Zemun. They were forced to such action since their houses were in the vicinity of the walls of Belgrade tower and were exposed to the brunt of Turkish artillery. Concurrently, Serbian troops took over the Jewish quarter and used it as a fortification point during battles. Jews had no option but to migrate, taking bare essentials with them.

The process of Turkish emigration, i.e., namely of the Muslim population, that commenced in the aftermath of the 1862 bombardment of Belgrade and ended when the cities were handed over to the Serbs in 1867 brought a major change to their ethnic structure. Towns soon became prominently Serbian. Already in 1862 the Serbian and Greek-Tzintzar Orthodox population of Belgrade added up to 89% of all Christians. Of the total city populace, 10,4% were Jews. The handing over of the remaining towns in the Principedom into Serbian hands was an important milestone and happy occasion in which Belgrade Jews partook in equal measure with the rest of the citizens.

There were no organized anti-Semitic groups within the political life of Serbia nor was anti-Semitism bred within its population. Despite the anti-Jewish measures undertaken by Prince Mihailo, there were no anti-Semitic prejudices within the Obrenović dynasty and meritorious Jews were held in favour. During Mihailo's reign, two state Jewish schools were opened in 1864, one for boys and the other for girls. Cordial relations with the Jewish Community and its representatives were maintained also by their successors the Karadjordjević dynasty. The Constitution of 1869 guaranteed freedom to all Serbian citizens and the right to property; all were made equal before the Law. The official religion was the Orthodox faith but all other recognized religions were allowed and protected by law, among them the Jewish faith as well. Recognition of Jewish faith and tradition was not a bare formality; it was respected even in the case of Jewish convicts.



Notwithstanding constitutional clauses, Jews were still limited in respect of place of abode and ownership of property outside Belgrade since the anti-Jewish laws passed in 1856 and 1861 remained in force. According to the 1869 Constitution, conscription of Jews was obligatory although they were bared from commissioned ranks up to the wars of 1876-1878. During these wars Jews proved themselves as brave soldiers and members of the military sanitary corps. That Jews were socially acknowledged and that individuals among them were duly respected is best documented by the fact that in the 1877 elections for the Great National Assembly by a majority of votes out of eight of its elected Belgrade members, one was a Jew.

The stated forms of discrimination affected Jews up to the international recognition of Serbia's independence at the Berlin Congress on July 13, 1878. By Article 34 of the Peace Agreement, the Great Powers recognized the independence of the Principality of Serbia obliging Serbia to conditions stated in the following Article of the Agreement. According to Article 35 of the Agreement, difference in faith and religion practicing within Serbia could not be an impediment to enjoyment of equal civic and political rights, to employment in public services or engagement in different trades and jobs "wherever this may be". Citizens of Serbia of all religions were granted freedom of worship rites in public and freedom of hierarchal structure.³

Serbian Jews were guaranteed full civic equality by the 1888 Constitution. The Constitution ranked among the most liberal statutes of Europe at the time. The following decades saw an accelerated progress and integration of Jews into Serbian society. Such accelerated development resulted in the emergence of a new social structure where origin and tradition were in retreat before the new values of civic society and had its effect on both Jews and their social surroundings.

After Serbia gained independence, individual anti-Semitic outcries and newspaper accounts were relatively rare. It soon became evident that such cases were above all integrated into political contentions and served to disqualify the opposition. To some extent the Serbian environment maintained a different stance toward Jews who had lived in Serbia for generations and who were predominantly Sephardim, and the newly arrived Austro-Hungarian Ashkenazi Jews. Life alongside generations of Jews had been a shared one where the good and the bad had been seen through together. On the other hand, the new arrivals brought with them a novel spirit, customs and habits not only foreign to Serbs, but to Sephardim Jews as well. They differed not only in the language they spoke but in customs, places of abode and burial grounds. Right up to 1912, the official language of the Belgrade Ashkenazi Community was German.

Acquirement of full civic equality resulted in a rapid growth of the Jewish populace in Serbia although their number was still relatively low. This growth in population was most prominent in towns, mainly Belgrade, where the centuries old oriental tradition refused to give way to European practices easily. From the mid seventies, the number of Jews in Serbia was growing fast and their numbers within the total of its population was increasing: in 1874 there were 2.049 Jews (0,15% of the 1.353.890 inhabitants of Serbia). Ten years later, in 1884, the number reached 4.160 Jews (0,21% of 1.901.736 inhabitants). According to the census of 1890, there were 4.652 Jews living in Serbia (0,22% of the 2.161.961 inhabitants). By 1900, this number increased to 5.729 (0,23% of 2.492.882 inhabitants). During the next decade the increase in the number of Jews slowed down and their share in the total population also decreased; in 1910 out of Serbia's 2.911.701 inhabitants, 5.997 or (0.2%) were Jews.

More than four fifths of Serbian Jews lived in Belgrade. Their numbers rose constantly although their share in



the total number of Belgrade's citizens declined owing to the great mechanical inflow of people into Serbia's capital. Among its 27.605 inhabitants there were 1.754 Jewish residents (6,35%) in 1874; in 1884. out of the 35.483 inhabitants 2.177 (6,14%) were Jews; and in 1890, out of 54.249 inhabitants, 2.729 (5,03%) were Jews. In the following decade the growth of Belgrade Jewish population was greater than that of the remaining populace: in 1900, out of 69.769 inhabitants, 3.730 (5,34%) were Jews. A decade later in 1910 the increase in the number of Jews continued but at a slower rate than the remainder of the population: out of 89.876 Belgrade inhabitants, 4.193 (4,66%) were Jewish. As before, Jews mostly lived in Dorćol where they counted up to one fourth of its residents.

From the last third of the 19th century there was a period of intensive language acculturation of Jews and replacement of Jewish-Spanish, German and Hungarian with the Serbian language. The cultural and social life of Jews was burgeoning and their participation and role in the economic and cultural life grew in importance. An expression of such a trend was the existence and work of the Serbian-Jewish singing society in Belgrade in 1879, named the First Jewish Singing Society. This choir had a prominent role in the cultural life of Belgrade both prior to and after 1918. Although at the beginning of the eighties there were two Jews MPs in the National Assembly, participation of Jews in public life was limited.

Integration of Jews in the Serbian society as "Serbs' faith" could not be interpreted as assimilation. Although the line of demarcation was a thin one, this assimilation was more a doubled identification where the Jewish and Serbian identity supplemented each. Assimilation was also stalled by the uncompromising link between Serbian nationality and its Orthodox faith; cases of Jews confirming their Serbian identity by converting to the Orthodox faith were exceptionally rare. Such cases were never initiated by the Serbian Ortho-

dox church to which almost all inhabitants of Serbia belonged up to the Balkan wars. However, relations between the Church and the Jewish Community were more than cordial and were maintained at this level by Church seniors. Contemporary Jewish newspapers in Serbia wrote of the attention and respect paid by Serbian authorities and especially the highest ranks of the Serbian Orthodox Church and its vicarage to the Jewish Religious Community.

The pace of social integration of Jews was measured by the strengthening of their economic role in the Belgrade business community on Zerek as well as in other towns in Serbia. The Jewish contribution to the economic growth of Serbia and its subsequent dealings in foreign markets came in the shape of their vast network of business connections. The Jewish Community was also going through a process of social differentiation resulting in a class of rich wholesalers and bankers. Being of limited number, this class progressively lodged itself into the general environment of Serbian politics and to a certain degree, its society.

Upon the Balkan wars of 1912/1913 and the liberation of Old Serbia and Macedonia, the territory of the Serbian state doubled. Within its boundaries now came relatively large communities of Sephardim Jews. The largest among them were those in Bitolj and Skoplje. Serbia's new subjects were expected to accept a new national ideal and culture as well as Serbian governing laws. A number of the most prominent members of the Serbian Jewish Community engaged themselves on these issues among the Macedonian Jews. The process was interrupted by the beginning of the Great War in 1914 and the ensuing Bulgarian occupation in 1915.

During the Balkan wars and the First World War, Serbian Jews proportionally contributed to the war effort. Their endeavour in the liberation and uniting of the country were significant, as were their losses sustained in the



battle fields and the rear lines. Apart from those who were killed in battle, or who died of sustained wounds, or from diseases, many perished in Austro-Hungarian camps. The courage of Jews and their dead, killed in the battle for liberation, was highly regarded. The deference for their war effort fortified Jewish integration into the Serbian environment. Witness of this is best found in the impressive monument standing by the entrance into the Jewish (Sephardim) cemetery in Belgrade and contemporary media publications and literature. The accentuated national and patriotic feeling of Serbian citizens was equally shared by Serbian Jews.⁴

Inheriting the liberal policy of the Serbian state, the



Memorial commemorating Jews killed during the Balkan wars and WWI – the Jewish Cemetery in Belgrade

Kingdom of Yugoslavia was able to extend full equality and prosperity to its Jewish Community for almost the entire period of its existence. This approach vis-à-vis Jews in the newly founded country was fundamentally a continuation of their status in Kingdom Serbia, i.e., a continuation of the state's liberal regulations.

Relatively small Jewish Communities of different po-

litical, cultural and economic background were integrated inside the Yugoslav state boundaries defined in 1918. The principal distinction between them was their Sephardim and Ashkenazi background. There also existed a separate community of Orthodox Jews of small number. The framework of the newly established country offered the possibility of identification with a new state and national ideal; however, it also provided input for additional strengthening of ethnic identity. For the Jewish Community this was embodied in the form of Jewish nationalism, Zionism, which at the time of the establishment of the Yugoslav state was gaining weight.

Within the boundaries of the new country, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, Jews were practically one of the smallest ethnic, i.e., religious community. Throughout the existence of the Kingdom, their numbers were more or less in the range of half a percent of the total number of inhabitants. This rate of participation gradually receded due to the accelerated growth of the number of other inhabitants. The relatively small number of Jews could best be explained by their association to the major centres of the great monarchies, Habsburg and Ottoman; whereas the lands that formed the new Kingdom were in reality the borderlines of the said monarchies. Two thirds of Jews in the new country of the South Slovenes originated from lands belonging to Austro-Hungary. The new borders had practically separated them from major Jewish centres of the former monarchy, Vienna and Budapest, to which they had been bound in multiple ways. Prior to this, Jewish Communities of Old Serbia and Macedonia went through a similar process after the Balkan wars of 1912/1913.

Conditions in which Jews lived in the Principality and the Kingdom of Serbia during the XIX century were prone to change, at times unfavourable due to the launching of a national marketplace and capital. The structuring of a liberal civic society, especially after the 1878 Berlin Congress and the gaining of full citizen equality



in its aftermath, brought a relatively speedy integration of Jews into Serbian society. Jews lived mostly in the capital of Serbia, Belgrade, while smaller communities existed in Niš, Smederevo, Šabac and a few other towns. The patriotism of “Serbs of Moses’ faith” which became markedly evident at times of war was equal to that of Orthodox Serbs. This patriotism did not imply loss of Jewish identity; for Jews from these parts the problem of assimilation was never raised as it was not expected. The toil and human loss that the Balkan wars and especially the First World War brought with them, sustained equally by Jews, was accepted as normal and befitting a Serbian patriot. Such dedication only fortified the sense of belonging to the Serbian, and later to the wider Yugoslav, community. The sense of freedom and connection to the wider community was a result of the parliamentary democratic system. The instituted civil rights were structured by the state’s elite educated in the liberal West and were primarily based on the French political and cultural model.

Upon the Balkan wars of 1912/1913, the territory of Old Serbia and Macedonia together with its Jewish population became a part of the Serbian state. Macedonian Jews were by far the poorest segment of the Jewish Community in the Yugoslav state and at the same time, the least connected to its other segments. In Old Serbia, i.e., the former Novi Pazar Sandžak, in Kosovo and in Metohija larger Jewish Communities existed in Priština, Kosovska Mitrovica, Novi Pazar and some other towns.

Opposed to Serbia stood the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy with its ossified bureaucratic semi-feudal system, constrained parliamentary *modus operandi*, and the traditional influence of the Roman-Catholic church. Despite the proclaimed civic equality and emancipation, Croatian Zionist noted in March 1918 that Jews within the Monarchy were exposed to numerous forms of discrimination and anti-Semitic newspaper attacks. It is thus understandable why the Zionist movement in

Yugoslav states was most powerful in the very territories of the former Monarchy, and why during the entire period between the two wars, the seat of Yugoslav Zionists was in Zagreb.

Among the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy Jews, who in 1918 found themselves in a new country, three groups stood out in numbers: Jews from the territory of Croatia and Slavonia with Srem, Jews from South Hungary, i.e., Serbian Vojvodina, and finally Jews from Bosnia and Herzegovina. As in other parts of the Monarchy, only Jews stemming from German speaking territories, the Ashkenazi (their commonly used name at the time Eshkenazi) lived in its South Slav dominions up to 1878. After the Monarchy’s occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1878, Sephardim Jews who had settled in this part of the Ottoman Empire upon their expulsion from Spain and Portugal also became subjects of the Monarchy. New state administration and the prospect of new business opportunities intensified the immigration of Ashkenazi Jews to these parts. Some hundred Jews, again mainly Sephardim, had lived in towns along the Adriatic coastline, primarily in Split and Dubrovnik. After living under the rule of Venice and the Republic of Dubrovnik for centuries and briefly under Napoleonic French government, they too became subjects of Vienna.

In the aftermath of the Hungarian-Croatian covenant of 1868, a continuously growing number of Jews came to settle in the territory of Croatia and Slavonia with Srem. Notwithstanding the ties they had with Vienna and Budapest, foremost cultural and economic, Jews increasingly integrated into the Croatian environment. This became apparent with their acceptance of the Croatian language in public communication and eventually among family members. Their influence was primarily felt in a relatively large share they took in economic life and independent professions. Zagreb was the centre of Jewry for these regions while a prosperous and



large community existed in Osijek, and relatively large communities in the towns of Varaždin, Slavonski Brod, Vinkovci, Vukovar, Zemun. Relocation of Jews rose in numbers significantly after the restriction of settlement inside Military boundary zones was lifted; the demilitarization of 1878 and again 1881 brought Jews to almost all towns and most villages inside Srem. In Jewish Communities in Croatia and Slavonija, primarily in the most portentous, the Zagreb community, integrationists (assimilates) were predominantly antagonistic toward the National Jewish Movement. They felt bound to the Croatian National ideology and politics. However, Zionism was gradually gaining a growing number of followers and was dominant in Zagreb after the foundation of the Yugoslav state.

Jews living in Southern Hungary in the territory of the once Serbian Vojvodina, were committed to the sovereign Hungarian nation. Although they were Ashkenazi stemming from German speaking regions and culture, they relatively quickly accepted the Hungarian language, the Hungarian concept of nation, state and culture in the second half of the 19th century. The number of Jews rose constantly, mostly in the Hungarian capital, Budapest, where by 1910 they made up for one quarter of the population. Significant Jewish centres in Bačka were the towns of Subotica and Novi Sad with large communities in Senta and Sombor, and smaller ones in a series of other towns and smaller settlements. In Banat the largest Jewish centre was Veliki Bečkerek (today's Zrenjanin), and smaller ones in Pančevo, Novi Bečej, Vršac, Velika Kikinda and a few other places. The period from the end of the 19th century up to the "white terror" of 1919-1920 was considered by Hungarian Jews as a time of great prosperity, while historians referred to it as the period of Hungarian-Jewish symbiosis, i.e., emancipation and assimilation. Such conditions resulted in the fact that once they found themselves living inside a new state, many Jews sided with ethnic Hungarians in the

feeling of injustice done to them. Zionism in these parts began to take root only after the state of Yugoslavia was formed.

Jews in Bosnia and Herzegovina had lived for four centuries within a traditional oriental civilization, i.e., the Ottoman feudal system which had profoundly embedded itself in the social structure of these regions. The changes brought by the 1878 Austro-Hungarian occupation were significant both for Jews and the rest of the population. As representatives of the new government and men of business, the "new arrivals" were looked upon as "carpet beggars" equally by Jews and the remaining population. Among these new arrivals was a large number of Ashkenazi Jews. However, the new and the old were equally influenced by changing circumstances. Thus the newly arrived Jews came to accept the new milieu, above all by accepting the native Serbian language. The "accelerated" Europeanization of these regions, with all its controversies and injustices, was in part effected by the presence of Jewish capital and entrepreneurship from other parts of the Monarchy. All this brought great change into the traditional way of living affecting all, Jews included. Improvements in living conditions were especially felt in the field of health protection where physicians, new arrivals of Jewish origin, played an important part. Here too, the Zionist movement developed gradually with the membership accepting the national name of *Židov* (Jew) opposed to the traditional name *Jevreji* (Jews).⁵

According to the first census of the population of the Kingdom of SCS in 1921 of the total number of inhabitants 12.017.323 there were 64.159 (or 64.746), i.e., 0.53% Jews. That same year the census of the Ministry of religion registering citizens by their religious persuasion, showed that the figure was somewhat lesser, i.e., 64.405 were Jews or 0.49% of the total of 13.934.038 inhabitants. In 1931 the new census of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia showed that there were 68.405 Jews living



in the country which made for 0.49% of the total of 13.934.038 inhabitants. Although the number of Jews had increased in a decade by 4.246, i.e., 6,62%, their participation in the total number of citizens was mildly declining due to an almost twice lower natural increase in population in comparison with other ethnics.

There are great disparities concerning the number of Jews in Yugoslavia originating from Jewish sources. According to records of the Federation of Jewish Communities from 1933, there was a total of 75.000 Jews living in the country at the time. They lived in a total of 109 organized Jewish Communities. Jaša Romano calculates that there was a total of 82.242 Jews living in Yugoslavia just before the war, which is in all probability the most accurate count.

According to the 1921 and 1931 censuses' recorded data, some basic parameters about the Jewish population in Yugoslavia can be studied. As per the 1921 census, out of a total of 64.159 (or 64.746) Jews, the majority lived in Banat, Bačka and Baranja: of the 1.380.413 of total inhabitants there were 18.777, i.e., 1,36% Jews. In Croatia and Slavonija (with Srem) of 2.739.593 inhabitants, 20.338, i.e., 0,74% were Jews; in Bosnia and Herzegovina of the 1.889.949 inhabitants there were 12.028, or 0.64% Jews; in Serbia (with Macedonia) there were 4.129.638 inhabitants of which 11.731, or 0.28% were Jews. In Slovenia with Prekomurje there were 946, in Dalmatia 322 Jews, and finally only 17 Jews lived in Montenegro.

The 1931 census registered citizens living in the nine (9) provinces and separately for the Administration of the City of Belgrade (the Belgrade Constituency), so only partial comparison with the previous census is possible. The total number of Jews had risen in the previous decade to 68.405 or for a count of 4.246 inhabitants, i.e., 6.62%. However, in comparison with the total increase in population, from 12.017.323 to 13.934.038 inhabit-

ants, i.e., a count of 1.916.715 or 13.75% it was more than twice less. In the Danube region, which included Banat, Bačka, Baranja and the greater part of Srem, as well as Šumadija there were 18.518 Jews (0.77% of the 2.387.295 inhabitants), in the Sava region (Croatia and Slavonija) there were 19.575 Jews (0.72% of the 2.704.383 inhabitants), in the Drina region including Sarajevo, there were 10.043 Jews (0.65% of the 1.534.739 inhabitants), in the Vardar region (Macedonia) there were 7.579 Jews (0,48 of the 1.574 243 inhabitants), in the Vrbaska region there were 1.160 Jews (0.11% of the 1.037.382 inhabitants). In the Dravska region (Slovenia), mainly in Prekomurje, there were 820, in Zetska (Montenegro with Dubrovnik) 610, in Moravska region 586 and in Primorska region 578 Jews. In the area of the Administration of the City of Belgrade (Belgrade with Zemun and Pančevo) there were 8.936 Jews, i.e., 3.1% of the total of 288.938 inhabitants.

Although the increase of the Jewish population in Yugoslavia was twice less than that of the whole population, the rising number of Jewish citizens in Yugoslavia's major cities, such as Belgrade and Zagreb and some others, to a certain degree kept pace with the subsequent increase of town population. This fact indicates that the Jewish population had a tendency to concentrate in large cities mainly by mechanical inflow and to a far lesser degree by natural increase of population. In 1921 out of Belgrade's 111.739 inhabitants, there were 4.844 Jews or 4,34%; in Zagreb out of 108.674 inhabitants, 5.970 were Jews or 5,49%. Ten years later, the 1931 census indicated that the population of Belgrade had more than doubled to a count of 238.775, while the number of Jews rose to 7.906 (3,31% of population) or increased by 3.062 citizens (63,21%). In the same period, the number of inhabitants in Zagreb increased up to 185.581, with the number of Jews reaching 8.702 (4,69% of the population) or rose by 2.732 citizens (45,76%). The increase of Jewish population in the two largest Yugoslav cities



continued throughout the next ten-year period although in smaller numbers, especially in Zagreb. According to an official estimation in 1939, there were 10.388 Jews living in Belgrade, an increase of 2.482 inhabitants (31,39%). In Zagreb the number of Jews increased only by a count of 765 inhabitants (8,79%).

During the thirties the same ratio of increase was noted in other cities in ex-Austro-Hungarian regions with the exception of Banat. Within the decade 1921 to 1931, the number of Jews in Subotica increased from 3.881 to 5.060, or by a count of 1.179 (30,38%), in Novi Sad from 2.594 to 3.764, or by 1.170 inhabitants (45,10%), in Veliki Bečkerek from 1.328 to 1.554, or by 226 (17,02%). Concurrently the number of Jews in Velika Kikinda increased only by 12, from 524 to 536, while in Pančevo a decrease was noted from 603 to 473, a count of 130 inhabitants. By 1939 the number of Jews in Subotica increased to 5.276, i.e., by 216 inhabitants (4,26%), in Novi Sad the number of Jews reached 4.104, an additional 340 inhabitants (9,03%), yet in Banat, in all three mentioned towns, there was a decrease in Jewish population : in Veliki Bečkerek (Petrovgrad) from 1.554 to 1.267, or a count of 287 (18,46%), in Velika Kikinda from 536 to 512, or a count of 24 inhabitants (4,47%) and in Pančevo from 473 to 403, or by 70 inhabitants (14,8%).

In the third major city of Kingdom Yugoslavia with a significant percentage of Jewish population, Sarajevo, the number of Jews increased at a slower rate so that their count in the total of the city's inhabitant decreased. In 1921 there were 7.458 Jewish inhabitants which added up to 11, 25% of Sarajevo's 66.317 inhabitants; ten years later the population of 7.615 Jews presented 9, 74% of the city's 78.173 inhabitants. In Bitolj, the largest Jewish centre in Macedonia, the decrease of population in general, initiated after the Balkan wars, was sustained and proportionally reflected in the number of its Jewish inhabitants. Out of the 3.751 Jews living in

Bitolj in 1921 the number decreased to 3.246 by 1940. Contrary to Bitolj, there was a constant increase of Jewish inhabitants in Skoplje. However, the increase came mostly in the first ten year period of the new Kingdom's existence. From 1921 to 1931 the number of Jews increased from 1.889 to 2.641 or by a count of 752 (39, 8%), while the next decade 1931 to 1940 recorded an increase of only 175 inhabitants (6,62%) adding up to 2.816 Jews.⁶

The traditional system of Jewish organization from times ancient has been the Jewish Community. In modern times it became the cornerstone institution of everyday Jewish life. The period in question was marked by the full affirmation of a novel mode of Community functioning; the Community's foremost religious character had been subdued, transforming the Community into a generating unit of its Jewish membership's many activities. The number of Jewish Communities, members of the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities, as well as the count of their membership fluctuated compared to the number of members of the Association of Orthodox Jewish Religious Communities. Within the period 1937-1938, there were 107 Communities in the Federation with a total of 69.214 members; between 1938-1939, 109 communities with 68.374 members; from 1939 to 1940, 105 Communities with 67.119 members, and finally between 1940-1941, 105 Communities with 67.347 members. Throughout this entire period the number of Orthodox Communities remained the same: 12 with a total of 2.865 members.

In the aftermath of the Great War, although advocating personal initiatives, Zionist leaders from Belgrade and Osijek, Dr. Hugo Špicer and Dr. Fridrih Pops, contributed jointly to the concept of integrated functioning of all Jewish organizations within the new country. Efforts to this end made by the younger generation of Zionists culminated at the Congress in Osijek on 1st and 2nd July, 1919, when the Federation of Jewish Religious Com-



munities of Yugoslavia was founded. Belgrade was chosen for the seat of the Federation. In accordance with regulations approved by the Ministry of Religion of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, the Federation decided on all issues vital to the existence of Jewish organizations and acted as the representative of Jewish ethnics before state authorities throughout the entire period between the two wars. The Federation played an exceptionally important role in the protection of collective and individual rights of Jews inside the Kingdom and was taken as a role model for other European Jewish Communities.⁷

The existence and functioning of prewar Jewish organizations continued in the new Kingdom. However, new social-humanitarian societies, cultural and sports organizations and groups were springing up in keeping with the spirit of the time. All such institutions were incorporated in the day to day life of Jewish Communities. Among the most influential was the lodge of the Independent Order of Bene Berit “Srbija”, founded in 1911 in Belgrade. Its membership assisted in the forming of new lodges in Zagreb, Sarajevo and Osijek after the war thus contributing to the formation of the Great lodge of the Independent Order of Bene Berit for Kingdom Yugoslavia XVIII district in Belgrade in the second half of the twenties. In the thirties lodges were successively founded in Novi Sad, Subotica and Slavonski Brod. Representatives of the Jewish elite were accepted as members of lodges; their engagement was discreet and primarily consisted of humanitarian and cultural work. During the thirties the lodges increasingly alerted to the wave of rising anti-Semitism, both in the country and abroad, and were active in providing relief for Jewish refugees.

A relatively large Jewish publishing business existed in the new state of Yugoslavia primarily in the field of press reporting. An abundance of Jewish newspapers, magazines, calendars and almanacs played a vital role

in the preservation and continuance of Jewish culture. However, traditional cultural forms were giving way to modern day life. The Jewish Community was unremittingly opening up to the general environment. For an increasing number of Jews their day to day engagements were mostly involved and realized in the broader social setting. Such activity was in no way contradictory to their activity within the Jewish Community. Jewish press and magazines adopted the “official” (Serbo-Croatian) language; furthermore official forms of the Federation of Jewish Communities were published and filled-in in Serbo-Croatian.

More visible aspects of Jewish integration were the acceptance of national personal names of the region they lived in and the translation of surnames, a practice more common among the Ashkenazi in Croatia and Slavonija. The disquiet caused by rising anti-Semitism from the second half of the thirties rendered new meaning to the practice. Within the framework of Jewish education, special Jewish schools kept closing down as parents increasingly enrolled children into state schools where classes were held in the “state” language. Through the schooling system, education authorities aimed to affirm ties of its “foreign nationals” to the new country and its language, with special guidelines for Jewish children from former Hungarian state territories. In the liberal civil state, religion was becoming less influential in everyday life, especially among younger generations, including young Jews.⁸

Due to historical reasons, the Jewish population lived exclusively in towns, a fact that dictated the choice of crafts and vocations they dealt in. The professional structure of Jews was commonly referred to as an upside-down pyramid in comparison to their percentage in the formation of the population since the greater part of Jews were traditionally employed in so-called unproductive jobs. According to Federation of Jewish Communities data, Eduard Mosbaher estimated that



in 1937 some 80% of the total of employed Jews held jobs in commerce, banking, industry and crafts. Another 10, 8% were state and administrative office employees or had independent professions working in Jewish Communities.

Out of the entire population of Yugoslavia according to the 1931 census, 76, 3% was employed in agriculture, cattle raising and fisheries and 10,7% in industry and crafts. The two added up show that over 87% of the Kingdom's inhabitants were employed in so-called productive/labour-intensive jobs leaving some 10% in unproductive jobs. Thus the percentage of Jewish participation in jobs they traditionally dealt in was extensive; e.g., in commerce where the number of Jews employed was ten times that of the rest of the population. The given structure did not alter in any significant way during the period between the two wars. It was dictated by historical circumstances in which Jews had lived throughout centuries and was similar to the professional structure of Jews in other European countries.

Social stratification of Jews had its specifics. Nevertheless, the number of Jews classed as poor, even destitute, was not insignificant. This was characteristic of certain Jewish Communities like the one in Bitolj. Among Jews, as with the population in general, place of residence was an obvious form of class differentiation. This was particularly felt in large Jewish centres like Belgrade and Sarajevo. Although an accelerated rate of development brought changes to such milieus, the Sephardim Community in Belgrade continued to be vis-

ibly divided among the rich who lived above Dušanova (former Vidinska) Street, and the less fortunate who lived in the Jewish quarter, i.e., Mahala, spreading from Dušanova to the bank of the Danube. The setting up of a liberal capitalist society in the new state of Yugoslavia meant that in the matter of social status, class identification and political engagement had more bearing than ancestry.

Education of Jews was in correlation with the stated professional structure. In comparison to their participation in the populace (0, 46), the number of Jewish pupils enrolled in elementary school was twice less (0, 23%) in the school year 1938/1939. However, Jewish pupils made up for 1, 51% of technical secondary school pupils, 2,57% of grammar school students and even 4% of trade academies' students. Their traditional predisposition for education and study, in all probability due to a relatively better standard of living, resulted in the fact that the number of Jewish students by far exceeded



Students of the First (I) Belgrade grammar school - generation 1938



the ratio of their numbers in the total count of inhabitants. Of the 11.223 students in Yugoslavia in 1923, there were 436 Jews or (3, 88%). In 1929 the number of Jewish students grew faster than that of other students so that out of 13.544 students, 582 or 4, 29% were Jews.

The professional structure of Jews defined their participation in different fields of economy. Their economic wealth largely exceeded the ratio of their participation in the total populace. An explanation to the fact is found both in historical conditions of their progress and the challenge of living and working conditions Jewish Communities had to adapt to; on the whole, unfavourable and frequently hostile. The outcome of such circumstances resulted in their traditional intermediary role in the structure of economy while their own interconnectedness and mobility of capital brought impetus both to them as a group as well as to the greater community they belonged to. The role of Jewish Communities in the modernization of Balkan societies and acceptance of European standards was unquestionably large. Frequently Jewish capital had a dual effect, being nationally and internationally connected to Jewish capital in the great and developed countries. When it came to Balkan countries, such connections were primarily maintained with Austro-Hungary and the formidable Jewish Communities existing in Vienna and Budapest. This association had great impact on domestic capital and subsequently on the recognition of the Jewish Community within the country's social environment post 1918.

In the newly founded state of Yugoslavia, the prewar borderline regions of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy where Jewish capital had already acquired a firm standing, Slovenia excepted, now became the state's most active and developed areas. Thus Jewish domestic and foreign capital gained an important place in the economy of Yugoslavia. The influence of Jews on economy and their interconnections throughout the territory of Yugo-

slavia contributed to the strengthening of the country's cohesive forces.⁹

The legal status of the Jewish Community in the new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was regulated by a liberal Constitution adopted on Vidovdan (June 28th) 1921. The constitution proscribed freedom of faith and values and full equality of all religions recognized by law, i.e., their religious communities. Such communities were free to self-administer all matters pertinent to their religion and take charge of management of their memorials, bequests and funds. "Approved and recognized," i.e., religious communities that were acknowledged by law were the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic with the Greco Catholic Church, the Evangelistic Church, Islam and the faith of Moses. Such status of the Jewish Religious Community was guaranteed by the new September or Oktroisani Constitution of 1931.¹⁰

According to official records, among the four main religions the status of the Jewish Religious Community was equal to that of the Orthodox, Roman-Catholic and Islam with equal recognition given to their respective patriarchs. Representatives of the Jewish faith were regularly invited and present at major public gatherings and other state events of importance.

It follows that in Yugoslavia not only were religious rights recognized to the Jewish Community but also the right to self-regulate community inter-relations. However, the community was not given the status of a national ethnic minority, a question never raised by the Jewish Community itself. It should be noted that the position granted to the Jewish Community in Yugoslavia was in general appreciated since, at the time, Jews did not have a national state of their own.

A further facet of the affiliation of the Yugoslav state and the Jewish Community was the high percentage of Jews enrolled in the active, and, especially, in the



reserve formation of the Yugoslav Royal Army. The proportion of Jews in the active formation (2,38%) was almost five times greater than their count in the total populace (0,40%). The fact was closely associated with the issue of Jewish identity and the bond between the state and its Jewish population; again, the relatively high level of education of Jews was another key factor. It should be noted that of the total of 212 active Jewish officers, 74 of them declared themselves as Yugoslavs. The participation of Jews in the reserve formation was by far greater than in the active forces and added up to a percentage of 3,74% of total reserve officers; their number added up to twice the count of all other national minorities. This meant that the presence of Jews in the reserve officer formation was seven times greater than that of their participation in the total populace (0,49% according to the 1931 census). During the entire period between the two wars, within the military corps emphasis was given to patriotism and the Yugoslav ideal; however, strict attention was paid to the difference in religious beliefs. The Catholic and Orthodox Christmas eve, the Jewish Rosch Hodesch, the Ramadan and Byram were celebrated by all in the presence of high ranking officers. In large military garrisons there were also Jewish military priests/rabbi.¹¹

Accepting how Jewish nationalistic (Zionism) goals were close to its own, since the state of Serbia had had to base its own aspirations and rebirth on principles of nationality rather than the principle of legality, the state had recognized Jewish aspirations to its national state. The support of the Serbian government, itself in exile, came in the early years of the First World War shortly after initial international approval was rendered to Zionist goals. On November 2, 1917, Lord Arthur James Balfour, Foreign Minister to Britain, had sent in the name of his government “the declaration of his sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations” to Lord Lionel Rothschild. In the declaration the British government

stated that it looked with favour on the foundation “of a national home for the Jewish people” in the Palestine and that it would take all necessary steps to alleviate the attainment of this goal on condition that nothing must be done “which may prejudice the civic and religious rights of existing non-Jewish Communities in Palestine, or the political status of Jews in any other country.”

Soon after the release of the British governmental declaration, the Serbian plenipotentiary minister, Milenko Vesnić, confirmed in his letter to Dr. David Albala dated December 27th, that Serbia recognizes the contents of the said declaration. In this letter to Dr. Albala, Vesnić a former member of the Serbian mission to the USA expressed the sympathy of the Serbian government and its people toward their Jewish brothers “for the just endeavour of resuscitating their beloved country in Palestine.” With this statement the government of the small, occupied Serbia was the first to follow the British government’s lead in upholding the rebirth of a Jewish state in the Palestine. Contrary to Balfour’s own declaration, which propagated controversy and ambiguities, this support was explicit. In anticipation that the letter would be publicized, it was written in English. Conscientiously, Dr. Albala saw to its publication in all major American newspapers gaining the title of a tolerant, generous and democratic country for Serbia, primarily among influential Jewish circles. The support of representatives of the Serbian government to Zionist goals was sustained throughout the period prior to and after the Great War.¹²

The support of the state to the Zionist effort did not alter after the founding of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes on December 1, 1918. The fact that, as approved by Law, uninterrupted autonomous functioning of Jewish organizations continued on was apparent proof of the state’s position. As the central body of Jewish organizations, the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities noted in 1937 that it had met with consid-



eration and understanding each time the relevant ministry or any other authority within the state had been approached. State bodies and institutions did not interfere in inter-relations between Jewish Communities even in answer to initiatives made by the Community itself for the relative ministry's arbitration in certain inter-Jewish disputes.

At the time of birth of the new state a sound basis for a thriving Jewish Community already existed. Therefore, it was considered that Jewish adaptation to new political circumstances would, in general, be relatively quick and without any major drawbacks. Individual and collective civic rights guaranteed by the Yugoslav state were legally stipulated in the *Act on the religious community of Jews in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia* of December 14, 1929. The financing of the Community was regulated by the *Decree on the fixed annual state backing of the religious community of Jews in Kingdom Yugoslavia* dated April 28, 1930. As asserted by the chief rabbi, Dr. Isak Alkalaj, the requests of the Jewish Community had thus been implemented in full, adding that such "broad-mindedness and liberalism" had not been shown to Jews by any other country. The amount of state subvention for each member of the Jewish Community was two to three times greater than to members of other faiths although from 1934 on this sum gradually decreased.

Zionist organizations in Yugoslavia enjoyed not only governmental support but also that of the Karadjordjević Royal Court by which the tradition founded in times of the Serbian State was continued. Jews, both domestic and from abroad had a high regard for the stance taken by the Yugoslav state and the Court. That after Arthur Balfour, Tomasz Masaryk, Albert Einstein and some other dignitaries, King Petar I Liberator was also honoured with his memorial olive-tree grove in the Palestine in 1930 was a foreseeable outcome of such relations. After his assassination in Marseilles in 1934, King Aleksandar I Unifier was also bestowed a memorial grove. Yu-

goslav Jews organized an extensive donation project for the planting of the forests. Similarly, Zionist leaders and prominent Jewish public campaigners were awarded high Yugoslav decorations. In the League of Nations and other international forums, Zionist standpoints were supported by Yugoslav representatives. As the rising tide of discontent and the persecution of Jews erupted in Germany with Hitler's coming into power top Yugoslav state representatives expressed on many occasions their sympathy for the Jewish Community, their support of Jewish national goals, and consideration for the "hardships it was struggling against to survive." Such official expressions of support waned with the onset of the war in September 1939, a fact directly related to Yugoslav state policy of neutrality.



*Prince Pavle Karadjordjević and Adolf Hitler.
Berlin, June 1, 1939*

In the aftermath of the British establishment of a mandatory territory in the Palestine, the Kingdom of SCS gave its support to plans for the development of a Jewish national state under the mandate of Britain. Relations between the Yugoslav state and political Jewish bodies in the Palestine were established in October 1920. At the time, the Political Mission for Palestinian Jews (The



Palestine Bureau) was opened to be later replaced by the Mission of the Jewish Agency.

Official relations between the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the Palestine were maintained through honorary consulates in Tel Aviv and Haifa. The General Consulate of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was opened in Jerusalem on December 31, 1936. A diplomat of experience and a prominent member of the Yugoslav Board in WWI, Dr. Ivo Dedjuli was appointed General Consul. Although this higher level of diplomacy should have furthered economic cooperation, the level of trade exchange between Yugoslavia and the Palestine was for the most part symbolic. Dedjuli recommended that Yugoslav exporters should take advantage of the fact that Yugoslav Jews enjoyed full civil rights, but this had little effect on the level of economic exchange with the Palestine.

Beside political relations established among the Kingdom of SCS and the Palestine close cultural ties were also maintained. The Kingdom SCS General Consul to Cairo was present at the opening of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem in 1925. In honour of the occasion a succession of formal events were organized in the country with the attendance of high-ranking representatives of state, public and science communities. In September 1922 throughout the Kingdom films picturing the successful reconstruction of Jewish life in the Palestine were shown in cinemas. According to reports published in the Jewish press, these films were received by an eager public. Among the films shown was the first Palestinian talking movie "Country of toil and future". The film had its opening night on February 15, 1936, in the Great hall of Kolarčev National University. The Jewish poetess Elisheva, member of the Palestine PEN club, appeared before the Belgrade public in 1931. At a public literary evening she read her poems granting one of them to the *Serbian Literary Herald* where it was published that same month. At the beginning of 1938 the Hebrew theatre company "Habima" from Tel

Aviv staged four extremely successful performances in national theatres in Belgrade and Zagreb. The famous violinist and founder of the Symphonic orchestra of Tel Aviv, Bronislav Huberman visited Belgrade and on January 29, 1939 held a concert in the hall of Kolarčev National University. The concert stirred the interest of the public and was attended by a large audience of Belgrade's admirers of music.

Relations between Jewish Communities and their surrounding social environment grew stronger in the period between the two wars although the quality of these relations differed largely from one region to another. In the case of Serbian society, primarily that of Belgrade, the feeling of kinship had been fortified by the struggles, battles and deaths of the First World War. It came as natural that business activities connected Jews to their social surroundings, but interrelations were dictated by other factors, too. In their lifestyles, way of dressing, habits, the majority of Jews differed little from their social environment. While in earlier times Jews, primarily Sephardim, lived mostly in separate areas of towns, in the period between the two wars they increasingly began to live in other city parts also which again influenced their integration into society in general.¹³

Certain Jewish ceremonies and holiday celebrations were looked on as social events enjoyed by a substantial part of the population and their Jewish acquaintances. The holiday of Purim was specially celebrated with mirth and gaiety in Belgrade, at Jaliija and Dorćol where Belgraders from other city parts paid visits to their Jewish friends. In the First World War these parts of the city had sustained great damage and during the period between the wars lost much of their previous Jewish atmosphere. Although celebrations of Purim and Pesah had lost much of their prior character, they still remained social events in which many Serbs took part. This was not only the case with Belgrade. The entire local elite, prominent men in the company of their wives came to



Purim celebration parties held at the Zemun “Central” Hotel.¹⁴

The Jewish House in Kralja Petra Street had a special role, not only in the social life of Jews but also that of the neighbouring wider community. The many activities of the Jewish reading room established at the end of 1929 enhanced inter-relations due to the many activities it offered right up to the occupation in 1941. The Jewish reading room had music, drama and cultural sections and soon became known as an esteemed institution of culture not only among Jews, but Serbs also. Still living in the memories of the people of Dorćol are the many gatherings and parties held inside the Jewish Home and its reading room. It became one of the most popular places for socializing; dancing was favoured; first steps of novel dances were attempted there among close friends. Beside the offered entertainment the Home lectures by famed scientists and intellectuals: Mihailo Petrović Alas, Milutin Milanković, Branislav Petronijević, Nikola Vulić, Vladimir Ćorović, Tihomir Djordjević, Ivan Djaja, Hugo Klajn, Velimir Bajkić, Ksenija Atanasijević, Paulina Lebl-Albala, Aleksandar Vidaković and many others were held before packed audiences.¹⁵

The array of Belgrade dailies regularly noted all events and aspects of the life of its Jewish Community and of its high officials, both in the country and abroad. News of life of Jews in the Palestine and other countries were reported as were news of anti-Semitic occurrences and attacks on Jews. According to Belgrade press reports during the twenties, such anti-Semitic activity went on in a number of countries, particularly in Poland. From

the onset of the thirties, and especially in 1933, news of persecution of Jews predominantly came in from Germany.

Editors of leading newspapers such as the *Serbian Literary Herald (New Series)* accurately portrayed the standpoint of Serbian intelligentsia toward Jews, but also carried views on important political problems. Keeping track of Jewish literary editions, *The Herald* reviewed books by Jewish writers, whether fiction or historical portraits of Jewish greats, like Moses. Editorials covering the Hebrew university and life in Palestine, especially after the large wave of Jewish-Arab conflicts in 1937, were published. With the “actualization” of the “Jewish question” in Germany, reports condemning the politics of the Nazi regime and persecution of Jews, or about the racist and anti-Semitic basis of such politics, were published progressively. Articles and works of Jewish writers and public dignitaries were published in the *Herald* including texts by Sarajevo’s novelist Isak Samokovlija, as well as lecturers and comedists, Žak Konfino, David Albala, Paulina Lebl-Albala, Kalmij Baruh.

Like the *Herald*, the editorial policy of yet another prominent Serbian magazine, *The Chronicle of the Serbian Cultural Centre*, saw to the publishing of works written by Jews. *The Chronicle* was Serbia’s oldest publication and one of the first of its kind in Europe. Its first edition came out in Budim in 1825. *The Chronicle* was also an edition with the longest tradition of publishing literary works by Jewish authors. In 1826 in the second year of its publication it ran the poem of Moses Mendelssohn, a



Jewish centre in Belgrade



Berlin philosopher and founder of the Hebrew press. A rendition of the poem was made by one of Serbia's most prominent reporters, Teodor Pavlović. In the period between the two wars, *The Chronicle* published works by Jewish authors, printed reviews of their literary works as well as articles on the problems of the Palestine. Cvi Rothmueller one of Zionist movement leaders was also among authors published.

Zagreb magazine, *New Europe*, edited by Milan Ćurčin, also published pieces by prominent Jewish public workers, among others that of Aleksandar Liht, the leader of Yugoslav's Zionists. Apart from works published in leading periodicals, Jewish authors were also published in some of the burgeoning provincial journals. The Šabac magazine, the *Literary impetus* published a series of articles about the Sephardim by Solomon Kalderon, one of the authors (co-author of *Juda Levi*) of the *History of the Jewish People* (Belgrade 1935).

In Yugoslavia in the period between the two wars, eminent intellectuals and representatives of the Jewish Community played an important role in the cultural life of their environment. Accepted as an integral part of the country's culture, their scientific, artistic and broader social activity and creative work were looked on as an immense contribution not only on a local scale but on the Yugoslav and wider European intellectual level.

Although circumstances in Yugoslavia were favourable for the advancement of its Jewish Community, many serious challenges had to be addressed within the community itself and in relation to its environment. Apart from the traditional discord between the Sephardim and Ashkenazi, and to a lesser degree that of the Orthodox Jews, and the ongoing antagonism between the growing Zionist movement and assimilates and other non-Zionists, conditions generated by the contemporary social and political scene became an additional breeding ground for new divisions.

The clash between traditional values and the lifestyle of a modernized Jewish Community, similar to that within its social surroundings was becoming increasingly apparent. This was specially felt among the younger generation and its attitude toward religion. In 1933 the chief rabbi, Isak Alkalaj stated that religious belief had decreased not only among the nationalistic youth but also among the young in general, as well as older generations. Disagreement among integrationists (assimilates) and other non-Zionists and the Zionists continued, accentuating the dispute between Jews living in areas of the former Austro-Hungarian monarchy with predominantly Ashkenazi population and Jews living in Serbia prior to WWI, mainly the Sephardim.

The centre of the Association of Yugoslav Zionists and the seat of the Organization of the Zionist Youth were both in Zagreb. By the second half of the twenties, Zionists controlled the greater part of Jewish Communities and, with the onset of the new decade, their influence became predominant also among the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities. The complexity of the international Zionist organization was reflected also within the Zionist organization of Yugoslavia split along the lines of the predominant traditional Zionists and its left and right wings. The activity of both these wings was a serious challenge within the movement. The right wing, led by the Novi Sad Zionist, Julije Dohany, favouring revisionism, walked out on the Association of Yugoslav Zionists in 1929. At the national conference held in Osijek in 1933, right wing Zionists founded the Zionist Revisionist organization-Vladimir Žabotinski which later took on the name, the New Zionist Organization. The organization set up its own youth organization *Betar*. However, revisionists failed in their attempt to make an overriding impact on Yugoslav Jews or to hinder the growing influence of the central Zionist organization.

For Jews living in the territories of pre-war Serbia, the



new state came as a natural extension of the previous one, thus identification with it also came naturally. Reason for such easy passage from one state to another was the previous integration of Jews in Serbia's general environment which itself was the result of the acceptance of Jews by the wider community. Together with other citizens of Serbia, Jews had substantially contributed to Serbian war efforts and had thus earned the nation's respect. The impressive memorial built in the Jewish cemetery in Belgrade in 1927 speaks best of their effort for Serbia. Due to their readiness to embrace the Serbian national feeling toward them as "Serb's of Moses' faith", a positive Jewish stereotype was embedded within the Serbian environment. A strong feeling of patriotism for Serbia that had become a part of Jewish self-identification did not affect the national identity of Jews living in Serbia. Jews in Serbia, especially Belgrade Jews, were deemed to have dual nationalities. In Bosnia and Herzegovina the same sense of national duality was maintained for their Sephardim. This came from the fact that, since they had lived in these parts for four centuries, they were considered to be deep-rooted and a domestic element. Such ties to the region rendered special rights to the Sephardim.

In the memory of citizens of Belgrade, their Jewish neighbours have lodged themselves as good and reliable friends and business partners. It was generally considered that Jews added a special touch to Belgrade life with their humour and vivacious spirit, as well as with the "inspiring business methods of their small traders in stores in Jovanova market, in Aleksandrova and Vasina Streets". While the stereotypes of a stingy Jewish scrooge or heartless man of wealth dominated the European tradition, in the Serbian environment of south Hungary and in central Serbia this stereotype was related to the Tzintzars dating from the thirties of the XIX century. In Serbia Shylock was no match to Kir Janja (a character from Jovan Sterija Popovic's comedy).

Serbs and Jews lived together sharing the good and the bad. Belgraders remember that between the two wars, Jews were highly esteemed for the unpretentiousness and professional efficiency of their lifestyle within Serbian surroundings. Very similar relations between Jews and their environment existed in Sarajevo. Here, too, life of Jews went beyond the family circle and included a wider sphere of friends, of which many were Muslims or Orthodox. Assimilation into the Serbian society and the non-existence of anti-Semitic acts resulted in the fact that Zionist ideas did not catch on in Belgrade and other towns of Serbia. In the Belgrade Sephardim Community Zionism took complete charge only well into 1938. Serbian Zionists made a special point to maintain loyalty and love for the Yugoslav homeland as part of their Zionist credo. This being the standpoint of the Zionist organization in general, it had, however, not been stipulated separately elsewhere.

Prewar national identification did not give way easily or swiftly to recognition of the new Yugoslav identity, especially in Bačka where Hungarian nationalism among Jews was also undyingly strong. However, it too weakened in the second half of the thirties, especially among younger generations educated in the new country.

Social integration of Yugoslav Jews became increasingly apparent with the acceptance of the new "state" language which ousted the traditional Jewish languages: Jewish-Spanish of the Sephardim (in its written form the language was known as Ladino), German, Hungarian and Yiddish of the Ashkenazi. Backed by the educational system, the objective of the authorities to establish and fortify loyalty to the new country and its ideals was a decisive factor in the acceptance of the language of the state. Linguistic acculturation was strongest among the younger generation, by far the most susceptible to changes generated after 1918.

The liberal political basis on which the Kingdom was



founded, coupled with favourable conditions for development, made it reasonably easier for Jews to identify with the state. Certain researchers refer to this assimilation as a form of Serbian-Yugoslav nationalism that replaced prior cultural identifications. It would probably be best to refer to this identification as Yugoslav for two reasons. Firstly, the concept of a Yugoslav nation was a frame with which Jews from the former Monarchy could identify with more easily than with the concept of belonging to Serbia, best noted in the case of Vojvodina. The second reason stems from the fact that, during the twenties, Jews from the Kingdom of Serbia supplemented their Serbian nationalism for that of Yugoslavia progressively and, after the proclamation of the January 6th regime in 1929, in accordance with the instated regime. The Yugoslav national identity was looked on as a synthesis of all previous national identifications, including that of Serbia.

Jews found their place within the framework of the post-war Kingdom's "three name" and later "Yugoslav" national identity, it being sufficiently extensive and acceptable to all who perceived the Kingdom as their homeland. At the same time, guaranteed collective rights offered the possibility of maintaining one's own identity, which became increasingly interpreted as a national identity with the ascendancy of Zionism.

From the standpoint of state interest, the advance of Zionism was of special importance in regions where Jews felt bound to the prewar ruling nation, especially that of Hungary. Yugoslav Zionists explicitly maintained the standpoint that national integrity and a firm state, organized on liberal principles, could best support the realization of Zionist goals at a time when the question of status and, then again, the survival of the whole Jewish people were at stake. A major Zionist achievement was the organized rallying of the Jewish youth into the Association of Jewish Youth Societies founded in 1919. The greater part of these youth societies were Zionist

and of left orientation. One stronghold of youths was the Zionist student organization at the University of Zagreb. However, the largest and best organized was the "Hashomer hatzair" (Young sentry). Its Yugoslav branch was founded in 1931. The main goal of the organization was to prepare youths for the planned relocation and settlement in the Palestine, where life would be organized on principles of socialism in kibbutzim, by teaching them the skills of productive crafts.

The Zionist organization in Yugoslavia was considered to be one of the best organized in the world, a fact confirmed by the world Zionist organization. Notwithstanding this strong Zionist movement, the number of immigrants to the Palestine in the period 1919 to 1939 numbered only 800, i.e., approximately 1% of Yugoslav Jews. The percentage was three times less than the average rate of immigrants from other European countries. Favourable living conditions of Yugoslav Jews partly played a role in the low percentage, but the restrictive settlement politics maintained by the British mandatory authorities in the Palestine were yet another factor. The Yugoslav government backed the relocation of Jews to the Palestine by issuing immigration passports and easing capital transfer regulations in lieu of a compensation agreement reached between the Yugoslav and Palestinian governments. However, conditions of living and business dealing still held back Yugoslav Jews from moving to the Palestine. From the end of the thirties, other factors would be in play and influence the rate of immigration from Yugoslavia.

The Yugoslav Jewish Community, primarily its Zionists, took part in international Jewish activities in a number of different ways. The Community/Zionists primarily organized money collections donated for establishment of Jewish funds (foremost the Keren hajesod and Keren kajemet lejisrael). Such backing was intended for the purchase of land/real estate for settlers in the Palestine and sustained development of the future Jewish state.



Engagement in the Scheckel activity was a basic Zionist duty. Preparations for relocation and settlement were organized mostly among the young. Skills in “productive crafts” of use in the new homeland were also extensively publicized among the youth. The Jewish press, predominantly the *Židov*, frequently published articles about the life of Yugoslav Jews in the Palestine, containing facts about their kibbutz settlements and achievements in creating a new life for themselves.

Jews who relocated to the Palestine remained dedicated to Yugoslavia and founded their society (Hitahdut Olej Jugoslavia) in the new land; they also kept close contact with the Yugoslav diplomatic envoy. According to a re-



Zemun Jews in a moshava outing; the camp where youths trained for life in the Palestine

port of the general consul Dedjuli dated April 1938, it is stated that settlers who had completed the obligatory military service in the Yugoslav forces were exceptionally effective as they could be counted on in incidents of Arab terrorist attacks. It was, therefore, requested that the Palestine Office in Yugoslavia issue relocation certificates only to young men who had completed their service. In Yugoslavia too, the entire Zionist effort

seemed to exude the objective to form a new profile of the Jewish man and population; what was needed was a strong self-awareness of nationality and pride and submission to the collective effort in the attempt to build a Jewish state in the Palestine. Circumstances in which Yugoslav Zionists operated were constructive to their cause and made the organization one of the most lucrative in comparison with other, much larger Jewish Communities.¹⁶

Once the National-Socialist regime came into power in Germany, it brought immediate discrimination against Jews. Soon mass persecution became a reality which brought worry and protest to Jews in countries throughout the world, among them Yugoslavia. Like all leading newspapers, the Jewish press also reported on news of mounting persecution of Jews; however, the presence of censorship was also becoming apparent. In the initial period after Hitler’s coming into power the Jewish press spoke of Jewish hopes that the discerning part of the German people would pronounce the ideas of his programme as unacceptable, “... and that it would not let the grave responsibility for deeds so obviously in contrast to the basic human right to life, fall on the entire German people.” Unfortunately, it soon became evident that such hopes were groundless and that German persecution of Jews was increasingly gaining strength. It did not take long before a stream of Jewish refugees leaving Germany began to seek new homelands. It was hard for them to find safe harbours due to restrictive immigrant politics of a great number of countries. In 1938 and 1939 a new procession of refugees left Germany in the aftermath of German aggressive expansion into central Europe. The importance of Yugoslavia as a transitory region, where Jewish refugees heading for other countries found provisional stay and refuge, grew almost daily. By April 1941, approximately 55.000 Jewish refugees passed through Yugoslavia while another 4.000 were still waiting to move on when war broke



out in the country. Relief for refugees passing through Yugoslavia was primarily provided by the Jewish Community of Yugoslavia as well as other major Jewish humanitarian organizations, like the Joint Distribution Committee and Hicem.¹⁷

Yugoslav Zionists organized numerous rallies, protesting against countries that tolerated discrimination and persecution of their Jews as well as against events of consequence to the entire Jewish people. In May 1933 a large protest rally was organized in Zagreb in which both chief rabbi Isak Alkalaj and Zionist leader Aleksandar Liht took part and delivered speeches. Yugoslav Jews, including those from the poorest community in Bitolj, collected money for the German Jews Relief Fund.

In the second half of September 1935, a rally protesting against the passing of all anti-Semitic laws in Germany was organized in Zagreb. Following the protest the leadership of the Jewish Community in Yugoslavia lodged an official complaint against persecution of Jews in Germany to the League of Nations. The advancement of German troops into Austria in 1938 and the subsequent annexation of the country by the Great German Reich were seen as a great threat to Yugoslav Jews since Germany thus became Yugoslavia's neighbouring country. The act also brought economic consequences, above all for Jews in Croatia as their business activities were mainly tied to Austria. A series of protests of Yugoslav Jews were organized again after the May 1939 endorsement of the British "White Book", by which the number of Jewish immigrants into the Palestine was severely limited. The Jewish public paid great attention to developments in Jewish-Arab relations in the Palestine as differences grew into grave clashes, leaving many dead and wounded on a number of occasions. These events were also cause for organized protesting. The Zionist left wing youth did not interpret the conflict in the Palestine as a battle of interests of two nations, the

Jewish and the Arab, but rather as "a conflict between feudalistic-clerical interests and the constructive power of Zionism with its inbred seeds of progress." Such interpretation made it possible for Zionists to argue "that in their political strife, a structured course of action toward the workers of the Arab nation should be embraced."¹⁸

With the mounting influence of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and its Youth organization (SKOJ) during the thirties, commitment to Communist revolutionary objectives was believed to be the solution to all problems including the Jewish national issue: thus the "red assimilation", as dubbed by Zionists, grew in prominence. In time, this became a serious concern for Zionists, as Communist influence spread in mass youth organizations. It was manifested by the appeal revolutionary causes had on the Jewish youth organization memberships, primarily the Hashomer hatzair. Despite the comparable ideologies of Zionism and Communism, there were major discrepancies between the two movements. Communists saw the Zionist movement as a backward ideology and an exponent of British imperialism while Zionists were exposed to persecution in the Soviet Union. The influence of Communism on the Jewish population, especially its youth, lies in the fact that Communists uncompromisingly condemned anti-Semitism from the initial years of Yugoslav state existence. That the ideology of the Zionist movement was basically leftist was reason more for supporting Communism. During the thirties the political polarization in the state was increasingly narrowing down to anti-Fascist and pro-Fascist forces. In the assortment of anti-Fascist groups, Communists were gaining lead, which also had influence on the preferences of Jews.

During the twenties and the parliamentary era, a very small number of Jews took part in the political life of the Kingdom. Those who did were generally engaged in local politics. The Jewish Community had no wish



to partake in the Kingdom's political conflicts. Engagement of their members in the public sphere was looked on by the community as an individual exploit. During the entire period between the two wars, the Jewish Community in whole was unambiguously loyal to Yugoslav identification and state-building policy despite, mostly, local differences of opinion and political compromises. State officials declared that Jews were "a precious harmonizing element" in a country as heterogeneous as Yugoslavia, and that their cooperation in "work on the spiritual cohesion of Yugoslavia" was notable. For all who were opposed to the existence of Yugoslavia this was yet another reason to harass Jews.¹⁹

Reactions to the engagement of Jews in political life varied from one region to another, and chiefly depended on the actual level of their social acceptance and the tradition of their political engagement. On the local level in multinational surroundings, Jewish Communities were exposed to adverse situations where they had to decide between diverse national organizations and parties. Thus, in their choice of political beliefs, members of one Jewish Community frequently found themselves opposed to each other. Different perceptions of tradition, of supremacy of local powers, and the gap between generations, all played a role in Jewish political choices.

Apart from being supporters of various political parties, Jews were also engaged in the overall patriotic effort of fortifying and spreading the new Yugoslav identity, mostly among Jews from the former Habsburg monarchy. Opposing viewpoints on this issue between a part of the Jews from prewar Serbia and Zionists, who at the onset of the thirties gained control in the roof organization of Yugoslav Jews, the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities in Yugoslavia, resulted in strong disagreement. Zionists maintained that there was no discord between Yugoslav patriotism and Jewish national identification and that the two were compatible, while their opponents argued that Yugoslav patriotism

had an idiosyncratic form. The leading representative of the Jewish Community in the political life of the Kingdom was the chief rabbi, Dr. Isak Alkalaj.

By a decree issued by King Aleksandar I dated January 1, 1932 he was appointed to the function of senator, giving him right to give voice to the Jewish Community in that house of parliament. On a number of occasions he addressed his peers, engaging their attention on issues like aiding the poorest Yugoslav Jewish Community, that in Bitolj, the relaxing of restrictive laws on citizenship; he also censured the mounting climate of anti-Semitism and argued for relief for Jewish refugees from Hitler's Germany. He remained a senator up to the beginning of 1938.²⁰



Dr. Isak Alkalaj - Chief Rabbi of Yugoslavia

The engagement of Yugoslav Jews in the country's political life could not match the sum of their engagement in professions of their choice mainly in the field of social and artistic life. It must be noted that in their professional efforts they acted as representatives of the comprehensive national community. On the other hand, many of them were also involved in the functioning of the Jewish Community and the effort to preserve and nurture the Jewish cultural and national identity. In certain professional societies Jews played important roles. Jewish women were also active in the greater national environment. One of the first professional women's organizations was the Society of Women with University education. At the society's founding meeting on December 11, 1927, a group of Belgrade leading women intellectuals elected for their president professor Paulina Lebl Albala. She remained in this function up to



the time she left the country in 1940. Chief rabbi, Isak Alkalaj noted at a meeting of the Federation of Jewish Communities that her election to the post of Society President was yet another example how in the state of Yugoslavia a Jewess could attain such status. On the other hand, when it came to elections within the Jewish Communities, Jewish women were denied the right to vote.²¹

Although Jews preferred not to get involved in day to day politics, the leadership of the Jewish Community took an open stand on certain major political events, primarily those that had bearing on the status of Jews. Thus, during the thirties, in the existing climate of the country's conflict ridden political situation at home and abroad, political opportunism prevailed on many occasions and it was thought best not to broadcast them. However, in the case of the concordat between Yugoslavia and the Vatican, the leadership of the Federation of Jewish Communities censored its signing, claiming the concord was detrimental to the interest of the Jewish Community. Akin to general public views, except those in Croatia, the Federation maintained that the concord reached would give leash to the already fervent proselyte activity of the Roman Catholic Church. In its aftermath the position of the Jewish Community would be yet additionally endangered; the rising number of Jews converting to the Roman Catholic faith, mainly in Croatia, best spoke of the fact.

The Jewish Community supported major political decisions projected to strengthen the position of the state, while its more prominent members contributed, with discretion, to their bringing into effect. The burning issue of State reorganization that finally crystallized into the "Croatian question" was the most burdening concern of internal politics. It is maintained that Jewish business and political circles played a certain role in resolving the problem. The view of the Jewish Community was that the Serbian-Croatian agreement would

reinforce the state and that its own position would, in consequence, be protected. The Executive committee of the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities stressed that after the signing of the Cvetković-Maček agreement on August 26, 1939, circumstances were developing favourably for the Jewish Community.

Further, regarding the state's foreign policy positions in respect of international events the Jewish Community, for the most part, kept in line with official politics. Changes in the country's foreign political orientation in the second half of the thirties and the state's coming closer to Germany and Italy resulted in certain internal political repercussions affecting Jews, among others. As the Jewish public was predictably of anti-Fascist orientation, distancing from such state politics was discerned in the expression of its views. Regardless of the disapproval of British Middle East politics, especially in the case of the "White Books" limiting the immigration of Jews into the Palestine, the Jewish public, especially its Zionists, maintained that the fulfillment of the main goal, the establishment of a Jewish state, could be achieved only in cooperation with British political factors.

Prosperity of the Jewish Community in Yugoslavia and the Kingdom's support to the Jewish national cause were a reality which neither Jews at home or abroad disputed; these were facts recognized both by the domestic social environment and the international community. Recognition of these facts, their interpretation and use (as well as misuse) would increasingly depend on foreign political events, on the mounting state and social crisis which, put together, inevitably bore weight on the "Jewish question". The ideological basis of National-Socialist imperialism, in which Jews were a key element, left no dilemma that the worsening situation for Jews would not be restricted to Germany only. Rising awareness of the fact was becoming the main concern of the Yugoslav Jewish Community but, as elsewhere, no



adequate response could be found.

Social emancipation and civic equality was a legacy with which Jews entered the new state in 1918. It was expected that such inheritance would be guaranteed and improved upon in the new country founded on liberal civic principles. During almost the entire period between the two wars such expectations had been basically met. In the process there was no lack of challenges that had to be overcome since inherited and fresh resistance to Jewish equality was not insignificant. Such resistance would, in the state of Yugoslavia, be expressed not only in anti-Semitic tradition, but also in its modern, political form. It would soon transpire that the spreading and tolerance of anti-Semitism would be greatly influenced by diverse traditional views about Jews in certain parts of Yugoslavia and also by intricate Yugoslav political interrelations. However, international events of the thirties, dominated by the ascendance of National-Socialists to power in Germany, became a decisive factor in the fate of Jews; the culminating point was the toppling of the system of collective security in Europe at the beginning of the Second World War.

Jewish nationalism, i.e., Zionism, strengthened concurrently with the growing integration of Jews into the Yugoslav society. Jewish entrepreneurship and capital contributed to the solidifying and strengthening of the home market while old and new business contacts led to greater incorporation of Yugoslav economy into international trade. Thus, based on the expansion of Jewish identification with Yugoslavia, Jewish capital strengthened cohesive forces inside Yugoslavia. At the same time, there were escalating forces inside the Kingdom, supported by revisionist countries, intent on not only the restructuring of the country, but on its dismembering. Such scenarios, dictated by each and every antagonist of both Yugoslavia and the state's liberal principals of politics, constituted a major threat to the Jewish Community. A study of anti-Semitism in the state of Yugo-

slavia should take into consideration how opposition toward Jews differed among its various parts. Intolerance of Jews was far greater in the Dual Monarchy than in Kingdom Serbia, which was generally considered as a tolerant country, free of anti-Semitism. Thus, the newly founded Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes on the very ground of the former Monarchy inherited aspects of latent, and at times, open anti-Semitism. This was always far from the organized, mass and frequently aggressive display of anti-Semitism that existed in countries of East and Central Europe with numerous Jewish minorities like Hungary, Romania and Poland. Anti-Semitism in these countries was integrated in the structure of their civic problems and was, in reality, traditional so that its expression took on more grievous forms.

During the period between the two wars, propagators of anti-Semitism in the Yugoslav state were mainly marginal or illegal political (and terrorist) forces backed by foreign elements, often coupled with the leadership and bulk of the German ethnic minority. However, in keeping with swift changes in international relations in the second half of the thirties as well as the rising national and social crisis within the country, anti-Semitism was gaining power in Yugoslavia, too. Relations began to deteriorate in the second half of the thirties although even then the social status of Jews was not significantly endangered. Already in the twenties, the translation of the influential anti-Semitic pamphlet *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* appeared in the Kingdom of SCS. By way of Russian refugees' editions, the wider public in the Kingdom was aware of the existence of the *Protocols*. The first complete Croatian and Yugoslav edition of the *Protocols* came out in 1929. It was an edition of the Franciscan press *Nova Revija*, from the Adriatic town Makarska.²²

The demise of democracy in Germany and Hitler's coming into power on January 30, 1933, marked the



beginning, not only, of the dissolution of the system of collective security in Europe, but also a departure from principals of liberal ideology in a great number of countries. German imperialistic expansionism, built into the National-Socialist (Nazi) ideology, incorporated far-reaching plans of the “new order”. Such plans stemmed from the notion of a natural hierarchy of nations and states, in which the German Norse (Arian) “race” was dominant. Among Nazism’s ideological postulates the opinion that the devastating activity of Jews, whether inclined to principals of liberal or Communist social organization, was detrimental not only to the German people, but to all other world nations. Enlightened and biologically far advanced, the German nation was ordained to lead others in the fight against the Absolute Jewish Evil and its two emanations, liberal capitalism and Bolshevik communism.

In the propagation of National-Socialist ideas and its political postulates a leading role was given to compatible political organizations and to the German ethnic minority (Volksdeutschers) which was not insignificant in numbers in neighbouring Central and East Europe. In order to impair political and social relations that came as a result of the First World War and build a “new order” dominated by Nazi Germany, it was necessary to find a common denominator as a basis; it came in the form of the destruction of the social status of Jews. Within the Nazi framework of a general “ethnic reorganization” of European territory, especially its eastern parts, such a standpoint evolved into a comprehensive “effort” to annihilate all Jews living within the bounds of the Great German Reich, its allies and satellites, once war began in 1939; after the “crusade” on the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, the effort progressed in a sinister way.

For Nazi Germany the building of a “new order” in Europe was inseparable from the solution of the “Jewish question”; the pressure Germany put on certain countries under its influence implicated induction of

anti-Semitism measures. The method applied, the time period and the extent of such measures did not depend solely on German influence but on the country’s own traditional anti-Semitism, the political culture and the international standing of each country. It was just a matter of time before Yugoslavia would have to distinctly state its position on the question of Germany’s Nazi “exported (racial) revolution”. The overthrow of the “Versailles order” and the beginning of Second World War brought the problem to the forefront; once anti-Semitism was legalized in all of Yugoslavia’s neighbouring countries, Greece excepted, the issue could no longer remain moot.

From the mid-thirties anti-Semitic propaganda in Yugoslavia was noticeably progressing in certain parts of the country. The moment the Nazi element gained dominance among the leadership of the organization of the sizeable German ethnic minority of Yugoslavia, this part of the population fell under the overpowering influence of anti-Semitic propaganda dictated directly from Germany.

Anti-Semitic propaganda in Croatia mostly formed a unified front with anti-Yugoslav doctrines, i.e., anti-Serbian, as the powers behind the propaganda upheld party policies of such orientation. They were primarily members of extreme right wing nationalistic and clerical organizations as well as illegal terrorist organizations, among which the Ustashi was predominant. The traditionally influential Roman Catholic Church had an important role in spreading anti-Semitism using its publications and mass organizations. Although dependant on Italy for providing shelter and aid, the Ustashi organization and its ideology, best mirrored in its anti-Semitic views and agreement with the “final solution of the Jewish question”, was closely aligned with Nazism. Within the Serbian environment, members of the Yugoslav People’s Movement *Zbor* played one of the leading roles in propagating anti-Semitic views. It was the one



political organization among Serbs that based its ideological principles on political anti-Semitism. Although Serbian members were predominant in the movement, the influence of *Zbor* was appreciated by certain groups in Croatia and Slovenia,



Dimitrije Ljotić, an anti-Semite and German collaborator during World War Two

mainly among Yugoslav nationalists. The source of anti-Semitism in the *Zbor* primarily stemmed from its ideology; however, it was soon backed by associates linking it to Germany's Nazi political and propaganda centres.²³

By the process of the country's coming into existence and its liberal domestic politics, Yugoslavia was predictably part of the "Versailles order". Contrary to other revisionist

countries in Yugoslavia's neighbourhood which looked on anti-Jewish measures as a "natural" fact that would bring about the destruction of this order, the posing of the "Jewish question" to Yugoslavia became a grave issue for the country. Neither tradition nor the social role of Jews gave reason to instate such measures. Although the sum of these facts could have acted against the passing of anti-Jewish measures, the Yugoslav government nonetheless adopted them at the beginning of October 1940.²⁴

On October 5, 1940, in the *Official Newspaper*, two anti-Jewish by-laws with legal effect were publicized. By these two enactments the constitutionally guaranteed equality of a group of Yugoslav citizens was jeopardized solely based on racist principles. *The by-law on measures relating to Jews dealing in human diet food-stuffs* prohibited human foodstuff wholesale trade and

businesses in Jewish ownership or in co-ownership with Jews. By *The by-law on enrolling persons of Jewish descent as University students, students of colleges, high schools, the teacher-training college and other high schools* the ministerial board adopted for the school year 1940/1941, that students of Jewish origin could be enrolled into universities and other schools "in a percentage equal to the ratio of the Jewish population and the number of other citizens". This applied only to those enrolling into the first-year classes of high school, i.e., first year of university.²⁵

It should be noted that the adoption of anti-Jewish by-laws resulted from exceptionally demanding foreign political pressure of Germany's Nazi hegemony on Europe. By then, Germany had become master of the greater part of Europe mainland and, together with its allies, had almost completely encircled Yugoslavia. It soon became apparent that the anti-Jewish by-laws were relatively lenient, with many exceptions and not strictly adhered to. To a certain extent, they were a reflection of changes in domestic politics, primarily of the mounting Croatian influence on state politics and the augmentation of Croat federal unit's legal authority within the state. It was, nevertheless, a hard blow for Yugoslav Jews and for the very basis of state organization; for many it was the sign of looming adversity.

Although there was a distinct difference in the definition and treatment of the "Jewish question" within the territory of Yugoslavia prior to and after the aggression of the Axis forces on Yugoslavia in April 1941, the stance taken by the Banovina (autonomous province) of Croatia significantly diverged from that of the state. Certain elements of consistency between prewar Croat regional policy and that of the wartime Independent State of Croatia existed in many spheres. Such consistency was not only limited to the acceptance of extremist ideologies by the Croatian general public. A number of sources agree on the existence of widespread separatist, anti-



Yugoslav and anti-Serbian sentiment among Croats, on which foreign and domestic factors could count on to all intent and purpose. This same sentiment fostered Croatian anti-Semitism, which gained intensity once the leadership of the Croat region veered toward German politics.

The change in Croatian politics resulted in enforcement of regulations that substantially constrained Jewish ownership of property in the territory of the Banovina Croatia; such regulations were imposed independently from the remainder of Yugoslavia. Initiated in Croatia, these regulations were discharged by organizational bodies of the autonomous Croatian administration; the procedure allowed for the swift expropriation of Jewish property once the Independent State of Croatia was proclaimed.²⁶ However, only upon the aggression of the Axis forces and the establishment of ISC did the position of Jews decline drastically. From then on, the “final solution for the Jewish question” became a priority in the politics of the newly founded state.

Deeply worried, Jews attentively kept track of the worsening situation of their nationals in other European countries. The Jewish press regularly printed detailed news on the pogrom of Jews in Germany, later Austria, Poland and other countries. Although at times the language took on the form of fables for reasons of strict censorship, one could still discern rough words pronounced on German politics regarding the pogrom of Jews and on the basic ideology behind such politics. The press explicitly stated that the aim of such draconian measures was the pilfering of Jewish property and the destruction of the Jewish people. However, that this threat would in its entirety be realized was inconceivable for a great many of Yugoslav Jews.

From the second half of the thirties the anxiety of the Jewish Community was heightened by local acts of anti-Semitism. On a number of occasions Representatives of

the Federation of Jewish Communities appealed to the Prime Minister and ministers against anti-Semitic campaigns fronted by certain papers, primarily those in the German language. Despite promises made by chief state representatives and sporadic prohibition of said papers and pamphlets, the authorities lacked the will to thoroughly banish such manifestations of anti-Semitism. The gradual veering of foreign political orientation from traditional Western allies to overpowering totalitarian forces, above all Germany where anti-Semitism was integrated into official state ideology and political practice, was the primary cause of such mild reaction. Anyhow, leading Western countries were likewise guided by appeasement politics in dealing with Hitler’s Germany right up to the aggression on Poland. The spreading of German political and ideological influence at home became more apparent after the start of the Second World War. The passing of anti-Jewish by-laws in Yugoslavia resulted from the exceptionally difficult position Yugoslavia found herself in, in the autumn of 1940.

One significant response of the Jewish Community in Yugoslavia to mounting anti-Semitism and Fascism was the increased engagement of young people in Jewish leftist, and to some degree Communist youth organizations. As a counterpart to anti-Jewish and anti-Semitic acts, Jewish organizations attempted to impart to the general public that among their nationals there were prominent cultural and public personas, among others people inherent to both the Jewish and Christian tradition; the aim was the enhancement of interrelations and unison of Jews and their social surroundings.

Jews in Yugoslavia could learn first hand about the pogrom of their nationals in Germany and later in other countries where Nazi authority and influence had been instated, from the actual victims of these expulsions, i.e., from Jewish refugees. The Jewish Community in Yugoslavia donated ample relief to refugees passing through the country or during their stay in Yugoslavia.



The greatest burden of aid was borne by Jews in Zagreb since the greater part of refugees passed through that city. The Federation of Jewish Communities imposed a separate surtax payable into its Social Fund in support of extraordinary expenses for Jewish refugees. Other Jewish organization also took part in collecting donations, among them the Bene Berit High Lodge for Kingdom Yugoslavia. However, without the backing of major Jewish humanitarian organizations (Hicem, Joint), Yugoslav Jews would have found it hard to rise to the situation alone. After Germany's annexation of Austria (Anschluss) in March 1938, the problem, according to the Jewish press, escalated in light of the "tragic catastrophe of Austrian Jews". In order to provide accommodation and necessary aid for refugees, the Federation of Jewish Communities organized a Central support fund.

The politics of Yugoslavia toward Jewish refugees was in general humanitarian and benevolent. Such endeavours were in keeping with tradition dating from the time of the Princedom, i.e., the Kingdom of Serbia and were upheld by the greater part of the public. However, from the mid thirties, similar to other governments, the Yugoslav government was also unwilling to tolerate prolonged stay of Jewish refugees. The large surge of Jewish refugees was creating ever growing problems for Yugoslav authorities who tried to solve them in a way that would not bring into question relations with those who had caused the misfortune (Germany) and those who wanted to elude its consequences, so as not to disturb their own interests (Great Britain).²⁷

After the German onslaught on Poland and the beginning of the Second World War, the importance of Yugoslavia as a passageway for Jewish refugees as well as its support to threatened Jewish Communities heightened. Yugoslavia and other Balkan states became even more important to Jewish refugees after Italy entered the war in June 1940. In order to enable Jews to legally immi-

grate to the Palestine or reach other countries, Yugoslav authorities issued Yugoslav passports to refugees since as holders of German papers, i.e., enemy passports they could not obtain necessary British visas; in general, Jews with German passports were regarded as "hostile enemies." Although the treatment of Jewish refugees by Yugoslav authorities was generally auspicious, it nevertheless deteriorated due to increasingly harsher foreign political factors the country was faced with and changes in state politics. After the Anschluss, a series of limiting measures and procedures regarding Jewish refugees were endorsed. Pressure exerted on the country's foreign policy and covenants made had a decisive role in the bringing of such measures, especially after the start of the Second World War and Yugoslavia's declaration of political neutrality.²⁸

From post-Holocaust hindsight the passive mind-set of the Jewish Community in Yugoslavia faced with the imminent threat of death may seem odd. However, in that respect Yugoslav Jews were no exception compared to their co-nationals from other European countries and the leaderships of major Jewish organizations. Historical sources are in agreement that despite extremely hostile anti-Semitic propaganda, Hitler's evil announcements of the "final solution to the Jewish question" and the manifest persecution of Jews in all territories where the "new order" had been instated, the number of Jews who believed that comprehensive and systematic annihilation of the entire Jewish nation could take place was very small.

Although the Jewish Community in Yugoslavia was well informed and aware of the reality that it also would soon be in the same tragic position as Jews in other occupied countries, the Community, nevertheless, did not resort to any extraordinary measures to alleviate the impact of the disaster looming over its very existence. The same could be said about lack of initiative to save at least part of the existing Jewish cultural legacy. Yugoslav Jews



lived and worked in favourable conditions, and, up to October 1940, enjoyed full civic equality, so that the position they held in general society did nothing to induce them to resort to preventive measures. During the initial years of the war conflict in Europe, the life of the Jewish Community in Yugoslavia kept to the same routine as in pre-war days. Although faced with and experiencing the hardships of Jews exiled from war zones, the inflow of refugees and growing anti-Semitism, which in October 1940 was even institutionalized at home, Yugoslav Jews were mainly preoccupied with their daily domestic worries, with activities within the Jewish Community and their public activity.

Even though during the thirties Yugoslav Jews by and large expressed their concern for the increasing number of anti-Semitic manifestations, above all those in press releases, they could not conceive just how the “Jewish question” would be solved in “New Europe”. Despite all reports and testimonies about the nation’s persecution, there was strong belief that nothing like that could happen in Yugoslavia since the country would not get involved in the war. The same delusion was shared by leading Zionists, while the leadership of the Federation of Jewish Communities seemed to believe that the war would by-pass Yugoslavia.

From the establishment of a totalitarian state in January 1933, up to the beginning of the war in 1939, anti-Jewish measures in Germany resulted in the social isolation of Jews and their transformation into “a publicly dead” people. Beside verbal and physical assaults, Jews were further discriminated by law; thus segregated from the remaining part of the population, they were driven into exile. Initiated by the “Crystal night” pogrom, the burning of synagogues and Jewish stores between November 9 and 10, 1938, mass internment of Jews into concentration camps was set in motion. The accelerated “Arianization” (expropriation) of Jewish property and their expeditious relocation was practically over by the

beginning of the war in September 1939. After the capitulation of Poland, another two million Jews, along with half a million from previously annexed (Austria) and occupied territory of Czechoslovakia (Bohemia and Moravia), found themselves under German authority.

The Ribbentrop-Molotov agreement of August 23, 1939 was followed by the September 1, 1939, German aggression on Poland and the beginning of the Second World War. According to the above agreement, the eastern parts of the Polish state (western Byelorussia and western Ukraine) were annexed by the Soviet Union on September 17, 1939, while the territory occupied by Germany was divided into two sectors. Western parts of Poland were attached to Germany while the central part of the country became an occupied zone named General Government with its seat in Krakow.

Soon the next phase of the “annihilation of Jews”, its “concentration” stage, as named by Hilberg, began. This meant that all Jews within the territory under German control were deported to the General Government zone, located in the very geographical centre of the largest Jewish Communities in Europe. Together with the military successes of 1940, the Nazi leadership gradually came to reason that the “final solution to the Jewish question” was to be a pan-European undertaking. The conquests made in the West front in 1940 brought approximately another half a million Jews under German rule.

Notwithstanding the pact with the Soviet Union, Nazi leadership had no dilemma as to its ultimate military and ideological adversary; it was the Bolshevik state. Together with the decision to attack and destroy the Soviet Union, the Communist emanation of the “Global Jew”, at the beginning of 1941, Hitler also decided to inaugurate the epitome of Nazi-Socialism ideology, the annihilation of the entire Jewish population of Europe. With the start of the aggression on the Soviet Union on



June 22, 1941, the implementation of the “final solution to the Jewish question”, the massacre of Jews in all territories under German rule began. By then, a comprehensive social consensus on the necessity of the “final solution” had been reached.

The war against the Soviet Union was a war intended to destroy the Soviet (Russian) state and in its aftermath establish in territories occupied total domination of the “thousand year Reich” and the German “ruling nation”. In order to achieve this goal it was necessary to physically destroy all actual and potential adversaries as well as the entire Jewish nation, which according to Hitler’s belief was “the intellectual reservoir of Bolshevism”. Nazi propaganda reinvented the old myth of Russia as “Asia” placing Russia in total incongruity with a Europe embodied and defended by the Third Reich. The old myth was this time inflated by a new one: the threat of Bolshevism. Communism (Bolshevism) thus became the emanation of not only the Jewish but also the Russian-Asian spirit threatening Europe from both inside and out.



*Dragiša Cvetković signing the Tripartite Pact
in Vienna on March 25, 1941*

Once Hungary and Rumania joined the Tripartite Pact and Bulgaria subsequently followed suit on March 1, 1941, prior to Germany’s attack on Greece, Yugoslavia was forced to give an answer to conditions made by Berlin. On March 25, 1941 Prime Minister Cvetkovic signed in Vienna Yugoslavia’s accession to this military-political alliance dominated by Nazi Germany.

The ease with which the March 27, 1941, coup-d’état and subsequent mass demonstrations in Belgrade and many other towns were carried out revealed the actual magnitude of anti-Fascist and pro-Western and pro-Russian (pro-Soviet) sentiment and antagonism against Government politics. In the eyes of the freedom-loving world it looked as if Hitler had, after a series of continual victories, experienced first hand resistance. Therefore, the enormous publicity the event created worldwide and the acclaim and moral support of Great Britain and the United States came as natural. However, in the matter of support, despite all promises made, this was as far as tangible backing went. The Palestinian public also kept track of the course of events in Yugoslavia with utmost interest. The news of the March 27th events were sensational and “brought much joy to Palestinian Jews”. In these events they perceived Yugoslavia’s reaction against German advancement as a “barrier to the danger that could put the Palestine in jeopardy”.

At the meeting with army commanders-in-chief held on March 27, 1941, the German leader issued the order for the start of prompt military preparations intended to demolish Yugoslavia both “military and state-wise”. The accusation that “plutocrats” and Jews were responsible for the events of March 27th announced future widespread use of German propaganda anti-Semitic stereotypes, like the myth of the “Global Jew” as prime instigator of war, once Yugoslavia was occupied and dismembered.²⁹

The Yugoslav King’s Army was unprepared for the



Demonstrations against the signing of the Tripartite Pact with Germany, Belgrade, March 27, 1941

attack that followed on April 6, 1941, and could not measure up to the full force of the gigantic German war machine. The rift within the army caused by Croatian nationalism and the national separatism of minorities, primarily that of German, Hungarian and Albanian ethnics, augmented all army organizational weak spots. During the short-lived April war of 1941 the Yugoslav King's Army found itself in a hapless position in a matter of days despite the heroic resistance of its air force and some other divisions. One of the targets of the German air force in its attack on Belgrade was Dorcol, specifically those parts of its area with predominant Jewish population. Approximately 70% to 80% of the buildings in this quarter were destroyed or burnt down. A large number of Jewish citizens perished inside the bombed houses.

Hungarian and Bulgarian units came in the wake of German invasion troops and took charge of territories promised to them. King Petar II and Government left the country and joined other Governments in exile under British protection. In Belgrade delegates of the

High Command of the Yugoslav Army signed the declaration of the capitulation of the army which came into force on April 18, 1941. Yugoslav Jews responded to mobilization summons and many of them fought heroically. Prior to being officially summoned, Jews also voluntarily joined up with army troops. There were other volunteers, too. Although flawed, the register of April war victims drawn up in 1964 records that a total of 4.823 Yugoslav soldiers and officers died in the war effort, out of which 10 were Jews.³⁰

The discriminatory treatment of Yugoslav POWs best reflects the disposition of invader forces toward the Yugoslav state and the extent to which aggressive action against its different nationals was selective. The dogma of "Yugoslavia as Great Serbia" brought collective punishment to all captured Serbs by imprisonment in POW camps. Jews captured were also taken to prisoner camps; the number of imprisoned soldiers of other Yugoslav nationalities was by far less, especially



Jews, forced labourers, cleaning up Belgrade bombing debris



Slovenians from territories annexed by Germany. Jewish POWs were in reality treated as “Serbian” prisoners of war regardless from which part of Yugoslavia they came. In principle, Jews declared themselves as Serbs or Yugoslavs. As such, Yugoslav Jews taken prisoner as soldiers or officers of the Yugoslav King’s Army survived the Holocaust in German POW camps. Only a small number died in prison.

The total number of Yugoslav Jews who ended up in German POW camps as soldiers, non-commissioned officers or officers of the Yugoslav King’s Army has not been definitely determined. The approximate number lies within the range of 700 to almost 900 Jewish war prisoners. According to the register of war victims from 1964, 142.802 Yugoslav soldiers and officers were taken prisoner. Out of that number, 5.563 or 3,9% died. Among the dead there were 17 Jews; 9 of them were killed.³¹

Endnotes

1Istorija Beograda, book.2, Beograd 1974, pp.520-521 (Vidosava Stojančević); *ibid*, pp.34-37 (Vasa Čubrilović); *Živeti u Beogradu. Dokumenta Uprave grada Beograda 1837-1841*, book1, Beograd 2003, p.248; Vuk Vinaver, “Jevreji u Srbiji početkom XIX veka”, *Jevrejski almanah 1955/6*, Beograd 1956, pp.29-34; Ignjat Šlang, *Jevreji u Beogradu*, Beograd 1926, pp.68-70.

2Bartolomeo Kunibert, *Srpski ustanak i prva vladavina Miloša Obrenovića 1804-1850*, Beograd 1901, p.647; Božidar Kovačević, “O Jevrejima u Srbiji (Od XVIII do početka XX veka)”, *Jevrejski almanah 1959-1960*, Beograd 1960, p.107; Ženi Lebl, *Do ‘konačnog rešenja’*. *Jevreji u Beogradu 1521-1942*, Beograd 2001, pp.74-81.

3Tihomir Djordjević, *Arhivska gradja za zanate i esnafe u Srbiji od Drugog ustanka do Esnafske uredbe 1847.godine*, Beograd 1925, p.174; *Živeti u Beogradu*, book 3, pp.171-172, p.181, pp.191-193, p.209; Vojislava Radovanović, Milica Mihailović, *Životni ciklus-Običaji kod Jevreja. Jewish Customs-The Life Cycle*, Beograd 1998; Andrija Radenić, “Jevreji u Srbiji. Narodni poslanici Jevreji u skupštini Srbije 1878-1888”, *Zbornik 6, Jevrejski istorijski muzej*, Beograd 1992, pp.9-10, pp.17-20; *Srbija 1878. Dokumenti*, Mihailo Vojvodić, Dragoljub R.Živojinović, Andrej Mitrović, Radovan Samardžić (prir.), Beograd 1978, p.569; Milan Koljanin, *Jevreji i antisemitizam u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji 1918-1941*, Beograd 2008, pp.159-170.

4Marko Perić, Srećko Stanić, “Jevreji Beograda u popisima stanovništva XIX i XX veka”, *Zbornik 6, Jevrejski istorijski muzej*, Beograd 1992, pp.281-289; Ivan Hofman, *Srpsko-jevrejsko pevačko društvo (Hor “Braća Baruh”)*, 125 godina trajanja, Beograd 2004, *passim*. The choir is the oldest Jewish choir in the world permanently in existence; Paulina Lebl Albala, *Tako je nekad bilo*, Beograd 2005; Mihailo B. Milošević, *Jevreji za slobodu Srbije 1912-1918*, Beograd 1995, pp.38-41. Branislav Nušić, *Stari Beograd (Iz poluprošlosti)*. *Beleške, crtice sećanja*, Beograd 1984, pp.16-20; *Istorija srpskog naroda*, VI/1, Beograd 1983, pp.188-191 (Dimitrije Djordjević); Isidor Djuković, *Nadjmedjer. Austrougarski logor za Srbe 1914-1918*, Beograd 2003, p.191, p.201, p.260, p.286, p.292, p.325; *Spomenica poginulih i umrlih srpskih Jevreja u balkanskom i svetskom ratu 1912-1918*, Beograd 1927.

5Harriet Pass Freidenreich, *The Jews of Yugoslavia. A Quest for Community*, Philadelphia 5740-1979, pp.139-142; Mirjana Gross, *Počeci moderne Hrvatske. Neoapsolutizam u civilnoj Hrvatskoj i Slavoniji (1850-1860)*, Zagreb 1985, pp.360-369; Ivo Goldstein, “Antisemitizam u Hrvatskoj. Korijeni, pojava i razvoj antisemitiz-



ma u Hrvatskoj”, u: Antisemitizam, holokaust i antifašizam, Zagreb 1996, p.18; Rolf Fischer, Entwicklungsstufen des Antisemitismus in Ungarn 1867-1939. Die Zerstoerung der magyarisich-juedischen Symbiose, Muenchen 1988; Tomislav Kraljačić, Kalajev režim u Bosni i Hercegovini 1882-1903, Sarajevo 1987; Josef Konforti, “Doprinos ljekara Jevreja zdravstvenoj zaštiti i kulturi Bosne i Hercegovine”, Jevrejski almanah 1968-1970, Beograd 1971, pp.109-123.

6Prethodni rezultati popisa stanovništva u Kraljevini Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca od 31. januara 1921, Sarajevo 1921, pp.2-3; H. Pass Freidenreich, The Jews of Yugoslavia, p.58; Definitivni rezultati popisa stanovništva od 31 marta 1931 godine, book II, Prisutno stanovništvo po veroispovesti, Beograd 1938, VI-XII; Die Gliederung der Bevoelkerung des ehemaligen Jugoslawien nach Muttersprache und Konfession nach den unveroeffentlichen Angaben der Zaehlung von 1931, Wien 1943, (Nur fuer den Dienstgebrauch), p.10; Milica Mihajlović, Jevreji na jugoslovenskom tlu, Podgorica 2000, p.30; Jaša Romano, Jevreji Jugoslavije 1941-1945. Žrtve genocida i učesnici NOR, pp.13-14; Cvi Loker (ed.), Pinkas jevrejskih opština Jugoslavije. Enciklopedija jevrejskih naselja od osnivanja do posle holokausta u II svetskom ratu, Jerusalem 5748/1988. (translated from Hebrew by Eugen Verber of the Museum of Jewish History, Belgrade; further reference : JIM/ Jevrejski istorijski muzej); Nebojša Popović, Jevreji u Srbiji 1918-1941, Beograd 1997, p.125; H. Pass Freidenreich, The Jews of Yugoslavia, pp.58-60, p.215, table 3.

7Fridrih Pops, “Iz mojih uspomena...Osnivanje Saveza jevrejskih veroispovednih opština”, Glasnik Saveza jevrejskih veroispovednih opština, No.1, 1. April 1933, pp.4-9; Ivan Kon, Najvažniji momenti u radu Saveza jevrejskih veroispovednih opština od njegovog osnivanja do danas, ibid, pp. 9-19.

8 Ž. Lebl, Do ‘konačnog rešenja’. Jevreji u Beogradu 1521-1942, passim; Ž. Lebl, Do ‘konačnog rešenja’. Jevreji u Srbiji, passim; Krinka Vidaković-Petrov, Kultura španskih Jevreja na jugoslovenskom tlu XVI-XX vek, Sarajevo 1986; Milica Mihailović, Jevrejska štampa na tlu Jugoslavije do 1941.godine, exhibition catalogue, Beograd 1982; Židovi na tlu Jugoslavije, exhibition catalogue, Zagreb 1988, pp.113-142, pp.153-154, pp.163-168 (V. Nedomački, S. Goldstein); Katrin Voelkl, “Zur Judenfeindlichkeit in Kroatien: Wieweit gab es Antisemitismus bis 1941?”, Suedosteuropa, year 42, No. 1, 1993, p.61.

9Eduard Mosbacher, “Jugoslovenski Jevreji u svetlosti statistike”, Jevrejski narodni kalendar, yearVI, Beograd 5701/1940-1941, pp.127-130; Mirjana Belić-Koročkin, Radivoje Davidović, Povest o braći Baruh, Beograd 1988, pp.28-29; Djordje Stanković, Studenti

i univerzitet 1914-1954. Ogledi iz društvene istorije, chapter 4: Socijalna i verska struktura studenata Jugoslavije (1919-1939), Beograd 2000, pp.74-76, p.69, p.80; Ljubomir Kosijer, Jevreji u Jugoslaviji i Bugarskoj, Zagreb-Beograd-Ljubljana, 1930; Zlata Živaković-Kerže, Židovi u Osijeku (1918-1941.), Osijek 2005, pp.18-26. Stevan Mačković, Industrija i industrijalci Subotice, Subotica 2004, pp.28-29, pp.53-55; Velimir Starčević, Knjiga o Geci Konu, Beograd 1993; Vesna S. Aleksić, Banka i moć. Socijalno-finansijska istorija Opšteg jugoslovenskog bankarskog društva A.D. 1928-1945, Beograd 2002.

10Ustav Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca, Beograd 1921; Ustav Kraljevine Jugoslavije od 3 septembra 1931, Beograd 1932; Branko Petranović-Momčilo Zečević, Jugoslovenski federalizam. Ideje i stvarnost, tematska zbirka dokumenata, volume I, 1914-1943, Beograd 1987, pp.127-128; Zoran Janjetović, Deca careva, pastorčad kraljeva. Nacionalne manjine u Jugoslaviji 1918-1941, Beograd 2005, p.17.

11Aprilski rat, Zbornik dokumenata, book I, Beograd 1969, pp.400-401; Mile Bjelajac, Jugoslovensko iskustvo sa multietničkom armijom 1918-1991, Beograd 1999, pp.36-38; B. Petranović, M. Zečević, Jugoslavija 1918-1984, pp.326-327.

12Paulina Lebl Albala, Vidov život. Biografija dr Davida Albale, Beograd 2008.

13Dimitrije M. Knežev, Beograd naše mladosti 1918-1941, Beograd 2001, pp.221-222; further ref.: Nada Doroški, “Slike iz svakodnevnog života”, u: Beograd u sećanjima 1930-1941, Beograd 1983, p.35.

14Jevrejski istorijski muzej, Beograd (JIM), Minutes of the 7 Congress of the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities in Kingdom Yugoslavia recorded by shorthand (Stenografski zapisnik 7. kongresa Saveza Jevrejskih veroispovednih opština Kraljevine Jugoslavije), Belgrade, 23.and 24.April 1939, p.24, report by Dr Moše Švajgera; Dr Jakov Kalderon, “Sećanja”, Židov, No.7, 17. February 1933, pp.2-3; Sevezna vijeća Saveza cionista Jugoslavije (i članovi Saveznog odbora), Jevrejski narodni kalendar, 5698/1937-38, pp.147-153; Cvi Loker, “Začeci i razvoj cionizma u južnoslavenskim krajevima”, in: Ognjen Kraus (ed.), Dva stoljeća povijesti i kulture Židova u Zagrebu i Hrvatskoj, Zagreb 1998, pp.171-173; N. Popović, Jevreji u Srbiji 1919-1941, pp.175-176; “Posveta šume Kralja Petra Oslobodioca”, Židov, No.19, 9.May 1930, p.3; “Koncert Bronislava Hubermana u Beogradu”, Vesnik Jevrejske Sefardske veroispovedne opštine, No.3, 1.March 1939, p.13; Danilo Fogel, Jevrejska zajednica u Zemunu. Hronika (1739-1945), Zemun 2007, p.31.



15 Ljiljana Vuletić, *Život i misao Ksenije Atanasijević*, Beograd 2005, p.166; Vladimir Živančević, "Od Vidinskog poljančeta do "Helikona" u "Moskvi", in: *Beograd u sećanjima 1930-1941*, Beograd 1983, pp.175-176; Spomenica o proslavi tridesetogodišnjice sarajevskoga kulturno-potpornoga društva La Benevolencija, Beograd 1924, Štamparija i cinkografija "Vreme" A.D; Politika, 10.March 1924, p.5. Ana Štulić, Ivana Vučina, "Jevrejsko-španski jezik: Komentarisana bibliografija literature i periodika", *Zbornik 8, Jevrejski istorijski muzej*, Beograd 2003, pp.195-198.

16 Jevrejska omladinska društva na tlu Jugoslavije, 1919-1941, Beograd 1995, pp.35-42; Hašomer hacair, Biblioteka "Honoar", Zagreb 1932; "Cijonistički život u gradovima Vojvodine", *Židov*, No. 15, 13.April 1928, p.4; "Snaga cionističke organizacije u Jugoslaviji", *Židov*, No.27, 7.July 1939, p.1; "Rad jugoslavenske delegacije", *ibid*, No.36, 30.August 1939. „Slučaj g.Levića i naši cionisti“, *Narodna odbrana*, No.12, Beograd, 24.March 1935, p.180; N. Popović, *ibid*, pp. 79-80; "Naš kibuc dobio ime Šaar Haamakim", *Židov*, No.8, 14.February 1936, p.3; Hilel Livni, "Šaar Haamakim", *Jevrejski narodni kalendar 5701, 1940/41, VI year*, pp.157-162.

17 Milan Ristović, *U potrazi za utočištem. Jugoslovenski Jevreji u bekstvu od holokausta 1941-1945*, Beograd 1998, pp.23-54; Pinkas jevrejskih opština Jugoslavije, pp.496-498; as per the table of refugees in transit, a total of 53.520 refugees passed through Yugoslavia from 1933-1941.

18 David A.Levi-Dale, "Novo vreme u Nemačkoj i Jevreji", *Glasnik Saveza jevrejskih veroispovednih opština*, N.1, 1.April 1933, pp.68-70; "Veliki miting zagrebačkih Židova", *Židov*, No.20, 19.May 1933, p.1; "Protestni miting u Zagrebu protiv progona Jevreja u Njemačkoj", *ibid*, No. 21, 26.May 1933, pp.1-3; "Spontani protest protiv antisemitskih zakona u Njemačkoj", *Židov*, No.40, 27.September 1935, p.5; "Protest jugoslavenskih Jevreja protiv progona Jevreja u Njemačkoj", *ibid*, p.19; "Židovski narod neće kapitulirati", *ibid*, No. 20, 19.May 1939, p.1; "Veliki protestni miting zagrebačkih Židova", *ibid*, No.21, 26.May 1939, pp.8-9; "Židovi Jugoslavije protestiraju protiv Bijele knjige", *ibid*, No.22, 2.June 1939, p.9. "White Paper of 1939", *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, book IV, pp. 1649-1650 (Abraham J. Edelheit):

19 Dušan Jelić, *Bački Jevreji u NOR-u naroda Jugoslavije*, Beograd 1973, pp.12-13; M. Belić-Koročkin, R. Davidović, *Povest o braći Baruh*, p.28; "Opštinski izbori u Beogradu", *Jevrejski glasnik*, No.10, 11.March 1921, p.1; "Prvi Židov u parlamentu", *Židov*, No.42, 21.October 1927, p.4; "Prvi jevrejski poslanik u Narodnoj Skupštini", *ibid*, No.44, 4.November 1927, p.2; "Novi odbornici beogradske opštine", *Židov*, No.19, 13.Maj 1932, p.6; "Šemaja de Majoj" (eulogy and report on burial service), *ibid*, No. 30, 29.July

1932, pp.2-3, p.5.Hrvoje Matković, "Hrvatska zajednica. Prilog proučavanju političkih stranaka u Jugoslaviji", *Istorija XX veka, Zbornik radova*, V, Beograd 1963, p.55; Slobodan Mirić and others. (prep.), *Hronologija radničkog pokreta u Srbiji*, book 2, from 1919. up to 1941., Beograd 1969, p.53. J.Romano, *Jevreji Jugoslavije*, pp.15-54; Miroljub Vasić, *Revolucionarni omladinski pokret u Jugoslaviji 1929-1941.godine*, Beograd 1977, v.m; Slobodan Nešović, Moša Pijade i njegovo vreme, Beograd 1968, pp.126- 137. 20 Stenografske beleške Senata Kraljevine Jugoslavije, year.1, No.1, Beograd 1932, p.1; *ibid*, book 2, Beograd 1932, pp.63-64; *ibid*, book 1, Beograd 1934, pp.60-61; "G. Vrhovni rabin-senator", *Židov*, No.2, 15.January 1932, p.5; "Govor dra Alkalaja u parlamentu", *ibid*, No. 4, 29.January 1932, p.3;

21 Mirjana Obradović, "Udruženje univerzitetski obrazovanih žena u Jugoslaviji 1927-1941.godine", in: *Srbija u modernizacijskim procesima 19.i 20.veka*, 2, Položaj žene kao merilo modernizacije, meeting of scientists, Beograd 1998, pp.254-255; Paulina Lebl Albala, *Tako je nekad bilo*, Beograd 2005.

22 M. Koljanin, *Jevreji i antisemitizam u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji*, pp.357-370.

23 *Ibid*, pp.395-415.

24 Mihailo Konstantinović, *Politika sporazuma. Dnevničke beleške 1939-1941. Londonske beleške 1944-1945*, Novi Sad 1998, pp.180-181; "Kraljevska vlada odlučno suzbija jevrejsku špekulaciju" *Vreme*, 20.September 1940.

25 *Službene novine*, No.229-LXXX-A, Saturday 5.October 1940; "Uredbe i o uredbama protiv Jevreja", *Jevrejski glas*, No.31, 16.October 1940; "Primjena uredbe o mjerama koje se odnose na Židove u Dunavskoj banovini. I pokršteni se smatraju Židovima, ako su rođeni od židovskih roditelja", *Židov*, No. 44, 23.October 1940, p.6.

26 *Narodne novine*, No. 249, Zagreb 31.X.1940; V. Aleksić, *Banka i moć*, p.85; "Uredbe o trgovačkim i industrijskim poduzećima", *Židov*, No.46, 8.November 1940, p.8; "Pregled štampe u vezi s privrednim uredbama". *Ibid*. "Naredba sa zakonskom snagom o otudjivanju i poslovanju privrednih preduzeća", passed by Ban I. Šubašić on 30. October 1940. je Zakonskom odredbom (zakonom) od 14. juna 1941. proširena na celo područje NDH. Predviđeno je da se prijava obavlja kod Ministarstva narodnog gospodarstva, Odjel za obrt, industriju i trgovinu, u skladu sa uputstvima objavljenim 31.oktobra 1940; *Zbornik zakona i naredaba*, 1941, p.178. Prema tome, M. Lamer je i u Banovini Hrvatskoj i u NDH bio odgovoran za pitanje jevrejske imovine.

27 Ivo Goldstein, *Židovi u Zagrebu 1918-1941*, Zagreb 2004,



chapter 37: Židovske izbjeglice iz Reicha u Zagrebu i Jugoslaviji, pp.448-470; Gabriele Anderl-Valter Manošek, Propalo bekstvo, passim. See also : Kladovo transport/The Kladovo Transport, Zbornik radova sa okruglog stola Collection of papers presented at the round table, Beograd October 2002, Jevrejski istorijski muzej, Beograd 2006; “Beogradska Sefardska opština za jevrejske izbeglice”, Vesnik Jevrejske sefardske veroispovedne opštine, No.18, 1.June 1940, p.7;

28JIM, ref. No.5857, Izveštaj Izvršnog odbora o svome radu, 28. November 1938. M.Ristović, U potrazi za utočištem, pp.23-54; Pinkas jevrejskih opština Jugoslavije, pp.496-498; G.Anderl-V. Manošek, Propalo bekstvo, passim; R. Hilberg, Zločinci, žrtve, posmatrači, pp.145-146; Dalia Ofer, Escaping the Holocaust. Illegal Immigration to the Land of Israel, 1939-1944, New York-Oxford 1990.

29Branko Petranović, Srbija u Drugom svetskom ratu 1939-1945, Beograd 1992, pp.75-85; Andrej Mitrović, “O značaju i tradicijama 27.marta 1941”, Gledišta, No.3, March 1970, p.487.

30Velimir Terzić, Slom Kraljevine Jugoslavije 1941. Uzroci i posledice poraza, book 2, Ljubljana-Beograd-Titograd, pp.478-479, p.532; “Ko je bio Imre Šrajer”, Jevrejski pregled, No. 7-8, Beograd, July-August 1973, p.42; Djordje Bošan, “Iz reda za gubilište majka me gurnula u život”, in: Mi smo preživeli, book 4, p.345; “Hrabri spiker Radio-Beograda”, Jevrejski pregled, No 7-8, Beograd, July-August 1973, p.47. Ženi Lebl (ed.), Jevreji iz Jugoslavije ratni vojni zarobljenici u Nemačkoj. Spomen-album, pola veka od oslobodjenja 1945-1995, Tel-Aviv 1995, pp. 14-16; “Osamdesetogodišnjica Armina Grina”, Jevrejski pregled, No.7-8, Beograd, July-August 1972, p. 35, J. Romano, ibid, p. 378.

31 Yugoslavia Archives, Victims of 1941-1945 War fund, Savezni zavod za statistiku/Federal Statistics Institute (fund No: 179), Rezultati popisa/ Census report, Beograd 1966; Branislav Božović, Beograd pod komesarskom upravom 1941.godine, Beograd 1998, p.19.



BIOGRAPHIES OF THE AUTHORS



Milan Fogel was born in Subotica in 1947. A year later his parents relocated to Novi Sad where he started his education. The next family move took Milan to Belgrade where he completed elementary school. His education was continued in Belgrade's VIII Grammar school. He chose economy for university studies and graduated from the Faculty of Economics. In the course

of his compulsory military service in the garrison of Bela Crkva, Milan launched the Bulletin review for his subdivision. Immediately upon leaving the army, he found employment in the profession of his choice having little time for literary exploits. Together with his family, Milan settled in Israel in 1995. He has dual citizenship. Milan has so far published three books of stories: "Gallery under the open sky", "Return to the Response" (first prize at the last Yugoslav contest of the Federation of Jewish Communities), and "Stories from Serbia". For his story "Why?" depicting the harsh reality of conditions in Israel under constant exposure to terrorism, he won third prize in the Croatian Bejihad competition. Milan's three stories have been published in the edition of the Anthology of works of former Yugoslavia immigrants in Israel, titled "In the beloved country". He is chief editor of the magazine "Most" and publisher of the issue "Association of immigrants" where his articles, reports and commentaries feature regularly. His reports are also published in Serbian newspapers and presented on websites.

Prof. Dr. Milan RISTOVIĆ was born in Priština in 1953. He completed elementary and secondary school education in Kosovska Mitrovica. In 1972 he enrolled at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade to study history and graduated in 1977. He furthered his academic studies at the same Faculty in 1978 when he began to study for his Master's degree. In December 1981 he obtained his M.A. title with his paper "Political relations in the Balkans 1941-1945 as seen from the perspective of reports from the Yugoslav Embassy in Ankara". From 1978 to 1989 concurrently with his studies, he was employed in the Institute for contemporary history in Belgrade, initially, as graduate assistant and then as assistant. His studies and research work took him to London in 1983. His tuition was furthered in Mainz at the city's Institute for European history. He stayed in Germany throughout 1984. As a scholarship holder of the Institute of European history and the DAAD foundation, the Austrian Institute for East and South-East Europe and the Yugoslav Federal Commission for international scientific exchange, he spent time in research work in Great Britain, Germany and Austria on more than one occasion. He was a guest lecturer at the University of London, in Manheim, Berlin, Trieste, Thessalonica, Athens, Weimar, USA LA, Tokyo, Coimbra, etc. With his presentations he contributed to numerous scientific gatherings at the Belgrade Faculty of Philosophy's Department for Comprehensive contemporary history. He became an assistant in the same Department in 1990, and a senior lecturer in 1991. Beside his lecturer's activity at his basic Department,





from 1992 to 1996 he also taught the subject: Introduction to history studies. He was elected senior lecturer for Comprehensive contemporary history in 1998 and became full professor in 2002. From 2002 to 2004 he was acting Principal of the History Department. He is presently Head of Department for Contemporary history and President of the Association of Social history studies. His chief scientific research is devoted to the history of South-East Europe and Yugoslavia from the mid-thirties to the mid-fifties of the 20th century, specifically the role of the region in the politics of the great powers. He is also engaged in the study of social history problems and the history of ideas and concepts. He was also member of the editing staff of the Yugoslav historical review, the History of the 20th century, the Military History journal and the History library of the publishing company NOLIT. He is one of the founders and main editor of the Yearbook of Social History and member of the editor's board of the publication Courses of History. He has led the Association of Social History from its establishment in 1998. He has also assisted in a number of international projects like: Authoritarian regimes in East and South-East Europe 1918-1945 (organized by the University of Mainz and Bonn), the Encyclopedia of National-Socialism (Institute for anti-Semitism and Genocide Research, the Technical University in Berlin and others), History of South-East Europe as the history of Europe, (the Open University in Berlin and DAAD), the History of East and South-East Europe Glossary (University of Graz).



Dr. Milan B. Koljanin was born in Belgrade in 1953. He graduated his history studies at the Department for History of the Belgrade Faculty of Philosophy in 1982. His first employment was as graduate assistant in the Institute for contemporary history in Belgrade and he was subsequently promoted to researcher-associate. In 2007 Milan

was elected for the post of science associate. He became Master of Arts in 1991 with his paper "The German Camp at Belgrade Sajmište 1941-1944 - A contribution to the study of the "new order" venture in Serbia". He obtained his PhD title at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade with his doctoral thesis "Jews and anti-Semitism in Kingdom Yugoslavia 1918-1941" in 2006.

His scientific research work is centered on the study of specific social groups, such as students and refugees, and their status in extraordinary circumstances, the feats of repressive systems in World War Two in Yugoslavia, especially the erection and functioning of the system of camps, the repressive legislature of the Independent State of Croatia, the Holocaust in Yugoslavia, the use of mass media in war conflicts, systemizing and use of historical sources regarding the Holocaust in Yugoslavia, especially Serbia, the complexity of World War Two crimes and their definition, the use of film as a means of propaganda, certain questions concerning political relations between Yugoslavia and its neighbours, use of anti-Semitic stereotypes in propaganda, the ideological basis of repressive politics during the German occupation of Serbia in World War Two in Serbia and abroad. In 1991 he defended his PhD dissertation "The German "new



order” and South-East Europe from 1940/41 to 1944/45 – Planning the future and the practice applied “based on the war and comprising a comparative research of the Holocaust in south-east Europe”. His papers have been published in issues of Collections of Papers of scientific meetings and in journals “20th century History”, “Social History Yearbook”, “History Teaching”, “Collection of works of the Jewish Historical Museum”. He has also published a monograph under the title “The German camp at the Belgrade Fairground 1941-1944”, Belgrade 1992. In 2008 his book “Jews and anti-Semitism in Kingdom Yugoslavia, 1918-1941” was published in Belgrade. He has participated and presented papers at numerous scientific meetings at home and abroad. He is noted for his engagement in editorial staffs of our leading historical reviews.



BIOGRAPHY OF THE BOOK PRESENTER

Danilo Fogel was born in 1923 in Stara Pazova. Together with his parents, he moved to Zemun in 1929. During the occupation he was ordered to work as a forced labourer, which he did for 15 months. Throughout this time he was also actively engaged in the People's Liberation Movement. He was awarded the commemorative "1941 Medal" as well as other war and peace-time decorations. He is a graduate of Political sciences and has held a number of responsible social and political posts. He was editor of the Vojvodina daily newspaper "Dnevnik" and later chief editor of the Central Syndicate paper "Rad". He was also Director of the Centre for Political studies and education. In his youth he worked as a translator - German language to Serbian. A man of "words", he stuck to his literary work throughout his professional career and continues to do so in retirement. His most prominent work is "Jewish Community in Zemun (Chronicle 1739 -1945)". The book was commended with the JC Federation's award. He spends his days as pensioner traveling frequently from Aschkelon (Israel) to Belgrade and to his retreat Banoštar on Fruška Gora. He is one of the Jews saved during the Holocaust and Martina Levec - Marković was awarded the Righteous medal for keeping him alive.





ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would, first of all, like to express my gratitude to the few living Righteous on their active participation in the process of writing this book. I am also indebted to the relatives of both the Righteous and the Jews saved who readily placed at disposal their documents and family photographs. Although today many of them live in various parts of the world, from America to Australia, we nevertheless managed to get in touch with them and acquire a better insight into those horrendous times of the plight of Jews inside the territory of today's Serbia. One can only highly respect the fact that the memory of the times, when to be a humane human being was excruciatingly dangerous, is proudly preserved by all the families. In many cases the friendship engendered between the saviours and the saved continued beyond the years of war and is still lovingly preserved by their descendants.

I am further indebted to the staff of the Belgrade Museum of Jewish History, its director, Vojislava Radovanović, and her assistants, Branka Djidić and Barbara Panić, for the solicitous help rendered to our researchers. Their understanding enabled us to access archived material regarding recommendations for the Righteous award for a number of individuals. Furthermore, I would also like to express my gratitude for their kind permission to publish the original photos of the Righteous and the people they saved in safekeeping of the Museum Archive. I am also grateful to the National Museum in Niš and the help rendered in clarifying circumstances concerning the biography of Jelena Glavaški. I further feel obliged to express my thanks to participants in this project: Olivera Polajnar, translator, Ida Dobrijević, proofreader, Jugoslav Rakita, project technical editor, and to Miriam Aviezer Steiner (our collaborator in Yad Vashem), who placed at our disposal documents perti-

nent to the awards of the Righteous among Nations - Serbia.

I feel especially indebted to my family, primarily my spouse Sladjana Fogel, for the unconditional support during the three-year period of the realization of this creditable edition dedicated to the good people of Serbia.

Book editor

Nenad Fogel

President of the Jewish Community in Zemun

Zemun, July 2010



GLOSSARY

- **Ante Pavelić** – Prime Minister of the Ustashi fabrication, the Independent State of Croatia from 1941 to 1945. (NDH)
- **Auschwitz** – death camp in Poland
- **Banjica** – concentration camp in Belgrade
- **Bergen-Belsen** – concentration camp in Germany
- **cantor** – one who leads in liturgical prayer, (hazzen)
- **Chetnik** – member of voluntary armed forces under the reign of Turks in Serbia; famous for their bravery in the Balkan wars and during World War One. Sadly, the glory of the name was tarnished by crimes committed, among other on Serbs, and the collaboration with the German occupier during World War Two.
- **Crveni krst** – concentration camp in Niš
- **Ćukovac** – a part of Zemun town
- **Dragiša Cvetković** – Prime Minister of the Serbian government who signed the blasphemous regulations limiting the rights of Jews; also co-signatory of the Tripartite Pact with Germany
- **dugout** – hiding place dug into the ground
- **Fifth column** – enemy collaborationists of all colours
- **gas truck** – a special vehicle used to transport Jews to grave sites. In Belgrade Jews were transported from the Sajmište camp to Jajinci. During the journey they were gassed to death by exhaust gasses led into the truck body
- **gendarme** – member of the police force
- **Gendarmerie** – section of the police force
- **Gestapo** – the official secret police of Nazi Germany
- **giur** – conversion to the Jewish faith
- **HaNoar HaCioni** – Zionist Youths
- **Hashomer Hatzair** – heb. The Young Gaurdsmen, Zionist movement for relocation to the Palestine
- **Holy Land** – today’s territory of Israel, Palestine
- **ISC (NDH)** – the so-called Independent State of Croatia (NDH), a Fascist state founded in the occupation of Yugoslavia by Germany in 1941
- **Jasenovac** – most brutal death camp in Europe situated in the territory of the Independent State of Croatia
- **Juden Frei** – *free from Jews* the dictum used by Germans during World War Two, to report to the Command in Berlin that all Jews had been killed in certain countries. Serbia was second in proclaiming a ”Juden frei” state
- **kapidžik** – a small side door or gate between neighbouring yards
- **Kosovo and Metohija** – southern Serbian region
- **Kreiskommandantur** – the county head-quarters of German authorities during World War Two in occupied territories
- **Kulturbund** – cultural-education society founded in 1920; it turned into a Nazi Germany spy nest within the Kingdom of Yugoslavia
- **Kum** – 1. witness at wedding, best-man (hence *kuma* – chief bridesmaid), 2. godfather (hence *kuma* – godmother)
- **Kumovi** – 1. witnesses at wedding 2. godparents
- **Kuran** – Muslim holy book
- **Lazarist** – name derived locally from the missionary society founded by St. Vinko Paulski, born 1581 in France. The name ‘Lazarene’ comes from their seat in Paris (Home of St. Lazarus)
- **Ljotićevci** – armed troops of the Serbian pro-Fascist party, Yugoslav National Front “Zbor” of Dimitrije



- Ljotić, commonly known simply as **ZBOR**
- **Maljen** – a mountain in Serbia
 - **Mauthausen** – death camp for Jews in Austria
 - **Milan Nedić**– Prime Minister in occupied Serbia responsible for arresting Jews and their deportation to camps run by or under German control
 - **Moses** – Jewish leader, God gave him the Ten Commandments
 - **moshava** – camping trips for preparing Jewish youths for life in the Palestine
 - **napoleon** - gold coin
 - **Njilaši (streličari)** - according to historians, the Nylashi (archers) stood for a Hungarian version of Nazism. In the spring of 1944, when Ferenc Szalasi, the leader of the Nylashi archers, came to power in Hungary, the persecution of Jews followed forthwith.
 - **NOB** – People’s Liberation Movement led by Josip Broz Tito
 - **Numerus Clausus** – restrictions stripping Jews of certain civic rights
 - **Partisan** – member of the anti-fascist guerilla force,
 - **pejseli** – special type of sideburns worn by Orthodox Jews (Yiddish)
 - **Pesah** – Jewish holiday celebrating the exodus of Jews from Egypt
 - **pusnica/drying kiln space** – a special room for smoking meat
 - **Ravensbruck** – concentration camp for women located in Germany
 - **Red Army** – the military forces of the Soviet Union
 - **redarstvo** – police in ISC
 - **Sajmište** – the camp on the Zemun bank of the river Sava where Jews were deported
 - **salaš** –remote agricultural estate located typically at a distance from populated areas (**farmstead**)
 - **Schwabe, Crouts, Bosh** – a name for indigenous Germans (**volksdeutschers**) living in the territory of Vojvodina,
 - **SKOJ** – Association of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia
 - **Srem front** – the last front in the territory of Yugoslavia where intense battles with German troops in retreat from its territory were fought
 - **SS** – armed members of the Fascist Nazi party of Adolph Hitler
 - **Stara Gradiška** – a camp in ISC, a section of the Jasenovac camp complex. Mostly women and children were imprisoned in the camp. There are no survivors from the camp
 - **Sveti Nikola – Saint Nicolas** day, a holy day for the Serbian Orthodox Church
 - **Terazije** – part of Belgrade, its downtown area
 - **Terezienstadt** – concentration camp for Jews in the Czech Republic
 - **Topovske šupe** – concentration camp for Belgrade Jews located in the part of Belgrade known as Autokomanda
 - **Tripartite Pact** – pact made between three countries: Germany, Italy and Japan
 - **UDBA** – secret service of post-war Yugoslavia
 - **Ustashi** – members of the Fascist movement in Croatia
 - **Užička Republic** – the first liberated territory in subjugated Europe. It was established by Tito’s Partisans
 - **Volksdeutscher** - indigenous German
 - **Wailing Wall** – the remnants of the destroyed Second Temple (in Jerusalem); a place of worship for



Jews today also known as the West wall

- **Wehrmacht** – the German army from 1935 to 1945.
- **Whitsun** (Dan Duhova) – a Christian Holiday commemorating the 50th day upon Resurrection
- **yellow band** – a band worn by Jews during World War Two to mark them out from the rest of the population
- **Yom Kippur** – Jewish day of reconciliation and repentance
- **ZBOR** – Fascist movement of Dimitrije Ljotić founded in 1935. During the war the movement collaborated with Germans. By the end of the war they joined up with other collaborationist formations: the Draža Mihailović Chetniks, Pavelić Ustashi, Nedić police and other traitors
- **Zvezdara** – a part of Belgrade

CIP - Каталогизација у публикацији
Народна библиотека Србије, Београд

94(=411.16)(497.1)''1918/1941''
323.12(=411.16)(497.1)''1941/1945''
929(=163.41)

FOGEL, Milan, 1947-
Righteous Among the Nations : Serbia /
Milan Fogel, Milan Ristović, Milan Koljanin.
- 1st ed. - Zemun : Jewish Community, 2010
(Beograd : Akademija). - 329 str. : ilustr. ;
23 x 23 cm

Prevod dela: Pravednici među narodima. -
Slike autora. - Tiraž 1.000. - Str. 10-11:
Editor's Foreword / Nenad Fogel. - Str.
12-13: Introduction / Danilo Fogel. -
Biographies of the authors: str. 322-324. -
Biography of the book presenter: str. 325. -
Glossary: str. 327-329. - Endnotes: str.
280-285, 318-321.

ISBN 978-86-88297-02-8

1. Ristović, Milan, 1953- [аутор] 2.

Koljanin, Milan, 1953- [аутор]

a) Јевреји - Југославија - 1918-1941 b)

Јевреји - Прогони - Југославија - 1941-1945

c) Срби - Биографије

COBISS.SR-ID 178535436